THE AFFECTIVE POTENTIAL OF QUEER SHAME ON SCREEN

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential of shame as intersubjective affect through three filmic representations of queer shyness in widely divergent cinematic texts: Tom Ford's high-profile US film adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's novel *A Single Man* (chapter 1); Alain Guiraudie's French erotic thriller *L'Inconnu du lac*, an art house exploration of queer desire, sex and death (chapter 2); and a Brazilian short film directed by Daniel Ribeiro, entitled *Eu Nau Quero Voltar Sozinho,* an coming-of-age narrative of a blind teenage boy (chapter 3). These ideas are rehearsed against the theoretical backdrop of Leo Bersani's and Lee Edelman's antirelational queer theory, José Estaban Muñoz's work on queer potentiality, relationality and hope as articulated in *Cruising Utopia* in opposition to antiutopian antirelationality, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's affective turn (in particular her theorizing on shame and her concept of paranoid and reparative reading). The analyses in the first two chapters gesture toward a displacement of antirelational queer theory's overinvestment in the radicality of strategically embracing cultural fantasies of male homosexuality as psychic negativity or erotic self-annihiliation. In contrast to these tropes, a vision of queer relationality grounded in the relational dynamics of shame is forwarded, drawing on Sedgwick's work on shame inspired by Silvan Tomkins's affect theory. The shy queer man thus comes to figure as a counterpoint to the figure of the death-driven queer subject enraptured by *jouissance*. The third chapter, in turn, moves from such a contrastive "anti-antirelational" engagement to a closer exploration of Tomkins's theory of shame, combining it with phenomenological film theory and Sara Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology, arguing that the short film's climactic moment allows us to think shame as utopian potentiality as conceived by Muñoz. Finally, the conclusion suggests a conception of shame as reparative affect in contrast to routinized habits of thought in paranoid antirelational queer theory.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word counts for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 23,893 words

Entire manuscript: 25,941 words

Signed _____ Dávid Baqais

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Introduction

"Remember the fifties?" Lily Tomlin used to ask. "No one was gay in the fifties; they were just shy."

– Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

This thesis explores the potential of shame as intersubjective affect through three filmic representations of queer shyness in widely divergent cinematic texts: Tom Ford's high-profile US film adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's novel *A Single Man* (chapter 1); Alain Guireaudie's French erotic thriller *L'Inconnu du lac* (Stranger by the Lake), an art house exploration of queer desire, sex and death (chapter 2); and a Brazilian short film directed by Daniel Ribeiro, entitled *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho* (I Don't Want to Go Back Alone), an adolescent coming-of-age narrative (chapter 3). These explorations emerge in the theoretical context of Leo Bersani's and Lee Edelman's antisocial queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's affective turn (in particular her theorizing on shame and her concept of reparative reading) and José Estaban Muñoz's work on queer potentiality as articulated in *Cruising Utopia*.

This introduction outlines these theoretical terrains, developments and tensions as well as providing a brief excursion into how queer film theoretical issues can be brought into dialogue with my analytic chapters whose theoretical vocabulary largely remains within the realm of queer theory.

The analyses that follow in the first two chapters gesture toward a displacement of antisocial queer theory's overinvestment in the radicality of strategically embracing cultural fantasies of male homosexuality as violent self-shattering or psychic negativity. In contrast to these tropes, a vision of queer relationality grounded in the relational dynamics of shame is explored by Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick's work on shame inspired by Silvan Tomkins's affect theory.

In the first chapter, this possibility emerges through a comparative analysis of the novel *A Single Man* and its film adaptation through Sedgwick's method of reparative reading. While the main character of the novel has been conceptualized as embodying the queer negativity that

antisocial queer theory celebrates, its film adaptation has been critiqued on similar theoretical terms for domesticating this radical potential. I instead argue that a reparative engagement with the film can unearth a different evaluation of the adaptation in which the main character's shyness emerges as an alternative model to the death-driven queer subject.

In the second chapter's engagement with *L'inconnu du lac*, the character of the shy queer man emerges as an odd outsider to the radical negativity of queerness itself in the film's representation of a gay cruising spot that eroticizes death and equates it to a sense of transgression which, in antisocial queer theory's psychoanalytic reading, inheres in the sexual itself. This character becomes worthy of attention in his enactment of self-sacrifice which can be conceptualized as an ethical counterpoint to the transgressive potential of betrayal and negation glamorized by Bersani and Edelman.

The third chapter's handling of *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho*, in turn, figures queer shame as utopian potentiality proper, taking up Muñoz's cue to envision queerness as unrealized futural promise as opposed to Edelman's rejection of futurity as a heteronormative temporal logic that abjects the negativity that queerness represents.

In the conclusion, I tie up these discussions with some further reflections on Sedgwick's reparative hermeneutics, suggesting that shame can be thought as reparative affect.

Queer antirelationality and its discontents

Leo Bersani's seminal essay "Is The Rectum A Grave?" as well as the subsequent book *Homos* initiated what has since been termed the antisocial (or antirelational) strand of queer theory. "Is The Rectum a Grave?", written in 1987, remains one of the most provocative essays in the context of the AIDS epidemic in '80s USA. Here, Bersani's aims are twofold. On the one hand, he analyzes the homophobic representational mechanisms of "the general public". On the other, he surveys a wide range of feminist and gay theoretical engagements with the sexual that he labels as the "redemptive sex project" (215). These projects aim to reinvent "sex as we know it", to look for forms of sexuality that are "less disturbing, less violent, more respectful of

'personhood"' (215) than it has been under patriarchy. He argues that the homophobic frenzy surrounding the HIV crisis was spurred mainly by the connotations that the emblematic male homosexual act – anal intercourse – evokes: the "infinitely . . . seductive and intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman" (212). In Bersani's view, sexist phallocentrism is the "denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women", the value of "a radical disintegration and humiliation of the self" (217).

According to Bersani, instead of refuting the homophobic representations of male homosexuality – which are structurally equivalent under patriarchy with misogynist conceptions of female sexuality as insatiable, promiscuous, infectious, or masochistic – as the redemptive sex project would have it, they should be strategically embraced because they lay bare the cultural logics by which the sacrosanctity of the self is "promoted to the status of an ethical ideal" (222), sanctioning both homophobic and sexist violence. Instead of redeeming the "anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing and antiloving" (215) aspects of sex inherent in its power dis/equilibriums, in its "inevitable play of thrusts and relinquishments" (218), through a heightened respect for selfhood, we should recognize how it is the introduction of *the self* into the sexual that degenerates it into "an argument for the natural authority of one sex over the other" (218). Male homosexuality – or rather the homophobic perception of gay men's "obsession with sex" (222) – should be celebrated because it promotes the risk of a radical selflessness or self-shattering, and "proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of ascesis" (ibid).

Homos was similarly written as a response to what Bersani considered as blindspots in his contemporaries' queer theoretical inquiry in the mid-nineties. He argues for the importance of articulating a gay specificity in the face of what he perceives to be a queer self-invisibilization – a de-gaying of gayness – as a result of the queer theoretical emphasis on the historicity and social construction of (homo)sexual identity. This self-erasure is a regrettable move, according to Bersani, because it eliminated the grounds from which antinormative resistance can be articulated; the power of the regimes of the normal are "only minimally contested by

demonstrations of their 'merely' historical character" (4). Lamenting how queer critiques of homosexual identities have desexualized gayness, he calls for a tracing of "the political productivity of the sexual" (6). To this end, he offers a model of sameness, or *homo-ness*, as an antidote to the focus on and valorization of (sexual) difference which in his view underpin conceptualizations of psychosexual teleology within heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is culturally consolidated as "the compulsive repetition of a traumatic response to difference" (40). This homo-ness works as a "desire for the same [that] can free us from an oppressive psychology of desire as lack" (7). Instead of privileging difference, Bersani asks: "How is sameness different?" (41) He reads Gide, Proust and Genet for this radical *homo*-ness and demonstrates an anticommunitarian impulse in their articulation of homosexual desire, following the trajectory begun in *Rectum*. Following Foucault's famous suggestion in the interview "Friendship as a Way of Life" that homosexuality can "reopen affective and relational virtualities" (138), Bersani ultimately wants to show that if queer politics is to establish new types of relationalities that are not premised on heteronormative hierarchies and power structures, we may need to temporarily withdraw from sociality itself as we customarily think of it.

The most influential articulation of queer antisociality has been Lee Edelman's Lacanian reformulation of Bersani's ideas in *No Future.* In a way, Edelman carries Bersani's argument to its radical extreme, rerouting it through Lacanian psychoanalysis. Edelman argues that the ethical value of queerness is its "resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure" (3). He calls for queers to embrace that abject position outside the Symbolic order to which they are banished by heteronormativity and its future-oriented temporal narrativity, emblematized for him in the figure of the Child. He coins the neologism *sinthom*osexuality, utilizing Lacan's concept of the sinthome: the organizing principle of a subject's access to *jouissance* and the knot holding together the three orders (Symbolic, Imaginary, Real). The *sinthom*osexual represents a ready access to the *jouissance* of the Real that the heteroproductive subject is seeking too but is forever barred from because it is

invested with the meaning-making logic of the Symbolic order. It is the access to this *jouissance* that gives the sinthomosexual the ability to say no to heteronormative reproductive futurism. Edelman identifies literary and cinematic characters that embody this *sinthom*osexual who "forsakes all causes, all social action, all responsibility for a better future" and thus enacts a "radical type of selflessness" by moving outside of reproductive futurism's "compulsory compassion", thereby performing the "wholly impossible ethical act" (101). Importantly, queerness and the *sinthom*osexual come to figure "the place of the social order's death drive" (3).

Thus, both Edelman and Bersani enact a queer negativity effected through the gesture of calling queers to embrace structural positions appointed to them by a homophobic logic (for Edelman, this is the barren, death-driven meaninglessness of the *sinthomo*sexual drive; for Bersani, the ecstasy of female sexuality as threatening sovereign selfhood or the trope of sameness); and both are concerned with the question of the compatibility of queerness and sociality. But their frequent grouping together as the antisocial theorists is also somewhat misleading, for Edelman calls on a wholesale rejection of sociality, while Bersani, on the whole, advocates for its temporary suspension through moments of disruptive antirelationalism in order to "clear the ground" for new relational ethics, to envision new relational modes. As Tim Dean puts it, Bersani's model is thus perhaps better conceived of as a "pre-social thesis" ("The Antisocial Homosexual" 820).[1]

Queer performance studies theorist José Esteban Muñoz gives an alternative reading of futurity and sociality in *Cruising Utopia* and explicitly positions himself as opposed to Bersani-inspired queer antirelationality, especially Edelman's polemic. He calls for a renewed queer collectivity through critical utopianism, insisting that we conceive of the primary domain of

[1] Bersani's oeuvre is famously nonteleological and his position as a "queer theorist" is somewhat tenuous too, as it is a label he disidentifies with (Tuhkanen, "Rigorously Speculating"). As Mikko Tuhkanen demonstrates in his book *The Essentialist Villain*, Bersani has always figured as something of a peculiar underdog, as his thinking coincides with queer theory's development at certain points (most importantly in "Is The Rectum a Grave?" and *Homos* that paved the ground for Edelman's polemic), but its trajectory is also somewhat incompatible with certain tenets of poststructuralism, most characteristically his interest in ontologies and essences. This is also indicated by the relative lack of substantial engagement in queer theory with his later writings beyond "Rectum" and *Homos*.

queerness as an imaginary future, as always being on the horizon (11). He constructs his politico-aesthetic project building on German idealist philosophy, in particular the writings of philosopher Ernst Bloch on hope. Hope becomes both a central affect and methodology for his readings because it is an "affective structure that can be described as anticipatory" (3). He imagines queer as a "utopian formation based on an economy of desire and desiring" that is "always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (26).

Although Muñoz appreciates antirelational thought for displacing an uncritical embrace of the values of community, he laments what he perceives to have become in the process a romance of singularity and negativity (10). This leads him to align with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's assessment in "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" that antiutopian "paranoid reading practices have become so nearly automatic in queer studies that they have, in some ways, ceased to be critical" (12). This is a point I will come back to in more detail in the first chapter and the conclusion.

Instead of such routinized habits of thought, Muñoz's project tries to imagine a queer social relationality that is both "critical of the communitarian as an absolute value and of its negation as an alternative all-encompassing value" (10). Further, although he admits to the argumentative force of Edelman's work, he critiques it from a queer of color perspective to ask: who has the privilege to give up the future and embrace abjection? For him, the antisocial thesis constructs a false, atemporal and ahistorical figure of queer abjection that guards itself against "the contamination of race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference" (11). For Muñoz, utopian thinking is necessary because it will "enable us to glimpse . . . a 'not-yet' where queer youths of color actually get to grow up" (96).

Mari Ruti gives a useful overview of the antirelational/"relational"[2] split in queer theory in her book *The Ethics of Opting Out*, wherein she aligns with Muñoz's infamous contention that the antisocial thesis is "the white gay man's last stance" (Muñoz, "Thinking Beyond" 825). She describes this split as a divide between the white gay male theorists like Edelman and Bersani theorizing radical negativity, jouissance and self-annihilation and "the rest" (like Muñoz, as well as David Eng, Heather Love and, to some extent, Lauren Berlant) who are interested in a more intersectional approach that pays attention to how queerness is inflected by other identity markers, like class, race or nationalism (Ruti 6). In Ruti's formulation, while antirelational theory such as Edelman's emphasizes the constitutive role of psychic negativity in human life in Lacanian terms and mines that negativity for a dissident queer politics, "relational" queer theory like Muñoz's turns attention to "context-specific" or circumstantial negativity yielded by systemic forms of social injustice. Rearticulating Muñoz's critique against Edelman, she explains these theorists' reluctance to take up Edelman's call to embrace abjection by pointing out how "those whose claim on subjectivity is precarious to begin with may not find the idea of plunging into the suicidal *jouissance* of the real a particularly appealing prospect" (Ruti 131).

I found it important to emphasize the fact that Muñoz's utopian queer theory is informed by his queer of color critique as all three films I am considering feature white gay men. Still, I wish to think about how we can challenge the ideal of a suicidal plunging into the *jouissance* of the real even in cultural representations where the radical possibilities of queerness is often cast in terms of antisocial queer theory because it involves white gay men (this is especially foregrounded in the first two chapters where I rehearse shame's potential against the backdrop of texts which can be easily claimed for an antirelational reading). In other words, it is very clear why an ideal of radical self-shattering for queer people of color or other marginalized subjects with already

[2] I use square quotes because, although I find helpful Ruti's account of constitutive/circumstantial negativity as organizing the debates and responses to Edelman's polemic, it is my sense that the antirelational/relational split she fleshes out tends toward a somewhat reductive dichotomizing that simplifies the individual authors' complex projects.

precarious existences and less resources for shattering a "self" is far from inviting. But perhaps it is a possibility that not all white queers want to identify with, either.

The potentiality of shame

My own approach in this thesis will align with Muñoz insofar as I explore affect as a site for thinking about queer relationalities vis-à-vis the psychoanalytically oriented antirelational school. However, instead of turning to hope as a source of affective potential, I mobilize shame as a relational dynamic against the tropes of singularity and negativity that Muñoz diagnoses in antisocial queer thought. To this end, I engage with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's explorations of shame, outlined in her essays "Shame, Theatricality and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel"* and "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins" (the latter co-written by Adam Frank).

Sedgwick most explicitly emphasizes the link between queerness and shame in "Shame, Theatricality and Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel", where she draws on Silvan Tomkins's affect theory and other psychologists of shame. For Tomkins,

> the innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest or the smile of enjoyment will active the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure powered by excitement or joy. (Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation", 135)

The first moment when an infant experiences shame vis-à-vis its caretaker is an important step in its subjectivation; this is the moment – prototypically enacted by the infant lowering the head and averting the eyes – when "the adult face fails or refuses to play its part in the continuation of mutual gaze; (…) it fails to be recognizable to, or recognizing of, the infant who has been, so to speak, 'giving face' based on a faith of the continuity of this circuit" (Sedgwick, "Shame", 36).

Instead of the psychoanalytic account wherein the ego develops through prohibition – the oedipal moment with its subsequent repression and anxiety – this affect-based approach takes

shame as a basis for identity formation. "In the developmental process", Sedgwick writes, "shame is now often considered the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop" ("Shame" 37). This is a promising alternative model of subject formation, Sedgwick explains, as shame is both painfully individuating (in intense shame, I recognize the contours of my skin, my subjectivity, the most acutely – as in moments of embarrassment when one only wishes to disappear, not be seen, "sink under the ground") and uncontrollably relational (both in the sense that it emerges in the intersubjective field as a result of the broken circuitry of looks and in the sense of contact shame, when one feels ashamed for someone else's embarrassment). Beyond its beneficial distance from a psychoanalytic heterosexist developmental telos, Sedgwick's drawn to Tomkins because despite what his taxonomizing of different affects suggests, his work is resistant to "any project of narrating the emergence of a core self" ("Cybernetic" 98).

Later on, Sedgwick points out a connection between shame, shyness and queerness:

> Some of the infants, children, and adults in whom shame remains the most available mediator of identity are the ones called (a related word) shy. . . Queer, I'd suggest, might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to this group or an overlapping group of infants and children, those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame. What is it about them (or us) that makes this true remains to be specified. I mean that in the sense that I can't tell you what it is–it certainly isn't a single thing–but also in the sense that, for them, it remains to be specified, is always belated: the shame-delineated place of identity doesn't determine the consistency or meaning of that identity, and race, gender, class, sexuality, appearance and abledness are only a few of the defining social constructions that will crystalize there, developing from this originary affect their particular structures of expression, creative, pleasure, and struggle. ("Shame" 63)

According to Sedgwick, this shame can be claimed for powerfully transformative possibilities due to its relational, that is, social nature; this thesis seeks to take up her call to stage such possibilities.

I suggest that Muñoz's formulation of queerness as permanently "not-yet-here" is analogous with Tomkins's conceptualization of shame as the "incomplete reduction of interest or joy" (135), as the look of the shame-prone subject which the other refuses to reciprocate, a look that is longing to be restored. Although shame is one of the negative affects unlike hope (which is not among the affects identified by Tomkins but is rather an affective structure), it contains in it the traces of incompletely reduced positive affects (interest, joy), so it can be thought as a site of potentiality: the wish for the reconstitution of the broken interpersonal gaze burns with anticipation as hope does, containing a future temporality too. If the promise of hope for Muñoz is a utopian queer future one always productively strikes for but can never attain (it is always belated, always not here), then the forward-dawning promise of shame is the restoration of the other's gaze.

In the first and second chapters, I nominate the shy queer man as an alternative to the subversive power attached by Edelman to the image of the *sinthom*osexual associated with the excess of *jouissance*. In the first chapter, this idea emerges in the context of Christopher Isherwood's novel *A Single Man* and its film adaptation, which I consider through Sedgwick's method of reparative reading. The second chapter looks at the French erotic thriller *L'inconnu du lac,* through which I further engage with Edelman's ideas as well as Bersani's ethics of self-loss and the challenge that the affect of shame poses to a queer microcosm of impersonal intimacy. In the third chapter, I analyze the Brazilian short film *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho,* moving from such a contrastive "anti-antirelational" critique to a closer exploration of Tomkins's affect theory of shame, combining it with phenomenological film theory and Sara Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology, arguing the short film's climactic moment allows us to think shame as utopian potentiality as conceived by Muñoz. I conclude by suggesting that shame can be conceived as reparative affect.

Queer theory, film theory

The field of queer film theory has a long and convoluted history that is beyond the realm of this introduction to explore. However, I want to point to some of its foundational tensions and apprehensions that also inform my analysis of these films. Ellis Hanson maps out these terrains in the introduction to *Out Takes*, one of the first anthologies to bring together queer theory and film, identifying three influential, intermingling, but, to his mind, problematic tendencies in this literature.

The first tendency is a moralistic politics of representation which is mainly concerned with fighting against "harmful", phobic stereotypes and a search for "positive", liberating images, a tradition started by Vito Russo's 1981 *The Celluloid Closet.* As Hanson puts it, this frame of mind can only put forward one question: "does it offend me?" Subsequently, it showns no concern for "aesthetics or cinematic form, no discussion of the complexities of desire and identification, no appreciation of political nuance, no understanding of homoeroticism beyond the representation of gay characters" (7). These projects are characterized by a call for "accurate" cinematic representation, assuming an essential, normative "truth" to homosexuality. Ultimately, all these protests can result in, according to Hanson, is a replacement of reductive "bad gay clichés" with a few new, similarly reductive "good gay clichés".

The second tendency is derived from Marxian-inflected cultural studies. In its descriptive mode, it merely calls for a multiplication of the representation of repressed minorities, confusing aesthetic and political representation. In its more critical mode, it can be said to align more with queer theory as it seeks "question the very paradigms through which the cinematic and the political are said to be allied" (10); however, queer theory tends to radically interrogate the dogmatic political presumptions even of cultural studies, such as the ideological nature of subjectivity or the "relation between the aesthetic, the sexual, the psychological and the political" (10).

The third tendency is a psychoanalysis of the cinematic gaze with a more sophisticated approach to questions of spectatorship and desire. This tradition is hugely indebted to feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Teresa de Lauretis or Mary Ann Doane who developed accounts of subjectivity that explain the "the pleasures of the look and the relationship of those pleasures to gender and sexual identity" (12). Mulvey's foundational "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" analyzes the objectifying male gaze grounded in sexual desire as a central organizing principle of on-screen looking. Importantly, while such accounts are first and foremost political critiques of cinematic pleasure in classical cinema, they also challenge "such critiques by deeming impossible any necessary conjunction . . . between ideology and desire, narrative and pleasure, the image and the subject" (12).

At the same time, as many queer theorists pointed out, the usefulness of this feminist approach is qualified by its "heterosexing" of the gaze, as it does not account for same-sex desire. Further, according to Hanson, this psychoanalytic frame is limiting because it tends to paranoiacally view "voyeurism, fetishism, sublimation, idealization, phallic sexuality, and even identification as not merely suspect but inherently evil" (13) and it threatens to reproduce Freudian conceptions of queer desire as narcissistic crises in gender identification.

He construes queer theory's intervention into the field as a tool for overcoming the impasses of these approaches through the deconstruction of sexual rhetoric, concerned, as it is, with the rigorous analysis of the construction of sexuality that reveals its incoherence and instability, so that it becomes "a performative effect of language, politics, and the endless perversity and paradox of symbolic . . . meaning" (4). Queer film theory thus emerges as a disruptive endeavor committed to a "theoretical analysis of the rhetoric of visibility and acceptance through which gay film criticism has established itself as a field" (19).

In line with Hanson's distaste for "the positive images" tradition, queer theorist D.A. Miller mounts a critique against the ideology of what he calls the "mainstream gay-themed movie", an "exasperating tradition" exemplified by films like *Maurice* (1987), *Brokeback Mountain*

(2005) and the recent successes of coming-of-age features like *Moonlight* (2016) and *Call Me By Your Name* (2018) (Miller). These films, according to Miller, pursue the following three goals:

> First, to elicit sympathy for gay male *love* in its struggle to affirm itself under the barbaric repressions of the closet. Second, to limit the visibility of gay male *sex* whose depiction is scrupulously kept from approaching the explicitness reserved for hetero-consummations . . . Only by averting our eyes from the distinctive gay male sex act can we defend a man's freedom to perform it; in the classically abstract liberal way, all is approved of on condition that nothing be looked at. . . [Third,] to be *a thing of beauty* — beauty so overpowering, or overdone, that (provided the other objectives are met) it persuades viewers they are watching a masterpiece, "gay sex or not."

The films I consider in chapter 1 and 3 can be easily problematized on these grounds. *A Single Man* has been critiqued for enfolding a radical queer literary text into the "positive representation" model of "likeable gay characters" in a universalizing liberal move that tries to clear the depiction of homosexuality of actual gay sex and presents gayness as an over-aestheticized, stylish, metropolitan commodity, an item of Tom Ford's fashion brand. The coming-of-age narrative of *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho* is similarly anything but subversive in its sexual politics: it is indeed a mild, "G-rated" story about a teenage boy's first queer attraction. One could further argue that the generic tropes of the gay coming-of-age drama – the emphasis on the authenticity of one's "true gay identity" and the linear teleology that it sets up from the repression of the closet to the liberation that coming-out entails – is at odds with the queer theoretical challenge to the idea of sexuality as fixed and monolithic or connoting one's "authentic" essence. Nevertheless, I will show that both films have something poignant to tell us about queer shame's potential. In this way, although I explicitly engage the method of reparative reading to make an argument only in chapter 1 and the conclusion, chapter 3 is also spurred by the reparative impulse to engage a genre which queer (film) theory seldom explores.

In turn, *L'Inconnu du lac*, the film I discuss in chapter 2, is the most radical one according to these terms from among my archive, both for its exploitation of potentially phobic associations between murderousness and queer desire as well as its non-moralizingly natural depiction of the uninhibited sexual promiscuity of cruising, one of the "bad gay" stereotypes most fiercely rejected by a normative gay politics of respectability. Indeed, *L'Inconnu du lac* checks all points on Hanson's list of qualities he praises as intellectually and esthetically stimulating queer cinema: "seductively dangerous figures . . . inspired performances, complicated narratives of desire, and an erotic intensity unheard of in the more sanctimonious fare that is favored by much gay criticism and much queer cultural studies" (11).

Nick Rees-Roberts's discussion of the film places it in a similar genealogy of queer representation on screen which moves from the "positive images" tradition to antinormative queer cinema, praising it for "operat[ing] at a critical distance from assimilationist gay culture and from its commercial imperative to promote the hypervisibility of young urban males" (442). If *A Single Man* presents a metronormative vision of domestic affective intimacy (depicting an urban, upper-middle class gay man grieving the loss of a monogamous partner), *L'inconnu du lac* daringly explores the nonhegemonic relational dynamics of gay cruising in a rural setting, troubling normative hierarchies of class and desirability. As such, it is indebted to the 1990s movement of New Queer Cinema, a term coined by B. Ruby Rich to describe the emergence of independent cinematic production in the US in the wake of the AIDS epidemic which drew implicitly on the queer theoretical challenge to identity politics and "positive representation" and offered provocative visions of an irreverent queerness as rebellious, nonconforming, and, often, murderous, in films like Todd Haynes's *Poison* (1991), Gregg Araki's *The Living End* (1992), or Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1991) (Rich).

Finally, Mulvey's gaze theory, which Hanson claims was also displaced by queer film theoretical inquiry, will be a recurring reference point in my analyses. Liza Williams, in an article

on new feminist filmmaking, already put Tomkins's account of shame to film theoretical use vis-à-vis Mulvey's account, pointing out how while the

> Lacanian mirror stage that has been so important to psychoanalytic film theory depends on a relay of looks that produces a moment of misrecognition, shame depends on a relay of looks that produces a moment of nonrecognition, a moment of understanding the self to be embarrassingly alone and isolated from the ego-stabilizing smile of the parent. (1357)

What is most pertinent to my interests is her engagement with the possibilities of the reverse shot to explore what an onscreen representation of shame-diffused looking may look like. In one of the films she analyzes, a reserved woman's shame-delineated personality is signaled by her downcast glances at inanimate objects; these gazes, however, are then impossibly returned by a reverse shot taken, as it were, from the object's perspective. These impossible reverse angles highlight shame as a moment of nonrecognition, a "shame response . . . defined by the loss of feedback rather than by a misrecognition that is founded and foundering in universal reinscriptions of sexual difference" (1367).

My thesis will similarly be attentive to the cinematic representation of shame's performative blazons (lowering the eye, averting the head, blushing) and consider it against psychoanalytic gaze theory. In the first chapter, my argument about shame in *A Single Man* hinges on a peculiar on-screen stylistic technique that allows for a different conceptualization of queer desire (and affect) and its on-screen representation vis-à-vis Mulvey's account of the (male) gaze. And in the third chapter, my analysis of *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho* will also complicate vision-centered theories of cinematic identification, not only occasioned in this case by the protagonist's queerness but more importantly his blindness, leading to a heightened role of tactility in the filmic texture which I will analyze through the lens of (queer) film phenomenology.

Chapter 1 Reparation and Shame in *A Single Man*

A Single Man has been hailed as the most refined work of Christopher Isherwood, a central figure of Anglo-American gay literary history whose work has been said to anticipate the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s. Published in 1964, five years before Stonewall, the novel is an unprecedentedly candid account of a gay, middle-aged college professor mourning the loss of his lover in the homophobic atmosphere of Cold War Los Angeles in 1962. It also harkens back in its composition to the modernist exploration of subjectivity through stream-of-consciousness and free indirect speech, in line with James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*; indeed, Isherwood credited Woolf's classic as a direct influence on the novel (Carr 49).

In 2009, fashion designer turned director Tom Ford adapted the book into a film starring Colin Firth, an endeavor whose reception was rather mixed, as Ford made some substantial changes to the plot, effectively turning it into a stylish melodrama that many critics feel does not do justice to the complexity of the novel. The validity of these criticisms notwithstanding, I claim the film for a queer theoretical project applying Sedgwick's reparative hermeneutics. By tracing the paranoia in dominant queer critiques of the film adaptation and complicating its implications, I present shame – embodied by the shy gay man – as an alternative affect to the subversive power attached by Edelman to the image of the *sinthom*osexual associated with the excess of *jouissance*.

Paranoid tendencies in *No Future*

In her essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading", Sedgwick identifies in most contemporary critical theory, including queer theory, a generalized paranoid attitude, or a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (a term taken from Paul Ricoeur). She describes this using Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic account of the paranoid-schizoid vs. depression positions, which develop in infancy but survive, according to Klein, into our adult lives. Paranoid reading practices in critical theory are characterized, among other things, by: an emphasis on *exposure,* or a constant

impetus to reveal and critique repressive or problematic characteristics of a text; an aversion to surprises that springs from the paranoid wish to avoid bad surprises at all costs; and, connected to the previous point, a tendency to be tautological stemming from explanatory structures that want to prevent bad surprises and thus end up reinforcing their own suspicions.

Sedgwick claims that in most of these critical projects, paranoid reading has become so habitual that it now seems like the only possible option; however, she calls for the recognition and proliferation of another, *reparative* kind of reading. Reparation is the "anxiety-mitigating achievement" in Klein's account by which the "murderous part-objects" that are psychically introjected from and projected on to a threatening outside world can be assembled into "something like a whole" (128), and one can fleetingly exit the paranoid-schizoid position and inhabit the depressive position (the preferable option, despite what its name suggests). In a reparative reading practice characterized by this depressive position, critical inquiry is opened up to *good* surprises; also, new, multiple, and perhaps positive affective registers are accessed.

Muñoz, aligning with Eve Sedgwick's reparative hermeneutics, makes explicit this identification of a paranoid impetus in the antisocial strand of queer theory, especially Lee Edelman's *No Future*, situating his turn to utopia as a corrective to the tendency by which "paranoid reading practices have become . . . nearly automatic in queer studies" (Muñoz 12). As already discussed in the Introduction, this corrective crystallizes in Muñoz, partially, as a queer of color critique against what he perceives to be an implicit universalizing whiteness sneaked in by Edelman's Lacanian framework. Muñoz remarks how Edelman himself anticipates this sort of criticism with a "precognitive paranoia" (95) in a footnote in *No Future*, where he preemptively rejects the critique that his polemic is determined by his position as a white, middle-class, gay man:

> There are many types of resistance for which, in writing a book like this, it is best to be prepared. One will be the defiantly "political" rejection of what some will read as an "apolitical" formalism, an insufficiently "historicized" intervention in the materiality of politics as we know it. That such

> versions of politics and history represent the compulsory norm this book is challenging will not, of course, prevent those espousing them from asserting their "radical" bona fides. A variant will assail the bourgeois privilege (variously described, in identitarian terms, as "white," "middle-class," "academic," or, most tellingly, "gay male") by which some will allege that my argument here is determined. (Edelman 157, n. 19.)

As Jack Halberstam observes in his critique of Edelman's chiasmatically self-enclosed system of thought, Edelman thus "exert[s] a kind of obsessive control over the reception of his own discourse" (Halberstam 128). This aligns with paranoia's familiar self-preserving, anticipatory move to foreclose any kind of surprise as mapped out by Sedgwick's essay. Sedgwick uses Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* as a case study of paranoid psychoanalytic queer theory in which even the *possibility* of bad surprises that could unsettle the coherence of a theory are vigilantly guarded against, exemplified by Butler's

> repeated and scouringly thorough demonstrations . . . that there can have been no moment prior to the imposition of the totalizing Law of gender difference; hence her unresting vigilance for traces in other theorists' writing of nostalgia for such an impossible moment. (131)

Butler's vigilance here is analogous to Edelman's preemptive dismissal of any potential resistance to his work, which he accuses of a naïve identitarianism from inside his own, Lacanian framework which deconstructs any such identity position from which a critique could be articulated.

But beyond the workings of rherotics, Sedgwick seems to implicitly jab at psychoanalytic queer theory when she draws our attention to the fact that paranoia is likely to yield theorizing that "seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind", and then goes on to list, among others, "self-shattering [and] *jouissance*" (146) as such singular affects, which are central tropes organizing Edelman's polemic, too.

In line with Sedgwick's and Muñoz 's objections to these paranoid tendencies, I situate my intervention in this chapter opposite an Edelman-inflected reading of the book and critique

of the film. Through my reparative analysis of the film, a transformative potential of shame as intersubjective affect emerges.

*Sinthom*osexual/spiritual

The novel was published in 1964 but is set in 1962, having been largely inspired by autobiographical elements, for instance the protagonist being a British expatriate in America, like Isherwood. It follows one day in the life of George, a homosexual college professor who lost his partner, Jim, a few months earlier in a car accident. Tormented by this unresolvable grief, the inability to publicly mourn his love in the homophobic setting of Cold War Los Angeles right after the Cuban missile crisis, the narrative follows a disgruntled, disillusioned George as he interacts with a world that negates his existence as a queer person, and makes him feel like an alien. Nostalgic reminiscence of happy past haunt a grim, hostile present.

My analysis in this section will engage with three emblematic episodes of the novel. The first one is an elaborate daydream George engages in on his car ride to work, in which he conjures up an organization that would take revenge on hostile representatives or "criminals" of majoritarian society, like the authors of gay-bashing newspaper articles or a senator urging to attack Cuba. "In each case, the principal criminal will first receive a polite note, signed Uncle George, explaining exactly what he must do before a certain deadline if he warns to say alive" (Isherwood 30). The second one is a lecture he gives on Aldous Huxley which culminates in an angry sermon on the Cold War US atmosphere of fear and rejection of difference, wherein George critiques the logic of assimilationism as an erasure of (queer) difference by what he calls "annihiliation by blandness". The third one is a flirtatious night George spends with a student called Kenny which also stages a conflict between a certain mode of queerness and dominant culture but which curiously turns into a coda filled with spiritual imagery.

Ian Scott Todd, in his essay "Christopher Isherwood's Bathroom", explicitly claims the novel for an Edelman-inflected antirelational, antisocial queer project in opposition to Muñoz broad ideas outlined in *Cruising Utopia* as well as to specific attempts that try to enfold

Isherwood's text into progressive gay identity politics or claim it as a "gay activist text" (112). Rather, for him, it attests to the irreconcilability of queerness as a backward-looking modernist ethos and a dominant, homophobic culture. As such, Isherwood engages a very different queer temporality to Muñoz, offering "no promise of a future for queerness or for modernism" (121), no investment in queer collectivity resembling any sort of minority politics, prefiguring also the Bersanian gay outlaw characterized by a "brutal negation of communal impulses" (Bersani 130). Through an analysis of George's relation to literary modernism (which, he claims, mirrors Isherwood's relation to the queer line of British modernist authors like Forster, Auden, and Spender), Todd argues that the novel is an "elegy for a literary modernism overshadowed during the postwar era by American middlebrow culture" (111). George's modernist ethos "values memory for its own sake" (112) rather than utilize memory as an archive that can create possibilities for a queer future as Muñoz would have it. According to Todd, all instances of utopia, exemplified by George's nostalgic memories of the gay bar by the beach that he and Jim used to frequent, are located squarely in the past as emblems of something forever lost. And this personal loss is linked up with the loss of the high modernist tradition that George's students, "vapid, bloodless undergraduates" (118) symbolizing America's mass-marketed, hetero-productive, goal-oriented future, blatantly do not care for. This motif is epitomized by the college lecture scene with George's depressed realization that his students did not take the time to look up where the title for Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* comes from.

Ultimately, for Todd, *A Single Man* depicts a post-war America hysterically committed to reproductive futurism that George, with his backward-turning, queer nostalgic sensibilities, refuses to be incorporated into. Thus,

> . . .George emerges as a figure for what Edelman has termed *sinthom*osexuality, the queer 'unwillingness to contribute to the communal realization of futurity' [Edelman 44-45]. The hermit-like distance George keeps from his straight, all-American neighbors, his casual hatred of their children, and his fantasies of torturing and terrorizing homophobic fear-mongerers speak to

> the 'fatal, and even murderous, *jouissance'* that Edelman associates with the figure of the *sinthom*osexual [Edelman 39] (Todd 119).

Further, Todd argues that George also comes to stand for Bersani's concept of "the gay outlaw" outlined in *Homos*, "characterized by a 'will to destroy' [Bersani 166] and utterly resistant to assimilation by dominant culture" (Todd 119). However, I side with Octavio R. Gonzalez who reminds us that George's antisocial, antihomophobic rants against majoritarian society bear an ironic mark. As Gonzales writes, it is "important . . . to recognize the impersonal narrator's self-parodying tone as he ventriloquizes the Uncle George fantasy" (770). Indeed, George ironically remarks a bit later on: "Jim hardly matters anymore. Jim is nothing now but an excuse for hating three quarters of the population of America. . . What is George's hate, then? A stimulant, nothing more . . . Rage, resentment" (Isherwood 31). Gonzalez argues that the free indirect speech employed here undermines George's "'homosexual 'rage [and] resentment.' Now the rage is 'but an excuse' and this 'hate' 'nothing more' than a testament to George's 'middle age,' an impersonal affect mobilized as political passion. The 'middle age' qualifier ('nothing more') ironizes George's passionate political identity, undercutting its politically murderous seriousness" (Gonzalez 771).

The penultimate episode of the narrative features Kenny Potter, a student of George whom he meets at the Starboard Side, the rowdy bohemian bar that used to be the setting for George and Tim's "glorious Indian summer of lust" in 1946 (Isherwood 125) but which since has lost its queer, "magic squalor" (124) with the "remnants of those barbarian orgy-fires . . . ground into the sand" (125). It turns out Kenny came here purposely looking for his professor, who is known for spending a lot of time in the establishment, and they engage in a drunk conversation that George fancifully pictures as a sort of Platonic dialogue between Youth and Age, inexperience and experience, and these dynamics are strengthened by Kenny's insistence on and pleasure in calling George "Sir". Kenny then proposes that the two of them go for a swim in the ocean, after which George takes Kenny home to dry up. Here, their conversation does turn from symbolic to flirtatious, but George becomes increasingly frustrated with Kenny as their

communication fails and falters, as he realizes that Kenny is ultimately not that different from his class and does not understand George's ideals. Finally, George erupts in a proper *sinthom*osexual tirade culminating as follows:

> …I'm like a book you have to read. A book can't read itself to you. It doesn't even know what it's about. I don't know what I'm about.
>
> You could know what I'm about. You could. But you can't be bothered to. Look—you're the only boy I ever met on that campus I really believe could. That's what makes it so tragically futile. Instead of trying to know, you commit the inexcusable triviality of saying *he's a dirty old man*, and turning this evening, which might be the most precious and unforgettable of your young life, into a *flirtation*! . . . It's the enormous tragedy of everything nowadays: flirtation. Flirtation instead of fucking, if you'll pardon my coarseness. All any of you ever do is flirt, and wear your blankets off one shoulder, and complain about motels. And miss the one thing that might really—and Kenneth, I do not say this casually— *transform your entire life*— (Isherwood 149-150)

In Todd's reading, this is a "*cri de coeur* on behalf of a dying breed of dirty modernists" (120) whereby George links up the joys of gay sex to the larger question of the joys of modernist, backward-looking, non-(re)productive reading practices. "In order to 'transform his entire life,' and thus escape conscription by a futurist America, Kenny must learn not only to 'fuck,' but must also learn to read: in particular, he must learn to read the dirty old book, and the dirty old men, that middlebrow American culture most wants to shove off-scene" (120).

Although Todd presents a convincing argument for this Edelman-inspired reading, he conveniently ignores the final pages of the novel, which complicate a straight-forwardly antisocial reading. Slowly after he delivers his tirade, he falls asleep, drunk, and awakens to find Kenny gone, having left him a goodbye note. Registering this impatiently but without much despair, he returns to bed and engages in masturbatory fantasies about Kenny and other attractive young men. As he goes to sleep again, he has half-conscious ruminations, some of which reinforce Todd's arguments about George's status as *sinthom*osexual figuring as an antidote to reproductive futurism, such as "Damn the Future. Let Kenny and the kids have it" (154).

However, some of these half-thoughts already destabilize such a straight-forward Edelman-inflected interpretation. "Jim is in the Past, now. He is of no use to George, any more. . .Let Charley keep the Past." His stream-of-consciousness reaches its climax at the final conclusion that "George clings only to Now. It is Now that he must find another Jim. Now that he must live. Now that he must love" (155). I argue that this final "presentist" utterance of the protagonist – the emphasis on living the present moment – already brings him and the narrative itself over into the realm of the spiritual, a move made explicit in the coda which is filled with clearly Vedantist spiritualist imagery and George's imagined death.

"Meanwhile, as we have this body known as George's body, asleep on this bed and snoring quite loud" (Isherwood 155), the omniscient narrator asks whether "*is* George altogether present here?". He invites us the reader to imagine a group of rock pools "up the coast a few miles north".

> Each pool is separate and different, and you can, if you are fanciful, give them names – such as George, Charlotte, Kenny, Mrs Strunk. Just as George and the others are thought of, for convenience, as individual entities, so you may think of a rock pool as an entity; though, of course, it is not. . . How can such a variety of creatures coexist at all? Because they have to. The rocks of the pool hold their world together. . . And, just as the waters of the ocean come flooding, darking over the pools, so over George and the others in sleep come the waters of that other ocean; that consciousness which is no one in particular but which contains everyone and everything, past, present and future, and extends unbroken beyond the uttermost stars. (155-156)

The narrator then "let[s] us suppose" (156) that many years earlier, "in one of the major branches of George's coronary artery, an unimaginably gradual process began" (156), leading to the formation of a plaque. "Let us suppose that this is the night" (157) when this process leads to an "Instant, annihilating shock" (157), giving George a heart attack. "Then, one by one, the lights go out and there is total blackness. And if some part of the non-entity we called George has

indeed been absent at this moment of terminal shock, away out there on the deep waters, then it will return to find itself homeless" (158).

As William R. Handley points out, Isherwood subscribed to the Vedanta philosophy of inseparability and nondualism, a metaphysics that holds that "there is only one reality and that physical separation and temporal distinctions are illusions" (Handley 63). The final passages of the novel quoted above are a representation of this belief; personalities as distinct entities are just illusions, just as rock pools are not distinct entities but together form the vast ocean, in which temporal distinctions of "past, present and future" are also dissolved. Sleep is then imagined as a communal loss of consciousness. The imagined death of George in his sleep thus suddenly takes a less grave tone as he is imagined as just such a "non-entity" that will, perhaps, by this metaphysical logic, return to the communal water of a nondivided eternal existence. Handley points out that this final Vedantist emphasis on the illusion of identity stands in stark contrast with a consistent thematization throughout the narrative of the alienating effects of minority oppression (not only of homosexuals, but also racialized subjects), difference, and identity categories, but concludes that the rock pools segment is an "odd confessional moment in a novel that otherwise has nothing to preach" (70).

I want to differ, however, and rather agree with Claude Summers who claims that the novel's "burden is to reconcile conflicting needs of tribal identity and individual assertion, as personal identity finally yields to impersonal universality" (Summers 3). Indeed, it can be no accident that the narrator lists as one of the "rock pools" besides George, Charley and Kenny, Mrs Strunk as well. Mrs Strunk is George's suburban neighbor who represents the mid-century heteronormative nuclear family invested with reproductive futurism hostile to the perceived threat that George's homosexuality poses. It is after all Mr Strunk who, although seemingly tolerant of George's difference, "doubtless growls" the then-derogative "queer" (Isherwood 21) about him behind his back earlier in the novel.

If, as Carr remarks, this communal loss of consciousness, this dissolution "assures George's connection to others" (60), then it is a connection with both those more or less sympathetic to George's position (like Charley and Kenny) and those who would wish his existence away (like Mrs Strunk). Ultimately, for the omniscient narrator, both George and his "enemies" are part of a "universal consciousness that ultimately subsumes individual differences" (Summers 3). This is a conclusion that a queer analysis like Todd's would most probably find dangerously close to a liberal/assimilationist erasure of queer difference: the "after all, we are all human" argument, or as George calls it disparangingly, "the technique of annihilation by blandness" (21). However, one also has to keep in mind George's earlier heated remarks in the classroom about the perils of the "pseudoliberal sentimentality" (59) of claiming that "minorities are just people, like us" (58) instead of candidly and fearlessly acknowledging difference *as* difference. Ultimately, what the novel *does* have to preach is the unresolvable tension between its protagonist's insistence on queer/minoritarian difference and the transcendence of the spiritual conclusion presented by the narrator.

If we take Gonzalez's word that George's murderousness, which for Todd was an unironic marker of the figure of the *sinthom*osexual, is actually presented by the omniscient narrator as ironic, and also consider the final spiritual passage on eternal existence, nondualism and connection, then the extent to which the novel can be fully claimed for an antirelational reading is thrown into doubt. Although the antirelational impulse is undoubtedly present in the novel in George's interior monologue, its omniscient narrator's voice does not ultimately present is as a viable queer politics. And the final Vedantist note under which its tensions are brought to a narrative closure by the narrator, through George's imagined death, then, subsume the political under the spiritual. As I will show, the film adaptation shares this narrative resolution/dissolution with the novel, although it reaches it through a very different route, one effected by queer shame.

Adaptation/fashion

The reception of fashion designer Tom Ford's 2009 adaptation of the novel, his debut direction co-scripted with David Scearce, was anything but uncontroversial. Although most critics praised Colin Firth's subtle, reserved performance as a grief-stricken George, there was general agreement that Ford's effort at producing a visually impressive work, a product of his sensibilities impacted by fashion design, misrepresented or skewed the substance of the original. "A movie about love and loss which all but drowns in its own gorgeousness", wrote one reviewer, "an indulgent exercise in 1960s period style, glazed with 21st-century good taste, a 100-minute commercial for men's cologne: Bereavement by Dior" (Bradshaw, "A Single Man" ds); another one opines that Ford "mistakes the concept of telling a story visually with a near-disastrous aesthetic suffocation" (Schenker).

In his comparison of the film and novel, literary scholar Claude Summers is much less harsh about the film, noting the success with George's and Jim's committed love is depicted, but he also surveys the reasons that make it problematic as an adaptation. On the surface level, these include changes that turn it into more of a reflection of Ford's personal life. He changed George's age from 58 to his own 49; christened him with the last name (which lacks in the original) of a former lover (George Falconer); and gave him a bisexual history (a past fling with his old friend Charley, similarly exempt from the novel). His real-life lover and beloved fox terrier, as well as products of his brand, also make a cameo. Further, Isherwood's shabby George is transformed into a "distinctly upscale fashion plate" (Summers 2), and so is Charley (played by Julianne Moore), who is turned from "a blowsy earth-mother figure . . .into a glamorous, aging, high-fashion beauty" (ibid). Such glamorizing tendencies attest more to Ford's past as former director of Gucci than Isherwood's sensibilities. Ford himself claimed that the movie is "extremely autobiographical. When you watch it, you are inside my head for an hour and a half" (Podolsky).

But even more problematic for Summers is Ford's imposition of a narrow vision on the source material that his plot alterations effect. He primarily highlights the added element of the suicide plotline: in the film, George wakes up planning to kill himself because of his depression resulting from his loss. This can be legitimated on the grounds that it gives an underlying suspense element – the viewer is left to wonder whether he will really kill himself by the end of the day – that gives narrative structure and frame to the source text which is lacking in grand events. However,

The question in the novel is not whether George will kill himself, but whether he will be able to escape his obsession with the past, and whether his fierce individuality can be incorporated within a larger, spiritual perspective. Isherwood's great theme is the transience of mundane existence when seen from the perspective of eternity while Ford's is the smaller one of apprehending the beauty and joy of mundane life itself. (Summers 3)

Further, according to Summers, the homophobic political climate of the period is downplayed in the film; for instance, he is invited by the Strunks to a party unlike the pitiful distance they keep from him in the book. Further, while film-George is a one-time former lover of Charley, who in fact tries, unsuccessfully, to reignite their sexual relation, George is presented in the book as clearly averse to the idea of sex with a woman. Summers suggests that such alterations may be marketing ploys that try to make the film more engaging or accessible for a broader, heterosexual audience, or, worse, may betray Ford's ignorance of the political context of the novel. It is, of course, telling, that the poster for the film features Colin Firth and Julianne Moore, and Ford himself said that it is "not a gay film" (Podolsky), although such declarations, Summers warns, may also be conscious commercial moves.

Approaching the issue from a different angle, Lee Wallace explicitly identifies the film not as an adaptation per se, but as a peculiar celebrity-driven "mood piece" primarily shot through with style that bears Tom Ford's signature in every shot, achieving the broadening of homosexual feeling into an "on-trend sensation hovering on the brink of mass identification and uptake" (22).

In her reading, the film becomes another product of the Tom Ford brand. She identifies the invention of the suicide plotline as a tool of creating the emotional arch of the melodrama, one of the many ways the novel is transformed into a marketable piece that speaks to a broader audience. She claims that the polished aesthetics of the film becomes a generalized gay mood, so that "the poignant diffusion of gayness across characterological, biographical, and celebrity domains broadens its aesthetic appeal in the here and now of audience reception while presenting homophobia as an historical artifact with which no one, or at least no one who counts themselves as up with the time, can identity" (28). Gay identity, in other words, becomes a stylish corporate commodity inscribed into the "impersonal space of the celebrity brand" (39).

So while Summers holds the film accountable as an effort at the adaptation of a gay literary landmark, Wallace recognizes it more as a product of a contemporary neoliberal moment – the assimilationist rallying for gay marriage rights happening around this time coupled with the enfolding of gay people into capitalist logics of consumption. The film thus makes a "sentimental case for the legitimacy of same-sex sexual relationships while at the same time contouring the upmarket consumerist ambitions of socially aspirant gays and lesbians" (Wallace 36).

Diagnosing a similar assimilationist move, Ian Scott Todd gives a scathing critique of the movie in the closing paragraphs of his essay. He identifies George's "makeover" as a sanitizing move designed to rob the novel of its political messiness borne out of a fear of making George in any way unlikeable, and "hence a potentially 'negative representation' of homosexuality" (122). But Todd finds even more objectionable that George's character is deprived of his antirelational impulse by the stress placed on his resemblance to straight audience members, so that it becomes a mere "character study in which George's closetedness is made to symbolize, in Ford's words, 'the isolation that we *all* feel'", a universalization of gay experience that "cleans up the novel for assimilationist politics" (ibid).

Although this is a valid point that I think rightly exposes the reason behind the alterations made to the source text, it elides the complications I explained earlier that the novel's Vedantist

coda poses to a simple dichotomy of queer anti-assimilationism versus the liberal "we are all human" argument. In other words, although Ford may have indeed applied these changes strategically for the purpose of making a liberal "straight-friendly gay movie", the final affective uptake that this results in on screen is ultimately not that different from the novel's spiritual vision of democratizing death, that "the waters of the ocean are not really other than the waters of the pool" (Isherwood 156).

However, it is not my primary aim here to defend Ford's film from Todd's and others' points of critique that I mostly agree with and rescue it as a perfectly queer piece of cinema or an apt adaptation; it is far from that. I want to rather point out how certain moments of the film, when seen in tandem with corresponding places of the text, rehearse poignant moments of queer connection, *despite* the faults exposed by the film's critics. This is in line with how Sedgwick formulated reparative readings, then, because I wish to move from *exposure* as the only impetus of critical inquiry to creative engagement with the movie to recuperate certain instances of queer relationality. It is to these moments, central to my argument, that I now turn.

"Flushing", looking, affect, desire

The first such moment is linked to novel-George's perception of 60s Los Angeles cityscape and how that is transmuted onto the screen. Taking the freeway to San Tomas State College, he is faced with the alienating postmodern metropolis, into the "nowadays of destruction-reconstruction-destruction" (33), where the college campus itself is a modern factory constantly being refurbished and extended so that it can process graduates by the thousands. Passing through campus, the narrator notes:

> The air has a tang of smog; called *eye-irritation* in blandese. The mountains of the San Gabriel Range – which still give San Tomas State something of the glamour of a college high on a plateau of the Andes, on the few days you can see them properly – are hidden today as usual in the sick yellow fumes which arise from the metropolitan mess below. (37)

Smog, thus, becomes the emblem of a sickeningly (re)productive city that conceals and subsumes a lost glory of the past under metropolitan capitalist accumulation; a smog that the bland (which George's favored adjective for the despised majoritarian subject) normalize by merely calling it "eye-irritation". It thus succinctly represents much of the protagonist's malaise – his disgust of a reproductive-futurist America – as mapped out in Todd's analysis.

It is this smog that is creatively rewritten in an invented scene in the film, in which George has a brief connection with Carlos, a gay Spanish hustler in a parking lot. Read paranoiacally, this scene could be cited as an example of how Isherwood's text is retailored to align with Ford's upscale celebrity vision of gay sensibility, as Carlos is played by world-famous model Jon Kortajanera who is also associated with Ford's fashion campaigns. In my reparative reading, their interaction rather showcases the affective potential of queer cross-ethnic relationality, especially contrasted with the novel's racial politics.

George bumps into Carlos, who drops his bottle in his hand; George insist on buying him another drink. Exiting the liquor store, Carlos offers George a cigarette; as the two men lean in close to each other so that Carlos can light them, their gaze meets, and George looks longingly at Carlos's eyes and lips.

In this moment, Ford showcases the most conspicuous cinematic technique that he employs throughout the movie and which Kyle Stevens, in his analysis of the film, terms "flushing" (115). These are shots where color suddenly floods the grim, desaturated color baseline that characterizes most of the film's duration and represents George's grief and depression (figs 1-3). These "flushes" occur in the film when George interacts with the world around him and is touched by its beauty; these are moments when the world *affects* him, forcing him to engage in relations in a world he decided to leave in the morning.

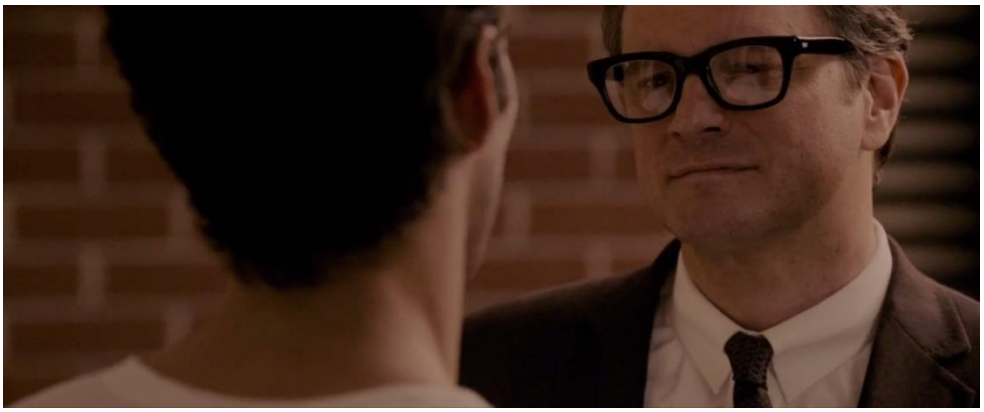

Figure 1. Shot of George's face in the film's default desaturated color scheme

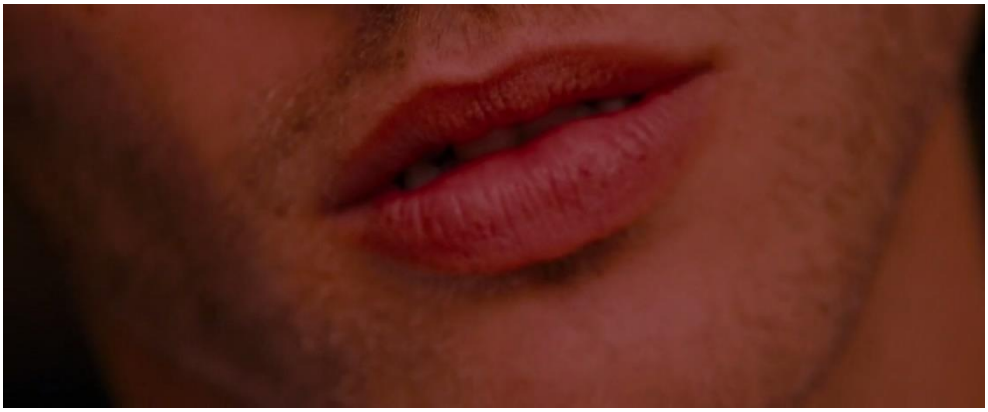

Figure 2. Carlos's lips, the object of George's gaze, as the screen flushes with warm color

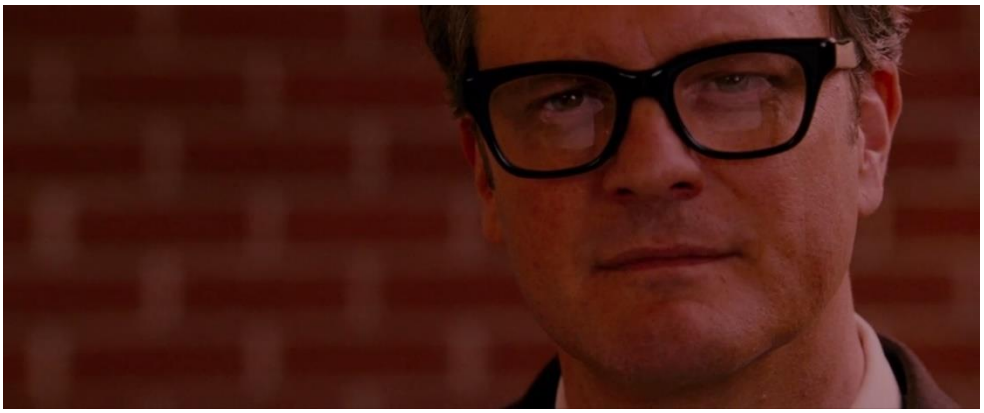

Figure 3. The reverse-shot of George's face, now also flushed

"We see from George's perspective as the object of his gaze brightens, then a reverse shot to a brighter George – and in a brighter world" (116). For Stevens, such moments produce a novel on-screen subjectivity as opposed to the model outlined by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" which reads the male gaze as fetishizing and objectifying. Stevens wants to avoid the reduction of gay men to "desiring automata" (102), and argues that when these flushes

happen, a triangulated character subjectivity between George, the emotionally moving sight beheld, and the world is yielded that "exhibits how desire is insufficient grounds for subjectivity" (116). George's gaze is still active but, unlike Mulvey's, is relational rather than unidirectional or "passivity-inducing" (116). Stevens ties up the metaphorics of flushing into a larger liberal argument of recognition which I do not side with, but his description of "flushing" is a useful tool for my own analysis.

As Carlos goes up to George's car assuming that George is looking for "a ride", it turns out that George does not actually want to sleep with the hustler. As foreshadowed by the flushing – and the exchange of intimate looks – what locks these characters together is *affect* rather than *desire*. Realizing his mistake, Carlos glances over the ethereally purple skyline of Los Angeles (fig. 4), and notes (in Spanish, which George speaks fluently): "You know, it's the smog that makes it that color. . . Sometimes, awful things have their own kind of beauty". The color scheme that characterizes the shot of the smog-filled purple-pink sunset feels like an extension of the earlier gold-purple flushing moment shared by the two men; it is as if that instant of appreciative relational affect was spread out over the entire cityscape. George, apparently taken aback and impressed by Carlos's unexpected words of wisdom, asks for another cigarette, and the two engage in a conversation about Carlos's family and history. This sequence of queer relationality, then, poignantly rewrites novel-George's antisocial aversion to the "sick, yellow fumes" and the reproductive futurity that they represent.

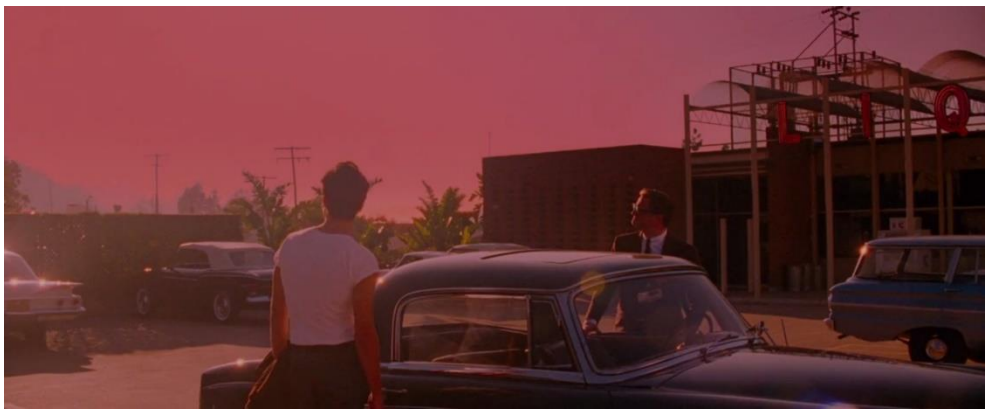

Figure 4. Smog-filled LA sky

Further, it also invites us to reexamine one of the charges often leveled against the adaptation: namely, "whitewashing", the elimination of the representation of minorities. For instance, while in the novel, San Tomas State has a predominantly non-white student body, the lecture room scene in the film figures an "all-American" white middle-class crowd; most problematically, Kenny's girlfriend Lois, originally of Japanese immigrant descent, is turned into a white, blonde woman. What the film misrepresents in the lecture scene it makes up for in the way it features a cross-ethnic moment of queer relating, where George is affected by the fate and story of a Hispanic person, what is more, a hustler, a figure of queer marginalization.

I argue that this is more than what the novel has to show for itself in terms of its racial politics. Although George expresses views sensitive to the hardships faced by all minorities, there is no "speaking role" given to any ethnically marked or racialized character. At best, they remain Others through whom George's alienation as a queer subject is emphasized. For instance, he praises the neighborhood populated by Mexicans and black people as a sanctuary of LA's pre-metropolitan 30s charm and exempts them from his rage against majoritarian society: "Mexicans live here, so there are lots of flowers. Negroes live here, so it is cheerful . . . he would never find himself yelling at their children; because these people are not The Enemy" (Isherwood 32). However, his solidarity is somewhat qualified, making it contingent on their tolerance of his homosexuality or lack thereof: "If they would ever accept George, they might even be allies" (ibid). And at worst, these racialized Others become mere objects of aesthetic pleasure, as when George ogles a young Mexican boy play tennis on campus, objectifying him into a source of fleeting erotic joy at a distance – in contrast to the film, where Carlos's physical beauty, although the first thing to affect George, is humanized into interior depth through their conversation.

Now that I outlined through this example how the film conceives of queer relationality through the stylistic of flushing, I turn to how these problematics become specifically bound up with queer shame in the film's finale.

"…and just like that it came"

The film develops a similar theme of queer connection between Kenny Potter and George. There is a scene in the first half which already suggests that Kenny feels drawn to his professor, although it is left ambiguous whether it is a sexual or an intellectual attraction. After their class, he runs up to him to tell him how much he enjoyed and related to his lecture on fear and recounts the reason he still stayed silent in class: "I was watching you. You let us ramble on and on and then you straighten us out. But you never really tell us everything you know about something". There is an intimacy to this confession, to Kenny's recognition and acknowledgment of George's closeted alienation. Indeed, George confirms: "It's not that I want to be cagey. It's just that I can't really discuss things completely openly at school. Someone would misunderstand". The shots of Kenny's face throughout this sequence are gradually flushed, nominating him as another source of potential affective impact for George; however, at this point, the reverse shots of George's face are still in the desaturated, grey domain.

This partial flushing becomes "full-blown" in the last quarter of the film. After yet another nostalgic flashback of George's and Jim's first encounter in the Starboard Side, shown in its bohemian squalor in saturated warm color, the scene cuts back to the colorless present and to a tormented George sitting at his table, clutching his gun, as the end of the day draws closer and he still is pondering suicide. Unable to bring himself to do it and realizing he is out of scotch, he returns to Starboard Side, now another grey-scale present location. However, as Kenny enters the establishment, color flushes the screen again, this time not only the shot of Kenny's face but also the reverse shot of George, foreshadowing the ensuing conversation between them that forges an even tighter connection.

Admitting that he may have been looking for his professor, Kenny engages with George in a dialogue about the present, past, death and the loneliness of existence. "We're born alone, we die alone. And while we're here we are absolutely, completely sealed in our own bodies. Really weird. Kinda freaks me out to think about it", Kenny laments, to which George replies: "You

know the only thing that has made the whole thing worthwhile has been those few times that I've been able to really, truly connect with another human being". Kenny then suggests that they go for a swim in the ocean, which is portrayed as an "exuberant 'baptism of the surf'" (Summers 3). Indeed, water is a recurrent motif in the film connoting the memory of Jim, as the film opens with a dream sequence in which George sinks in water and then walks up to a dead Jim, lying near his crashed car in the snow.

Afterwards at George's, Kenny, as he looks for a band-aid in the bathroom to put on George's forehead injured in their ocean adventure, finds a nude photograph of Jim in a drawer, "confirming" George's homosexuality to him. As he puts the band-aid on with a caring touch, their interaction is given an erotic tone for the first time; it is left ambiguous whether Kenny's discovery makes him flirtatious because he is genuinely attracted to George or because he is just playful. But this ambiguity provides the affective backdrop for the next moment, arguably the most visceral one in the film.

Kenny takes off his clothes to go shower, and hovers naked for a few moments before entering the bathroom, while his professor, aware of the inappropriateness of this moment, tries hard not to look while also wishing to look, an attempt that Kenny responds to in ambiguous glances that only further enhance the electricity of their looking relations (figs. 5-6). I argue that this is a prototypical enactment of the scene of shame that Tomkins describes and Sedgwick builds upon as explained in the introduction, with the lowering of the eyes and head. This intensive and vibrant affective circuit of unrealized longing, of the unreciprocated look is a very queer phenomenon, especially given the historical context of the pre-Stonewall era where George's sexuality is never explicitly verbalized, indeed, it *cannot* be verbalized in a homophobic society structured by the closetedness of gay desire (hinted at earlier in George's explication of his cageyness). As Stevens remarks in relation to the earlier Carlos scene, "just stealing glimpses in the context of 1962 is titillating" (112).

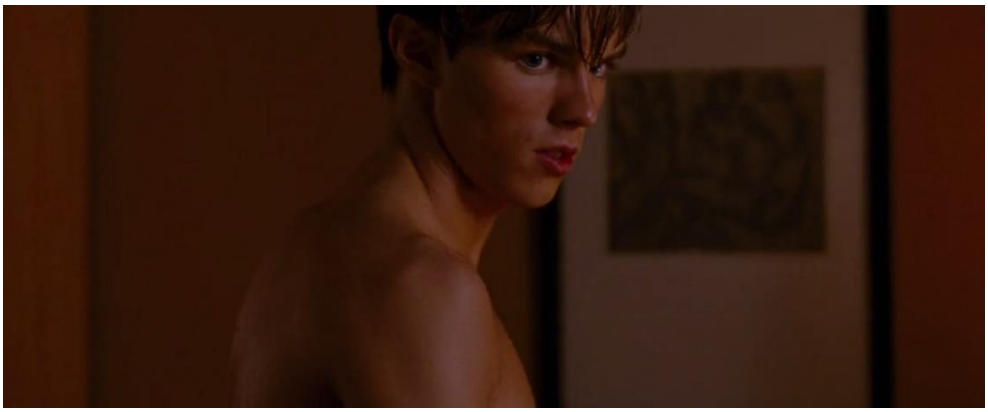

Figure 5. Kenny's glance

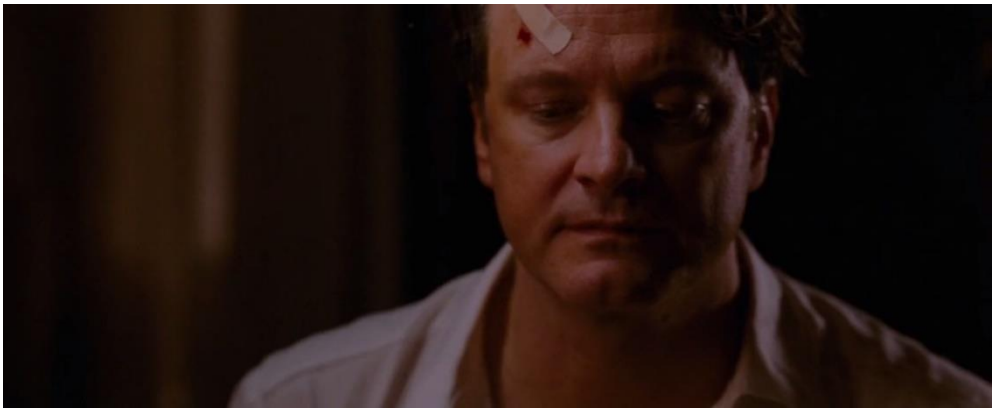

Figure 6. George's shame

This moment inscribes George as a figure of queer shame, who only does not blush because by this point, the *whole screen* is flushed as one's cheeks do in shame. As Sedgwick reminds us, "the 'fallen face' with eyes down and head averted – and, to a lesser extent, *the blush* – are semaphores of trouble and at the same time of a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge" ("Shame" 36, my emphasis). George's unfulfillable shame-diffused desire *to look and to be looked at,* while also wishing to hide this desire, locks these two people in a relationality that ultimately will save George from suicide.

As I discussed above, the novel has George "abandoned" by Kenny after his *sinthom*osexual rant, which George quickly gets over; indeed, it is Kenny's failure to comprehend what he is trying to communicate that leads him to conclude "Damn the Future. Let Kenny and the kids have it". His fantasies and ruminations before falling asleep then bleed into the spiritualist coda through the realization that "It is now that he must live", followed by the rock

pool analogy and his imagined death, which together rewrite his anxieties into a Vedantist transcendence.

The film has a different way of spiritually salvaging George. In their final bit of dialogue, Kenny confesses to his professor, underlining once more their queer connection borne out of societal alienation: "I just wanted to see you someplace other than school. . . Sometimes I think I'm crazy cause I see things so differently than everyone else. I feel like I can talk to you. To be honest sir, I was also worried about you today." A defensive George replies: "Me? What's to be worried about? I'm fine". The subsequent cut to the dream sequence of George's body floating in water, however, suggests otherwise – despite the repeated moments of interpersonal connection throughout the night, he is still in the grip of his heartbroken past. However, he awakens not to find Kenny gone (like in the novel), but to find him in another bed asleep clutching on to George's gun, implying that he had figured out his professor's suicidal intentions and tried thus to save him. It is as if Kenny's reciprocation of the shame-inflected look was temporally displaced onto this moment; it is at this point that the interpersonal gaze is metaphorically, if not literally, reestablished.

This reestablishment of the gaze occasions a spiritual epiphany for George, one similar in its reality-embracing tone to the novel's Vedantist resolution. We hear him recite a final voice-over monologue, as he is looking at Kenny and smiling to himself (interspersed with quick flashback shots of the valuable moments of his last day):

> A few times in my life I've had moments of absolute clarity, when for a few brief seconds the silence drowns out the noise and I can feel rather than think, and things seem so sharp. And the world seems so fresh as though it had all just come into existence. I can never make these moments last. I cling to them, but like everything, they fade. I have lived my life on these moments. They pull me back to the present, and I realize that everything is exactly the way it was meant to be.

George's monologue here revokes the earlier Carlos scene's privileging of affect as a way of connecting to the world, as a visceral lucidity gives way to rational thought. Then, as if literalizing the death that the novel dares only to imagine, George has a sudden heart attack and collapses. The final overhead shot features George lying on the ground, while Jim is conjured giving him a kiss on the forehead – as if finally releasing him from his grief. As this last shot fades to white (and finally to black), we hear his dying thoughts in voice-over: "And just like that, it came."

It came, but what came was not the self-shattering of orgasmic *jouissance* Edelman associates with the figure of the antisocial *sinthom*osexual. Here, George's death is not yielded by the "death drive that haunts the Symbolic with its excess of jouissance and finds its figural expression in *sinthomo*sexuality" (Edelman 119). Neither is it the quite literal *coming* that novel-George achieves as he drunkenly masturbates to various mental scenarios involving Kenny at the end of the novel. It is rather a self-shattering affectively occasioned by a queer relationality: that moment of *looking* at Kenny and realizing that someone was *looking out* for him. Referring to George's fantasies before his imagined death toward the end of the novel, Wallace remarks: "Whereas novel-George is brought back to animal life the moment his and Kenny's 'bodies rub against each other, briefly but roughly', when Kenny presents his naked body to film-George . . . nothing happens at the brute level except a briefly held glance that measures the emotionally foreshortened but physically inviolable distance between the two men" (29). Perhaps nothing happens "at the brute level", however, the return of this shame-diffused glance comes to mean *everything* in George's quasi-illumination.

Conclusion

This film, as explained earlier, can be easily critiqued on paranoid queer theoretical terms; it is a movie made for mainstream consumption that plays into the liberal agenda of gay identity politics. One of the most conspicuous forms this takes according to Wallace's analysis, echoing D.A. Miller's diagnosis of the ruses of the "mainstream gay-themed movie" in the introduction, is

the "sentimental deferrals of gay action" (28) that make sure actual gay sex is never present on screen. (Is it a surprise that D.A. Miller is the other author, besides Butler, whose work Sedgwick cites as characteristically paranoid?) Wallace points to the two scenes of queer relationality I tackled above as exemplifying this trend. These deferrals, however, also inadvertently produce moments of queer intimacy which, when read alongside the novel, offer a reparative engagement with the critiques aimed against the adaptation, either through the problematics of cross-ethnic representation or queer shame.

Such an engagement is necessary if we are to move, as Sedgwick urges, from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position, the realm of reparative reading. As Jason Edwards points out, as paranoid readers,

> we combine the insatiable, spiralling suspicion of paranoia with a tendency to split ourselves, other people and the texts we are working on, and that are powerfully working on us, into good and bad parts, rather than conceptualizing them as ethically complex and experientially changing wholes (109).

Thus, in failing to comprehend every text's inherent ambivalence, our paranoid take on them may blind us to its certain aspects which might be conceptualized according to a different logic than the compulsive critical impetus of exposure. However, "as peaceful, relational, reparative, future-oriented and pleasure-centred, depressive readers, we might instead seek to articulate and share the ways in which texts surprised, helped and healed us" (Edwards 112).

We should thus allow ourselves to embrace "as ethically complex and experientially changing wholes" texts like Tom Ford's *A Single Man,* that automatic, paranoid reflexes of queer theory would rather disavow.

Chapter 2 Queer Sociability and Shame in *L'Inconnu du lac*

The present chapter discusses the 2013 French film *Stranger by the Lake*, Alain Guiraudie's art house exploration of desire, death, and sexual transgression taking place at a rural cruising spot. I argue that the narrative of the film stages an unresolvable conflict between shame-imbued relationalities and the ethics of Bersanian homo-ness and Edelmanian *sinthom*osexuality.

In this conflict, the character of the shy queer man emerges as an odd outsider to the radical negativity of queerness itself in the film's representation of impersonal cruising that eroticizes death and equates it to a sense of transgression which, in antisocial queer theory's psychoanalytic reading, inheres in the sexual itself. This character becomes interesting in his enactment of self-sacrifice which can be conceptualized as an ethical counterpoint to the transgressive potential of betrayal and negation glamorized by Bersani and Edelman.

Nick Rees-Roberts' analysis already notes the antisocial frequencies present in the film. As he points out, "[t]he antisocial turn in recent queer thinking has its theoretical roots partly in the geneology of erotic transgression through death espoused by Bataille, particularly the assertion, quoted by Guiraudie while promoting *L'inconnu du lac,* that eroticism is a form of self-annihilation: 'the approbation of life even until death'" (457). This overdetermination of fatal eroticism routed through queer antisocial theories becomes the less theoretically interesting element of the film for Rees-Roberts, favoring its implications for thinking the Bersanian notion of "anonymous forms of being". In my view, such a neat separation between Bersani's ethics of impersonality and "antisociality proper" in the context of the film is not possible; my reading rather maps out how Bersani's and Edelman's tropes co-constitute each other and play out against the backdrop of the character embodying shame.

Sociability, the gay outlaw and *sinthom*osexuality

In the introduction I have already touched upon Bersani's project of radical *homo*-ness in his book *Homos*. I will now map out in greater detail those aspects of his explorations in chapter 4

"The Gay Outlaw" which are pertinent to my analysis of the film and which converge with Edelman's *sinthom*osexuality.

Cruising as sociability

In this chapter, Bersani first reads André Gide's *The Immoralist* and shows how its central character enacts a nonrelational sexuality. Visiting Tunisia, a Frenchman regains his health and will to live through an appreciation of Arab boys that never results in any actual homosexual act, and in this way, he eliminates relationality from "sex". Through his hardly definable and articulable pederasty that strips him of a self, a self-divestiture occurs resulting in an eroticism "unaccompanied by an essentially doomed and generally anguished interrogation of the other's desires" (*Homos* 123). Thus, Gidean homosexuality is construed as "a gliding into an impersonal sameness ontologically incompatible with analyzable egos. Such self-impoverishing self-expansions block the cultural discipline of identification" (*Homos* 125). Most importantly, his pederasty is a model of "intimacies without intimacy" in which the value of anticommunitarian homo-ness would be a "community in which the other, no longer respected or violated as a person, would merely be cruised as another opportunity, at once insignificant and precious, for narcissistic pleasures" (*Homos* 128).

In a subsequent essay, Bersani expands this argument by claiming that gay cruising is sexual sociability[3] which is "a form of relationality uncontaminated by desire" ("Sociability" 45). In here, he builds on Georg Simmel's sociological theory of sociability, who writes of the pleasures of sociability as mirroring those of art and play, a structure without motive, where the satisfactions of sociable behavior – for instance, engaging in conversations at a party or flirting – are gained from rhythm and form rather than content. Importantly, " 'the most personal things–

[3] Apart from Bersani, Tim Dean is the most well-known queer theorist to turn to gay male sexual practices to construct an ethics in his ethnography on bareback subculture in *Unlimited Intimacy* (2009). See especially Chapter 4, "Cruising as a Way of Life", where, drawing on Samuel Delany's account of public gay sex as interclass contact in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* and Laplanche's theory of seduction and the enigmatic signifier, he proposes that the ethical value of cruising is a radical openness to and preservation of the stranger's otherness instead of an annihilation of this otherness through identification. Dean's impersonal ethics of alterity is heavily indebted to Bersani's theorizing on cruising as a centrifugal, aimless, self-divesting form of sociability (210, n.33).

character, mood, and fate' have no place in sociability" (46). Bersani rethinks Simmel more radically to suggest that in sociability, there might be "a happiness in not being entirely ourselves, in being 'reduced' to an impersonal rhythm" (47), in line with his arguments about Gidean self-subtraction in *Homos*. Sociability emerges as a non-masochistic "ascetic conduct" whose pleasure

> does not serve an interest, satisfy a passion, or fulfill a desire. It is an intransitive pleasure intrinsic to a certain mode of existence, to self-subtracted being. A willingness to be less—a certain kind of ascetic disposition—introduces us. . . to the pleasure of rhythmed being (48).

Gay cruising, then, becomes an experiment in sociable modes of such impersonal intimacies, as "in ideal cruising. . . we leave our selves behind" (60). For Bersani, "the danger associated with cruising is not that it reduces relations to promiscuous sex, but rather that the promiscuity may stop. Few things are more difficult than to block our interest in others, to prevent our connection to them from degenerating into a 'relationship'" (57). In other words, the ethical value of cruising is that it helps maintain the hygienic practice of self-loss that Bersani first envisioned as the radical potential of male homosexuality in *Is The Rectum a Grave?* (the selflessness or self-shattering of "jouissance as a mode of ascesis" ["Rectum" 222], outlined in the introduction) and then through self-substracting Gidean homosexuality, by proliferating modes of relations that are not based in a possessive wish to own the other through desire. When the promiscuity stops, and relationships emerge, this radical selflessness is compromised. This is why personal details are relegated to the background in his model of sociability as a condition of possibility of the self-slumming necessary to engage in the impersonal communication of being that cruising exemplifies.

Gay outlaw and *sinthom*osexual

Another influential analysis in *Homos* entails the figure of the gay outlaw which bears many similarities to Edelman's account of the *sinthom*osexual. In the most provocative example of gay outlaw existence in *Homos*, Bersani shows how betrayal becomes an "ethical necessity" in Jean Genet's *Funeral Rites*. He offers a detailed exploration of how the erotics of rimming are bound

up with the narrator's betrayal of his love, Jean, by turning the communist freedom fighter over to German collaborators.

In this way, he reverts and renegotiates society's ethical terms, "repeat[ing] society's accusation of him as a homosexual outlaw, meticulously seeking out every ramification, every implication of that accusation" (161). But Bersani shows how even such a reversal of terms still leaves him socially positioned, as "[e]vil is already contained within those arrangements; its destructiveness could even be thought of as a necessity for the sake of the good itself" (161). However, according to Bersani, Genet makes an even more radical move later with the establishment of a "nonrelational betrayal" (162) effected through embracing "a crime in order to be alone" (163). Evil is now conceived "not as a crime against socially defined good, but as a turning away from the entire theater of the good, that is, a kind of meta-transgressive *dépassement* of the field of transgressive possibility itself" (163). In other words, the radicality of his nonrelational betrayal lies in the fact that it moves outside sociality and rejects the ethical terms which it is purported to transgress. As Mikko Tuhkanen explains, "this betrayal is not a message to the betrayed other, a retaliatory response to previous events defining the relational dynamics . . . Instead, Bersani wants to imagine a betrayal without an object, one that, refusing all dialectical economies, would constitute an *active force*" (*Essentialist* 50).

This valorization of negativity structurally aligns with Edelman's project in *No Future* of articulating a "queer oppositionality that would opposite itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say, that would opposite itself to the logic of opposition" (4). This opposition to oppositionality is the same as Genet's metatrangression of ethics and politics. Edelman's project thus emerges less "as an assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, Imaginary identities foreclosed by our constitutive subjection to the signifier" (17). This governing fantasy suturing the fabric of sociality and organizing politics is of course what he comes to term "reproductive futurism", against which he celebrates the figure of the

*sinthom*osexual who embodies the social order's death drive as "the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). This death drive is in opposition to fantasy and desire, as desire is always, under reproductive futurism, engaged in a constant deferral of its own realization, reconstituting itself through/as lack. Thus,

> [w]ith no sympathy for the subject's desires and no trace of compassion for the ego's integrity, with no love insofar as love names the subject's defense against dissolution, *sinthom*osexuals . . . endanger the fantasy of survival by endangering the survival of love's fantasy, insisting instead on the machine-like working of the partial, dehumanizing drives and offering a constant access to their surplus of jouissance (74).

Edelman's rallying against the logic of desire as perpetuating reproductive futurism evokes Bersani's attempts at rethinking desire as not based in difference and lack but sameness. As Mikko Tuhkanen explains, Bersanian "[s]ociability is nondesiring insofar as it is not a response, or a corrective, to a perceived lack as (a) being's essence" (16). This is the lack that futurism, in Edelman's account, seeks to fill in in vain by the fulfilment of desire, an endeavor that can never quite succeed.

In the following sections, after giving a synopsis of the plot, I map out how Bersani's theorizations of anticommunitarian, impersonal intimacy are represented in the film, both thematically and stylistically. I then move on to how the film's "lover villain" embodies Bersani's gay outlaw and Edelman's *sinthom*osexual. I finally argue that these antisocial impulses are, if only momentarily, disturbed by a shame-imbued relational dynamic in the film's only true narrative act, and the shy queer man emerges, similarly to the first chapter, as an alternative figure to the death-driven queer subject enraptured by *jouissance*, offering a different model of self-loss than that propagated by Bersani's and Edelman's accounts of queer negativity.

Anticommunitarian community

The film's plot is just as uncomplicated as its tone understated and naturalistic. It takes place over the course of ten days in one single location, at a country lakeside in the summer

somewhere in rural France. It follows the attractive, young and lithe Franck as he strikes up a friendship with Henri, an older, meek, big-bellied, bi-curious man who sits all day on a nook of the shore, further from the gay cruisers and nude sunbathers. He quietly observes but never gets naked, never goes swimming in the lake or cruising in the adjacent woods. Franck and Henri's first conversation is cut short when Franck notices handsome Michel on the beach and is instantly drawn to him. He chats him up only to sadly discover he is "already taken", as a jealous boyfriend, Ramière, shows up. But this poses a problem only until day two, when, late Tuesday night, in the narrative's turning point, Franck secretly witnesses from the woods as Michel drowns Ramière in the lake. Franck, disturbed but unable to resist his attraction, consummates his desire for Michel the next day. A lot of passionate sex ensues, and while Franck wishes to turn their relationship more serious, repeatedly pleading Michel to spend the night together, Michel wants to keep things only casual. Simultaneously, Franck and Henri's friendship deepens through their daily conversations on the shore, as Henri confides his need for affective intimacy to his friend.

In the meantime, Ramière's body is found, and an inspector appears investigating the murder. Henri grows increasingly suspicious of Michel, but Franck pays no heed to Henri's warning for caution. For the first time ever, Henri finally crosses over,to the other side of the beach to confront Michel, and then goes into the woods as if seductively provoking Michel, who follows him and slits his throat. Franck, going into the woods to look for his missing friend, is witness to this second murder too. Noticing his lover, Michel pursues a bewildered Franck through the bushes, while also stabbing the inspector who happens to show up. Michel pleads Franck to show himself from somewhere behind the tree. In the eerie final sequence, as dusk turns to dark, a stranded Franck, in a gesture of deathly self-surrender, calls out Michel's name.

The question of community is a central organizing theme that many of the film's reviewers also picked up on. As Richard Brody puts it, this "community is one that is stripped of the marks of community" due to its anonymity, so that "all the men at the lake are strangers,

regardless of their degree of physical intimacy" (Brody). This is also reflected by the film's ambiguous title, whose *Stranger* (*inconnu*) really can refer to any of the characters. The area is also spatially demarcated as an alternative queer sociality: on the opposite side is the "hetero beach", whose visitors never make any appearance; in an interesting reversal, they become the constitutive outside to this queer microcosm, their presence sporadically referenced in a couple of fleeting shots of their sailing boats or kayaks passing on further side of the lake. The film is purposefully atemporal, with minimal cues to the outside world, but judging from the character's clothes (a negligible amount of t-shirts and shorts) and lack of cell phones, it is most probably taking place around the mid-90s, an era already of "AIDS awareness instead of AIDS panic" (Oleszczyk). This is expressed, for instance, by an early scene where a guy Franck hooks up with is unwilling to engage in oral sex without a condom, contrasted by Franck's sexual self-abandon portrayed through his conscious decision to go bareback with Michel. This atemporal understatedness stripped of the "ornamental details of social realism" (Nick Rees-Robert 454) sets up this queer lifeworld as an allegorical space where primordial questions of drives and desires are explored.

In Bersani's analysis of *The Immoralist*, the protagonist's self-slumming is necessarily accompanied by a "repudiation of property and a renunciation of citizenship" (*Homos* 118), resulting in his illegibility within lawful sociality. These problematics are most emblematically put into relief once Inspector Damroder appears, who becomes "the voice-box for hetero-normative law and order" (Rees-Roberts 456). Damroder is continuously baffled by what Peter Bradshaw calls the cruisers' cultivation of a "willed forgetfulness", a "cloud of unknowing", that is "highly injurious to a police investigation" (Bradshaw, "Stranger"). He tries in vain to question the cruisers about who was with whom, at what time, in the events leading up to Ramière's death, to construct some kind of narrative surrounding the events. The interrogative logic of the state that Damroder represents inevitably fails in the face of the anticommunitarian impulse inherent in

disinterested cruising. Damroder's interrogations simply do not make sense in this environment whose impersonal intimacy is premised on strangers *remaining* strangers.

Importantly, these anticommunitarian impulses are never presented disparagingly, according to any normative ethos: this is signaled by the inspector's comical and offbeat character, who gives off no air of real authority or threat. If anything, he is depicted as pathetic, wandering through the woods with a slight limp, hands clutched behind his back, wondering at the sexual self-abandon and the cruisers' apparent nonchalance towards their peer's death. ("One of you was murdered and you don't care?... you guys have a strange way of loving each other sometimes", he sermonizes to Franck in one scene.) And as Rees-Roberts points out, the inspector's brutal stabbing "neutralizes these judgmental concerns about promiscuity, anonymity, and responsibility, by placing him within the prescriptions of the thriller–horror genre, according to which the potential savior is also killed off" (456).

That Guiraudie is not interested in normative moralizing is also apparent in the careful and nonjudgmental depiction of the rituals and geometry of cruising, the "rites of seduction and tacit communication through backward glances, variously used to denote interest, aversion, or rejection" and he even manages to "dispose of the normative corporeal hierarchies of queer culture and to aestheticize body-types largely ignored by mainstream cinema" (Rees-Roberts 454). Thus, he goes beyond the common fallacy that Bersani problematizes in certain gay theories in "Is the Rectum a Grave?", whereby cruising culture is imagined as a Whitmanian democratic paradise, a great equalizer, without paying attention to how normative ideals of physical desirability abject some bodies while elevating others.

Bersanian selflessness is not only reflected on the macro-level of the geometries of cruising, but in the passionate sex acts occurring between Franck and Michel, too. Their first sexual encounter poignantly dramatizes a Bersanian sense of self-loss through self-expansion: as Michel is performing fellatio on a supine Franck, we cut to Franck's point-of-view shot of the clouds passing in the sky, followed by a cut to the gentle waves of the lake accompanied by the

couple's groans and grunts, inscribing queerness into nature – and queer desire intermingling with modes of perceiving the natural. This is analogous to Bersani's discussion of *The Immoralist* and its protagonist's apprenticeship in becoming a desiring skin, a process leading to his

> authentic being—his naked flesh—extend[ing] itself into the world, abolishing the space between it and the soil, the grass, and the air. He *is,* briefly, the contact between himself and the world, and he has simultaneously become nothing but a bodily ego *and* has broken down the boundaries of that ego. Outside himself, he has lost himself. The narcissistic expansion of a desiring skin is also the renunciation of narcissistic self-containment. (120, emphasis in original)

Subsequent scenes where Michel and Franck have raw sex[4] consistently gesture toward such an cosmology of self-expanding queer sex, as the cinematography "embed[s] the raw nature of the sex within the natural aesthetic contrast of the piercing sunlight, the bright blue water and the lush green landscape" (Rees-Roberts 456).

No feeling, pure drive

If this cruising microcosm can be construed along the lines of Bersani's thoughts on cruising as self-divestiture, it is the thriller element that draws in Edelman's theory of sinthomosexuality and Bersani's Genettian explorations. Michel's character embodies both the gay outlaw and the *sinthom*osexual – as one reviewer put it in more vernacular terms, he is "pure sex – with a dash of death" (Oleszczyk), but Francey Russell is even closer to my analysis when she characterizes him as "empty of feeling or motive, pure drive" (Russell).

On the very first day of the narrative, after spotting him on the beach, Franck goes looking for Michel in the woods to find him rimming another guy, locking eyes with him for the first time. This evokes Bersani's discussions of Genet's transgressive erotics of betrayal and its association with the *jouissance* of rimming. As Bersani writes,

[4] In fact, the film has been noted for its unsimulated, explicit portrayal of sex acts, executed by pornographic doubles.

> The pleasure of tasting Jean's waste is the pleasure of tasting Jean as waste, and this is to love Jean as dead, which is to will him dead and, finally, to make virtues of treachery and murder. These logically unjustifiable equivalences nonetheless have the "rightness" of an erotic crescendo, of an unreasoned yet irrefutable ratiocination of a very specific *jouissance* (*Homos* 160).

Michel, here, is eating out his lover whom he will soon dispose of – betray – in order to be with Franck, making, as Genet's antagonist, a "murderous relation to others the precondition of his sexual pleasure" (*Homos* 161).

Michel's character also soon comes to figure the *sinthom*osexual and its "intimate relation to a fatal, and even murderous, *jouissance*" (Edelman 39) in the scene where he drowns Ramière, a *jouissance* that is a "movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law" (25). This scene is importantly preceded by an explicit close-up of Franck's penis being stroked to orgasm by another man in the day, followed by an abrupt cut to the long shot of the lake later in the evening. Thus the association between orgasmic self-shattering and death is straightforwardly established, and further underlined by the initial ambiguities of the grunts and noises of Michel and Ramière in the lake, which are first misperceived as light-hearted erotic play by Franck spying on the scene, only to turn out to be Ramière's exasperated cries to stop as Michel pushes him under water. In an unsettling, extraordinarily long cut that we witness from Franck's perspective in the woods from a high-angle long shot, the lake filling the screen becomes a locus of death and *jouissance*.

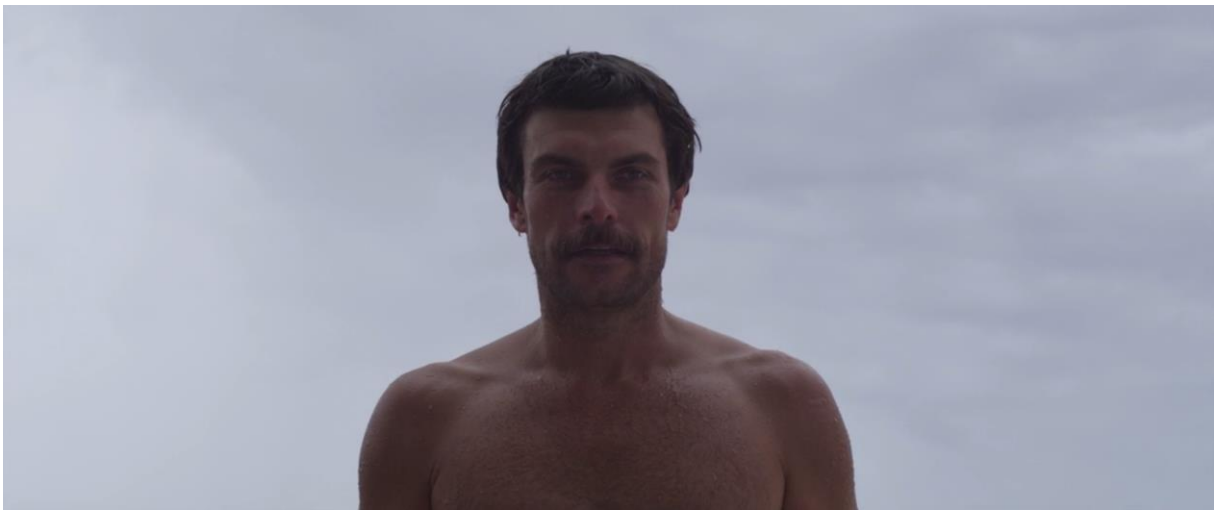

Figure 7. Michel

The second day, it is likewise from the water that Michel emerges, towering above Franck in a low-angle shot (fig. 7). Dread and yearning merge in Franck's trembling voice as he asks Michel if his boyfriend would mind, but Michel comforts Franck: "He's not my boyfriend either. It's just a casual thing, nothing serious". The sense we get is that possessive Ramière, who appeared resentful and disgruntled in an earlier scene by Michel's attraction to someone else, has been disposed of to make way for Franck. Thus, Michel's murderousness is a literalization of the unrelenting drive resistant to being subordinated to the temporal narrativity of desire.

However, Franck seems to make the same mistake as Ramière by trying to "own" Michel. Their idyllic paradise of erotic delight is tainted already on their first night as Michel turns down Franck's invitation to stay a bit longer and get a drink, a dynamic that characterizes their relation all throughout the film. The next day, he confesses to Henri that he thinks he is falling in love, and continues pleading Michel to spend the night together in numerous scenes. Franck's insistence on achieving romantic domesticity ("sleeping together") is a wish to enfold their relation into the logic of love and desire and its concomitant futurity, the "survival of love's fantasy" where love protects "against the subject's dissolution"; it is an attempt to turn their *meaningless* fucking – the "meaningless pulsions of the drive" (143) that *sinthom*osexuality stands for – into something "more *meaningful*". But Franck's attempt to "domesticate" Michel inevitably fails insofar as "*sinthom*osexuals. . . fail to fall in love, where love names the totalizing fantasy,

always a fantasy of totalization, by which the subject defends against the disintegrative pulsions of the drive (73). Put in Bersani's terms, Franck's recurrent pleas to sleep together threaten to contaminate their relationality with desire, degenerating it into a relationship that Bersani warns against when he praises cruising as an example of impersonal intimacy.

Michel as embodying an almost machine-like, dehumanizing drive is foregrounded once more in relation to Ramière's death when Franck's attraction first seems to falter later in the narrative. When Franck "searches" Michel's soul in asking him if he feels for Ramière (recall that Michel is of the belief that Franck does not know Michel is the killer), Michel expresses no sincere remorse. Michel's lack of compassion evokes Edelman's discussion of the *sinthom*osexual standing outside the realm of what he calls reproductive futurism's "compulsory compassion". All Michel can do is, "unmoved by sympathy, deaf to claims of human fellowship, materialize[] the force of negation, the derealizing insistence of *jouissance*" (Edelman 70). Almost all reviewers point out without fail that Michel is reminiscient of Tom Selleck, "the mid-1980s gay centerfold incarnate" (Oleszczyk), embodying the 80s "gay clone look": rugged, hairy, hypermasculine, and mustached. Tim Dean argues that the gay obsession with this clone look is in relation to what Bersani postulates about gay desire rooted in *sameness* instead of difference: "ultimately, the clone represents an *image* of sameness, as well as of desirability" ("Sameness" 36). Michel as "drive machine", Michel as killer machine, Michel as clone: he emerges as the impenetrable, irrefutable, ever-present drive of nonhuman proportions.

The incessant return of the s(h)ame

It has been noted how repetition becomes an organizing feature of the film, both formally in and in terms of narrative, dramatizing a repetition compulsion, an "incessant return of the same" (Chauvin qtd. in Rees-Roberts 454). Thus, beyond being localized in Michel's character, "the meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive" (Edelman 39) are dispersed by the filmic structure itself. Each new day is announced with an establishing shot of the parking

lot, serving as a punctuating device, usually followed by a sequence of Michel walking down the same path in the woods to the lake, greeting acquaintances on the beach, taking a detour to talk to Michel, and then plunging into cruising. The representation of cruisers as inhabiting a perpetual, atemporal present, without much care for what happened the day before or what will happen the next day, also literalizes the drive's presence (present-ness) that does not so much seek a future satisfaction of desire rather than its constantly repetitive self-perpetuation. As Linda Williams points out, "this is no psychological bildungsroman and no further social development ensues" (18). This repetitive rhythm is upended, I argue, by shame in the film's climax, embodied by Henri's character.

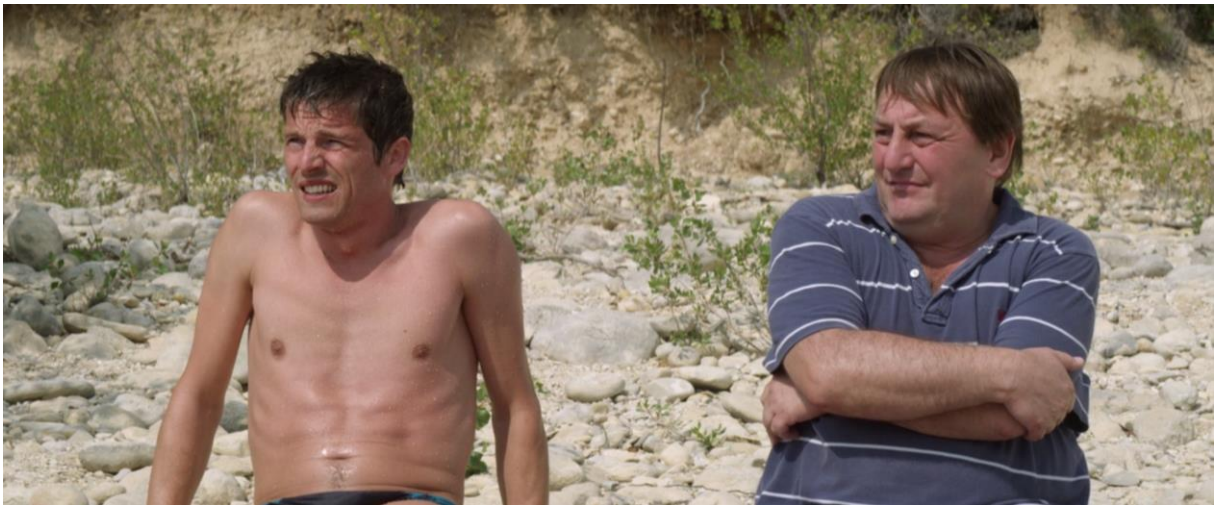

Figure 8. Franck and Henri

Henri usually sits alone, in his usual spot, secluded from the rest of the beach, the only one to don a t-shirt, with his hands perpetually wrapped around his chest. When one reviewer writes that these cruisers "leave society at large for a natural paradise of physical delight, an Edenic erotic garden *with no clothing and no shame*" (Brody, my emphasis), who is forgotten is the one character who is *always in shame*: Henri.

Henri emerges as a paralyzingly self-conscious man who watches the cruising unfold but never partakes in it because of his shyness. Over the course of Henri's and Franck's conversations, we learn that Henri used to have a girlfriend with whom he frequented the opposite beach, but now prefers coming to the "homo" side because people perceived him to be

"weird" on the hetero beach. But his shame sets him up as the "other" to this queer lifeworld of sexual self-abandon, too, forever haunting, as he does, the figural margins of the narrative and the literal margin of the beach.

On day nine, Henri confesses his "nonsexual" attraction to Michel:

> You know, not even two years ago, sex was the only kind of relation I wanted. For me friendship was pointless. Now, I really miss you when we don't see each other for two days. When I see you coming my heart starts to beat faster, like I'm in love. But I don't want to sleep with you. You also want to be with me. And it's not to fuck me, I imagine. To sleep alone, to eat alone, always being alone. It's difficult. And I wonder if you have to fuck someone to sleep with that person.

Henri characterizes his affection as a visceral affect, a longing from the guts not expressed in sexual terms, set up as a counterpoint to Franck's sexual infatuation toward Michel. Indeed, Franck retorts by telling Henri: "If you want to sleep with someone that means you want more from that person", but Henri insists on articulating that *something more* in nonsexual, affective terms: "Yes, but something else than sex . . . A different kind of attraction." Even if such a separation of libidinal and "affective" attraction may sound dubious, Henri obviously articulates it in these terms to set up his shame-imbued attraction to Franck in contradistinction to the "libertine" cruising he associates with the relationship between Michel and Franck. While Franck wants to *sleep with* and not only *fuck* Michel, shy Henri, he insists, would be content with "just sleeping", period.

"Interest" is vital here. If shame, as explained in chapter 1, is "the incomplete reduction of interest or joy" in Tomkins' account, it is something that characterizes both Henri's and Franck's relations to their cherished psychic objects. For Henri, Franck becomes the object of interest from whom he has turn away, metaphorically, in shame. For Franck, this object is Michel, but his attempts at turning their relationship into something more "meaningful" is refuted by Michel. Thus, both Henri and Franck cultivate shame dynamics which presuppose a disavowed self that seeks recognition in affective intimacy. But Tomkins's account of shame is

clearly at odds with Bersani's ethics of self-loss.[5] The latter valorizes cruisy sociability exactly for its undemanding and *disinterested* nature insofar as it does not wish to incorporate the other according to the logic of possessive desire, but instead

> proposes that we move irresponsibly among other bodies, somewhat indifferent to them, demanding nothing more than that they be as available to contact as we are, and that, no longer owned by others, they also renounce self-ownership and agree to that loss of boundaries which will allow them to be, with us, shifting points of rest in a universal and mobile communication of being. (*Homos* 128)

Indeed, Franck and Michel's relationship begins to deteriorate when Franck develops an "interest" in Michel, and thus wants to "own" him, demanding more of him – something *different,* something *more* – than the self-divesting *jouissance* of the sexual which Michel embodies as the *sinthom*osexual.

Henri's confrontation with Michel at the end is the only impactful act of the narrative – the only real event – that quickly turns the whole story into bloodshed. Until this moment, the repetitive pulsions of the drive permeate the affective economy of the film: a monotony expressed in recurring shots, sequences, and sex acts. Henri's gesture, however, "radically redirects the course of events. Where the murder only facilitates further repetition — the beach visits and the sex carry on — Henri's final deed, a feat of self-sacrificial passivity, is the film's only true action" (Russell). Importantly, as Russell also points out, this moment is also a site of multiple boundary crossings – tectonic changes – for Henri: this is the first time he passes over from his seclusion to the naked men sunbathing on the beach, and the first time he enters the

[5] In fact, in his essay "Aggression, Gay Shame, and Almodóvar's Art" Bersani explicitly chastises the (then) recent turn to Tomkins's affect theory in queer studies, especially in Sedgwick's work, because Tomkins's account, according to Bersani, rids subjectivity of drives and as such becomes too intersubjective and deficiently intrasubjective as it does not account for the destructive movemenft of *jouissance*. He goes on to suggest that new relational modes will not be invented "if we merely assert the dignity of a self we have been told to be ashamed of. Instead, we might begin by recognizing an abject destructiveness irreducible to intersubjective power plays, a destructive drive from which no human subject is entirely free" (69) Bersani's critique, however, rests on a misreading of Sedgwick's project. Sedgwick specifically reminds us that forms that shame takes, although available for transformation or transmutation, are "all too potent for the work of purgation and deontological closure" ("Shame" 63) that could enable a simple transformation of shame into dignity.

woods, too. Henri's accusatory charges – "Will you drown him too when you're fed up?", he asks Michel – are answered with a rhetoric of abjection from Michel, once more underlying how Henri's shyness figures him as a sort of "meta-queer" other to this microcosm of impersonal cruising: "You realize must guys here wonder what your deal is. A guy who never gets naked, never swims, never cruises… It's weird, no?"

But Henri's status as an outsider also enables him to piece together the "whodunnit" of the thriller mystery. He senses that Michel is about to kill again. And so, while Franck is swimming in the lake, he crosses that boundary, moves from that self-appointed margin of shame, and sits in Franck's place, effectively assuming his friend's position and offering himself as a placeholder against which Michel's fatal, murderous destructiveness may be directed. Thus, when he goes into the woods and looks back at him with a back glance that connotes an invitation for cruising, he enacts this ritual of seduction not for himself and for a moment of *jouissance*, but so as to contain Michel's *sinthom*osexual murderousness by redirecting his destructive energies onto himself. It is small wonder, then, that when we see from Franck's perspective Michel and Henri wrestling behind some bushes, Henri's grunts can be momentarily misperceived as erotic, evoking the earlier scene where Michel drowns Ramière. However, unlike Ramière, whose death literalized the inextricability of the death drive and the self-dissolution of *jouissance*, Henri's literal self-dissolution is effected through his self-sacrifice yielded by his wish to save Franck. In other words, in cruising Michel, he was cruising for Franck.

Conclusion

If betrayal is an "ethical necessity" in Bersanian antirelationality, it is its structural counterpart, self-sacrifice, that unsettles, even if only momentarily, the stasis of the drive. Henri's act thus can even be conceived of as "ecstatic", in the sense of a stepping out of stasis. However, Henri ultimately cannot save Franck, because Franck cannot save himself: in the final shot, he answers Michel, calling out his name in the dark of the woods, succumbing, as it were, to the pull of the death drive. Thus, we might say that Franck ultimately literalizes Edelman's impossible act,

assuming queerness's "ethical burden" by inhabiting the "place of meaninglessness associated with the sinthome" (46). This self-willed dissolution is the opposite of a narrative resolution. Symbolic closure is exactly what the death drive's immortality, per Edelman, forecloses, as a "persistent negation that offers assurance of nothing at all: neither identity, nor survival, nor any promise of a future" (48). And, indeed, Guiraudie leaves us literally in the dark in the film's final frames as dust turns to night. Henri's act – shame's challenge – may have been inevitably futile, but the tenuous unease that we are faced with as the scene cuts to black makes us less than willing to assume, as Franck does, the drive's radical negativity.

Chapter 3 *The Way He Looks*: Tactility, Shame, and Queer Disorientations

The present chapter analyzes the 2010 Brazilian short film *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho* (I Don't Want to Go Back Alone) written and directed by Daniel Ribeiro. Although at first sight an uncomplicated and rather naïve gay coming-of-age narrative about three high schoolers, the blindness of the central character introduces a host of theoretically interesting complications to the genre's familiar tropes – the shyness of the first queer love, coming out, or the joy of the first kiss – which I will discuss through a (queer) film phenomenological approach and Tomkins's account of shame.

Toward a "crip" queer film phenomenology

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed asks what it would mean to think about "the orientation" of sexual orientation in phenomenological terms. Building on phenomenology's engagement with embodiment and the intentionality of consciousness, her project aims to show how bodies "are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space" (5). She reads moments of disorientation in the writings of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to ask what it means to be orientated and to show how space depends on "bodily inhabitance" (6). Drawing on Heidegger's notion of "familiarity", she suggests that "the question of orientation becomes . . . a question not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to 'feel at home'" (7). Orientations, for Ahmed, "are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places" (8). Building on Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the centrality of the body – of our body – in perspectival perception, she argues that

> the "here" of the body does not simply refer to the body, but to "where" the body dwells. The "here" of bodily dwelling is thus what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings: the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression . . . Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness to the world around them, given this capacity to be affected. In turn, given the history of such responses which

> accumulate as impressions on the skin, bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling. (9)

Katharina Lindner takes up Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenological approach and combines it with the observations of film phenomenology, arguing that queer (dis)orientation as conceived by Ahmed opens up novel avenues for thinking about embodied experience, cinematic affect and queer ways of being-in-the-world. Film phenomenology is useful here for its turn away from ocular-centric theories of the gaze and visual identification (dating back, of course, to the tradition of psychoanalytic feminist film theory initiated by Laura Mulvey) to a focus on how the whole body is engaged in cinematic meaning-making and world-making through senses other than vision. Lindner engages with Jennifer M. Barker's phenomenological approach to film in *The Tactile Eye*, who in turn builds upon Laura U. Marks's *The Skin of the Film* and ultimately Vivian Sobchack who launched film phenomenology with her book *The Address of the Eye*. Barker argues that

> a phenomenological approach to the cinematic experience … focuses neither solely on the formal and narrative features of the film itself, nor solely on the spectator's psychic identification with characters or cognitive interpretation of the film. Instead, phenomenological film analysis approaches the film and the viewer as acting together, correlationally, along an axis that would itself constitute the object of study. (18)

Lindner also points to more cognitive studies of cinematic affect, not based in phenomenology, such as Carl Platinga's *Moving Viewers*, in which he frames viewers' prelinguistic, affective identification in terms of empathic mirroring. As Lindner explains, "motor mimicry is associated with affective mimicry and bodily empathy. For instance, we may not only experience sadness when we know why a particular character in a film cries (based on information provided through dialog and narrative); we may also experience, and exhibit, particular emotions when we see them displayed through characters' facial expressions, gestures, and movements, which we then mimic" (205). For Lindner, Platinga's account has potential for its implications of

"emotional contagion", both in terms of identification with the on-screen characters and the mechanisms of the cinematic situation as a whole.

While appreciative of these accounts for their turn to the lived body, Lindner goes on to point out their implicitly universalizing understanding of what a body is, or what a body can do, with the able-bodied, white, male, straight subject normatively underpinning phenomenology's imaginary. It is here that Lindner turns to Ahmed's corrective, who observes how, for instance, Husserl's implicitly white phenomenology "seems to involve an ease of movement" which presupposes a "mobile body as one that 'can do' things" (Ahmed 136). Lindner takes up Ahmed's ideas on orientation as a differential queer bodily inhabitance of space to inform her film phenomenology:

> Queer bodies are characterised by facing the "wrong" way, by tending towards 'inappropriate' others and directing their attention towards "deviant" objects. This means that queer ways of being-in-the-world are characterised not only by tactile, kinaesthetic, or muscular relations to different others, but also by differences in the experience of proximity, contact, touch, and movement itself. Linking this back to cinema, a queer sense-ibility can be articulated not only by the representation of tactile relations to "inappropriate" others, but also by differences in the articulation of tactility and contact itself. (207-8)

If Ahmed's (and Lindner's) queer engagement points to the "straightening" and "whitening" devices of phenomenology, it pays less attention to its ableist implications, something that Joel Michael Reynolds explores from a critical disability studies perspective in his essay "Merleau-Ponty, World-Creating Blindness, and the Phenomenology of Non-Normate Bodies". Analyzing how disability and blindness in particular becomes but a mere trope of sensory deprivation in a passage about a blind man with a cane in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Reynolds proposes that Merleau-Ponty elides the "radicality of blindness as a complete sensory-perceptual experience" (424) instead of recognizing it as what he calls a "worldcreating disability" (424).

Drawing on these insights, I will show how particularly queer (dis)orientations are "cripped" by a gay and blind character in *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho*, and how this "cripping" complicates "differences in the articulation of tactility and contact itself" as they are specifically bound up with the affective economy of shame.

This entails a "cripping" not only of a queer film phenomenology, but also Tomkins's account of shame which places so much stress on the facial communication of affect. In fact, Tomkins equates the sensing self with the face and more specifically, the look: "Why is shame so close to the experienced self? It is because the self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes" ("Shame-Humiliation" 136). If for the sighted person, the central locus is the face where "the self lives, where it exposes itself and where it receives similar exposures from others", where "both transmission and reception of communicated information" (136) happens, then for blind people, it is their skin which, through touch, becomes an analogous site of affect communication. I will demonstrate that tactility as the bridge between self and other, which organizes an important moment of textural intimacy, can be productively analyzed through a (film) phenomenological discussion alongside shame's movement toward a destabilizing of the subject/object dichotomy.

Finally, I will argue that the matrix of shame-imbued looks and blindness's worldcreating potential result at the narrative's climax in a moment of what Muñoz describes as ecstatic temporality, yielded by a stepping out of straight and able-bodied time. In the process, shame and its displaced resolution emerge as a utopian potentiality.

Directionality and lines

The opening scene immediately sets up the protagonist, Leo, as marked by his blindness and shyness. The words of the title are spelled out on the screen in Braille accompanied by the sound of a Braille typewriter, followed by a cut to the close-up of Leo's eyes. Typing in the front row of the class room, his classmates behind him make a joke of the dinging sound his typewriter makes at the end of the line ("Elevator up!", they shout). Shame-humiliation compels him to

laugh with those laughing at him as his friend Giovana comes to his rescue: "What a stupid joke! How many times will you repeat it?" Giovana's comment evokes Tomkins's emphasis on how histories of affect accumulation delineate an affective attitude to the world, nominating Leo as a shame-prone character and enfolding him in the trope of the shy, bullied kid.

The story is set in motion by the appearance of Gabriel, a new classmate. He becomes friends with Giovana and Leo, partakes in their chit-chat about quizzes and crushes, and joins Giovana as she accompanies Leo on his way home. A short scene follows in which the interconnections of Leo's queerness and the verbal displacement of looks is foreshadowed against the backdrop of tactility and texture. Giovana and Leo are sitting in the school corridor, Giovana stroking Leo's hair and fumbling with her t-shirt absentmindedly, telling her friend: "Karina was totally staring at you during the test!" Leo is quick to respond: "You know I'm not into her, right?" "But you are never interested in anyone", Giovana replies chidingly.

The deepening of the friendship between Leo, Giovana and Gabriel is portrayed through a montage of activities that already foreground the affective dimensions of tactility. For instance, they engage in a lighthearted "hypothetical" conversation about different tactile sensations ("Would you rather step barefoot on an ant nest or have a cockroach climb up your pants?"; "Would you rather have a mosquito fly into your mouth or lose your pocket money?"); or, in another early sequence, they're shown playing a game of hide-and-seek, in which Leo's (both bodily and queer) orientation toward Gabriel is foreshadowed: Giovana is hiding under the bed, while Gabriel is standing in the corner, and Leo is slowly, but surely, gravitating toward Gabriel, touching his face as he stumbles upon him.

The walk from school to Leo's home is a recurring element that is inflected by the changing dynamics between the three friends as Leo slowly develops a romantic attraction toward Gabriel. Their path can also be construed as a line connecting the two prototypical sites of the coming-of-age narrative: school connoting (hetero)normative sociality, and one's teenage bedroom connoting a private affective intimacy. (In line with the schematic simplicity of the

short film, we never get to know Leo's family or any other room in their apartment than his own.) Ahmed reminds of the centrality of lines and directionality in bodily orientation: "Space acquires 'direction' through how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitance" (12). But, as she warns, directions are not neutral: they are given and organized, as "the body gets directed in some ways more than others" (15). So when Giovana leaves Leo and Gabriel on their own mid-walk for the first time (to the apparent delight of Leo), and Leo grabs Gabriel's hand rather forcefully so that Gabriel aids him from his right side, thus replacing Giovana with Gabriel, he enacts and communicates a quite literal queer reorientation, entrusting him, instead of her, with his steps to find his way home – resulting in what Ahmed calls the performative "magic of arrival" (16) involved in following directions.

Leo's curiosity about Gabriel is shown blossoming in the next scene at school, as he enquires Giovana: "How does Gabriel look like? (…) His face, for example…" This dialogue harkens back to their conversation earlier about Karina, as Leo expresses, for the first time, interest about a peer. It also recalls Tomkins's analysis of interest-excitement as indeed a distinct affect, just like fear, enjoyment-joy – or shame-humiliation, of which it is an inherent part as that affect "which partially reduces interest or the smile of enjoyment". Leo and Gabriel are then paired up for a school assignment, leaving them on their own without Giovana for the first time. Gabriel is asking his friend about life as a blind person from birth. "So, you've never seen Giovana's face," he says. "(…) I think she likes you. The way she looks at you, it seems more than friendship," he tells an embarrassed Leo.

For Leo, the immediacy of looking, which for Tomkins is the most visceral medium of affect, is always mediated through someone else's account of how others look at him romantically (Karina and Giovana), what others look like (Gabriel), or how he can "look at himself" through the perception of others (dramatized when Leo asks Giovana if people think he's handsome). *The Way He Looks*, the English title of the extended feature film that was made after the success of the short film, perfectly captures this sensibility with its grammatical ambiguity (the way he looks

at me, the way he looks like). This verbal displacement of looks, as I will explain, plays out in the emotional turning point as a spatial displacement of intimacy which is transmuted in the climax into a temporal displacement of intimacy.

Leaving for Leo's home to work on their assignment, Leo takes Gabriel's arm, who is wearing his characteristic, brown sweatshirt. Entering his room, Leo takes off his t-shirt to change it with his back to Gabriel. The sequence of Gabriel's facial expressions as Leo exposes his bare torso in front of him are a prototypical enactment of the shame response as described by Tomkins: although stimulated by and drawn to the sight, he quickly casts his glance down, turns his head, only to return his gaze momentarily with a mischievous, excited half smile. As Tomkins argues, "we are all necessarily would-be both voyeurs and exhibitionists of all those affects we are inhibited in expressing, witnessing, and sharing" ("Shame-Humiliation" 147). A frequency of voyeurism is thus introduced into their dynamic which further heightens the affective presence of shame which also sticks to the spectator: Gabriel, and us, as viewers, may be "free to peek" due to Leo's blindness, but the illicitness of this look which Leo cannot return folds back onto Gabriel (and us) as something to be ashamed about.

Textural intimacy

The emotional turning point of the narrative is bound up with a spatially displaced moment of intimacy. As Gabriel leaves the room to go to the bathroom, we see Leo caressing Gabriel's sweatshirt, and after some hesitation, he grabs it, holds it to his face and takes a deep breath of it (fig. 9). The next shot reveals Gabriel, having returned, his face not showing (fig. 10). Thus, Gabriel's uninhibited looking enabled by Leo's blindness creates a situation in which Leo communicates his love for Gabriel through touch and smell not only to himself in an act of exploring queer desire, but also – unwittingly – to the one desired.

Figure 9. Haptic visuality

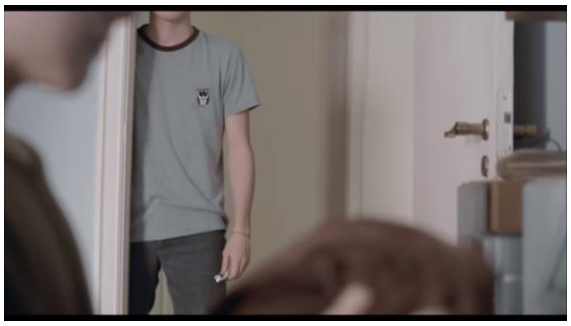

Figure 10. Gabriel revealed

Phenomenological film theory offers us the tools to account for the affective power of this shot and to explain how this moment is quite literally touching (for) the viewer. Following Laura U. Marks's account in *The Skin of the Film*, the shot in figure 9 can be described in terms of what she calls "haptic visuality:"

> Optical visuality depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object. Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze. (162)

Indeed, as Leo buries his face in the plushy, polyester texture of the sweatshirt, we do not see with him, but feel with him. In this close-up of Leo's intimate attachment to this piece of fabric, we momentarily lose our spatial bearings – our sense of dimensional depth – as the screen is flattened and we are invited to caress this texture with our eyes as it caresses Leo's skin. Touching on the erotics of hapticity, Marks notes how "the ideal relationship between viewer and image in haptic visuality is one of mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image, to lose her sense of proportion" (184). In this way, we might consider this as another moment of queer disorientation that plays out on a perceptual level both for the character on-screen and the viewer off-screen.

In the next moment (fig. 10), as Leo lowers his hand, and the background comes into focus to reveal Gabriel watching, dimensional depth is reintroduced to a certain extent. But the scene largely remains in the realm of haptic visuality, due to the lack of a reverse shot from

Gabriel's perspective and the way the shot's framing cuts his head out, so that we do not see his eyes, which would reinstate the expectation of a reverse shot in the viewer, according to optical visuality's relationship of mastery between the subject and object of vision. At the same time, we should keep in mind Marks's emphasis on how optical and haptic visuality are not diametrically opposed dichotomies, and the difference between them is "is a matter of degree. In most processes of seeing, both are involved, in a dialectical movement from far to near" (163). This dialectical movement is reproduced as the more pronounced haptic visuality in figure 9 bleeds into a somewhat more optical perception in figure 10.

If, as Marks suggests, optic and haptic visuality are intermingling perceptual modes, then we can say that there operates a layer of the more conventional, identificatory or mimetic model of spectatorship in this moment, in which Leo's gesture of burying his face in his crush's sweater in stealth also evokes the Tomkinsian scene of the shamed subject hiding his face. This blazon of shame would then activate, as it were, the "mirror neurons" of the shame response in the viewer, to use Platinga's cognitive model of emotional contagion referred to in the first section; indeed, Tomkins underlines what he calls the "vicarious" nature of shame ("Shame-Humiliation" 159), and Sedgwick also points to this contagion when she writes that "one of the strangest features of shame . . . is the way . . . someone else's embarrassment . . . seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me . . . with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way possible" ("Shame" 37).

For Tomkins, "In contrast to all other affect, shame is an experience of the self by the self. At that moment when the self feels ashamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self. Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and the object of shame is lost" ("Shame-Humiliation" 136). In other words, while affects like fear or joy are directed toward a thing, shame (although elicited by a situation) results in a sort of turning inward, in a "heightened self- and face-consciousness" which blushing indicates but also further exacerbates.

This moment's tactile intimacy might be conceived, following Marks, as gesturing toward a dissolution of the (gazing) subject/(gazed) object divide at the same time that it evokes on a more identificatory, empathic level the perception of shame's move toward a dissolution of the subject/object of shame. Leo's intimate self-loss in the sweatshirt, then, also connotes, through affective contagion, a perception of shame in the sighted viewer, further underlining Leo's shame-inflected relationality to Gabriel.

Leo's queer disorientations

"Sweatshirt again, Gabriel?" Leo asks the next afternoon, holding on to his friend's arm. Back home, he teaches Gabriel how to read Braille, holding his hand over the paper, a scene counterpointing their innocent games at the beginning, this time filled with growing intimacy. And the next day in the classroom, we see an intimate close-up of Gabriel whispering in his friend's ear as if it was a matter of deep significance: "Leo, I forgot my sweatshirt at your place," which ultimately sets up this cloth as a metonym of secret desire in the common imaginary of their friendship.

After Leo's attraction is thus established to the viewer, the coming-of-age genre's obligatory coming-out crisis follows at school. As Giovana listens wide-eyed with an expectant smile, apparently waiting for a confession of love, Leo instead "confesses" his attraction to Gabriel. The smile immediately leaves Giovana's face and it makes the prototypical journey of shame. Upset by this turn of events, she leaves in a hurry. Dejected and ashamed in turn for evoking the shame of rejection in his friend, Leo is shown for the first time walking home alone. We see him absorbed in his thoughts, laying on his windowsill, fingering the curtain absentmindedly, a poignant shot of aimless tactile activity matching the circular rumination one is usually engaged in after such emotional turmoils – and one cannot help but wonder what that texture reminds him of.

Then, the door opens, and thinking it is Giovana who came by, when it is in fact Gabriel, Leo immediately goes on a tirade about his feelings: "I've been asking myself if I should've told

you I'm in love with Gabriel. You're already the jealous type. What will happen now?" First, Gabriel seems amused by this little misunderstanding, which evokes the earlier shirt-changing scene with its voyeuristic looking; but, just like in that scene, Gabriel soon becomes ashamed of the deception – head down, eyes averted. This time, however, he reestablish the contact that shame blocks with an unexpected kiss. Before Leo could reach up to touch his face, Gabriel is out of the room, leaving Leo under the impression it was Giovana that kissed him. Some time later, Giovana does drop by, causing Leo to become utterly confused – and visibly disorientated.

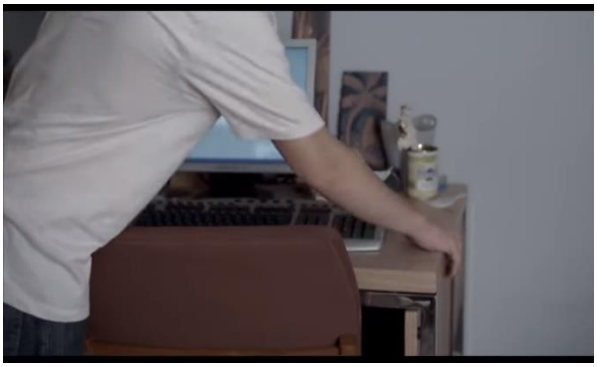

Figure 11. Leo feeling around

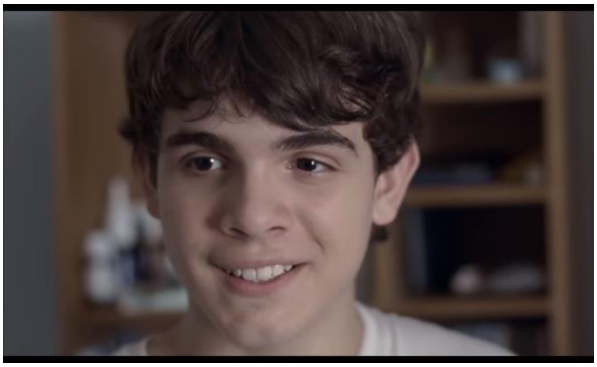

Figure 12. Leo's ecstasy

Feeling around his chair and table (and here I imply all the semantic richness of the phrase with its connotation of tactile searching as well as a tentative attempt at emotional self-orientation), he notices that the sweatshirt is missing. Realizing it was Gabriel who kissed him and then took the sweatshirt with him, the closing shot shows Leo breaking into a smile (figs. 11-12). It is worth recalling that for Tomkins, "the innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest or the smile of enjoyment will active the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure powered by excitement or joy" ("Shame-Humiliation" 135). As such, Leo's smile signals the arrival of the reciprocation of interest from Gabriel.

As Ahmed writes, "If orientations are as much about feeling at home as they are about finding our way, then it becomes important to consider how 'finding our way' involves what we could call 'homing devices'" (9). Gabriel's sweatshirt – or rather, its absence – comes to be such a

"homing device" for Leo as he feels his way around the table (which is inscribed as a locus of tactile/affective intimacy between the two in the earlier scene where Leo teaches Gabriel to read Braille): at once a bodily extension of and metonym for Gabriel with all its concomitant affective entanglements, it restores a sense of orientation through a temporal displacement by which an earlier moment is retrospectively recoded through the signifying absence of the sweatshirt. There is a complex chain of stand-ins at play here (the sweatshirt for Gabriel, its absence for the reinterpretation of the kiss) that quite literally queer the past for Leo – and in queering it, put Leo's disoriented present into place, aligning it with his desire. In other words, his temporal and spatial reorientation is cotemporaneous with a queer reorientation.

Conclusion

Muñoz, in his utopian call to conceive of queerness as anticipatory potentiality, suggests that "to access queer visuality we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now" (22). But in fact we might need to completely close our eyes. For Leo, it is precisely his worldcreating blindness that allows him to catch a glimpse of a queer futural potentiality in the peculiarly embodied way he does, as the narrative cuts off at the threshold of his queer coming-of-age, at the displaced resolution of the "first kiss", leaving him and the viewer wondering about the direction this relationship will take. In some sense, all coming-of-age narratives hinge on this promise of a forward-dawning potentiality whose continuation, signaling in the direction of "adulthood", always remains unspecified, unactualized, left to imagine. But for Leo, the existence of this potentiality emerges in a moment of embodied retrospection about the past in the present.

As such, in this moment, multiple temporalities are mobilized and collapsed in a way that Muñoz describes using Heidegger's notion of ecstatic time, which signals "the ecstatic unity of temporality–Past, Present, and Future" (25). He evokes the concept in the context of the analysis of a poem by James Schuyler to suggest that ecstatic time enables a "stepping out of the linearity of straight time" whose "presentness needs to be phenomenologically questioned" (25). I would

argue that for Leo, such a stepping out of "straight time" is bound up with a stepping out of "able-bodied" time, too: it is his blindness that allows for such an ecstatic temporality to emerge in the short film's climactic moment.

Muñoz also invites us to consider Husserl's horizons of being as one way of seeing queerness as "something that is not yet here" (22). In Husserl's account of horizons, "anticipations count as genuinely perceptual, but they lack the 'intuitional fullness' of the fully presented" (Smith). This rhymes with Muñoz's conceptualization of potentiality as "a certain mode of nonbeing, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (9). Something analogous happens when Leo notes the missing sweatshirt: its absence is a trace of the past which is also not "fully present" anymore but still genuinely perceptual (evoking embodied, tactile, intimate memories).

In that blissful moment of recognition when Leo finds that *the way he (Gabriel) looks* is that of the reciprocated gaze of the other through these entangled displacements, Leo lives queerness as a bodily horizon, as an "ecstatic and horizonal temporality" (Muñoz 25) which is "signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future" (Muñoz 32). For Leo, ecstasy is announced by that smile of enjoyment which shame incompletely reduces, as that embodied reflection on the past which can point to queerer futures to imagine.

Conclusion

What would it mean to conceive of shame as a reparative affect vis-à-vis paranoid psychoanalytic queer theory's valorization of self-shattering or *jouissance*? All three films discussed in this thesis, in one way or another, rehearse this possibility.

In the first chapter, I forwarded a reparative reading of *A Single Man* itself, but the film's depiction of its protagonist's relation to the world can also be described according to Klein's account of the paranoid and depressive positions that Sedgwick builds upon. All throughout his last day, George seems to be inhabiting the paranoid position – visualized by the film's desaturated color scheme – described by Sedgwick as "a terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one" ("Paranoid" 128). Indeed, George perceives the world around him as so threatening, hateful and dangerous that suicide seems to him to be the only viable option. As Sedgwick also hastens to clarify in her exposition of paranoia, to describe George's assessment of the world as paranoid is not to deny that the world is indeed oppressive and unjust. It is rather to question whether a paranoid stance is the most productive way to deal with this knowledge:

> It isn't that [the paranoid stance] is pessimistic and sees the glass as half empty, while the [depressive stance] is optimistic and sees it as half full. In a world full of loss, pain and oppression, both epistemologies are likely to be based on deep pessimism: the reparative motive of seeking pleasure, after all, arrives, by Klein's account, only with the achievement of a depressive position. (138)

In the film's transient moments of relational affect, in its moments of "flushing", George seems to be able to achieve, if only fleetingly, the depressive position in which there emerges a possibility of "assembl[ing] or 'repair[ing]' the murderous part-objects into something like a whole" (128). In the Carlos scene, the threat that smog represents in the novel as an emblem of a homophobic, reproductive majoritarian society, is acknowledged not paranoiacally but

reparatively in Carlos's poignant observation that "Sometimes, awful things have their own kind of beauty". And in the climax, the shame dynamics that play out between George and Kenny also ultimately result in an elusive depressive state which George describes in his final monologue as "moments of absolute clarity" when "when for a few brief seconds . . . the world seems so fresh as though it had all just come into existence". It is in this state that his self-dissolution through death happens, accompanied by the imagined return of George's lost partner as he kisses him on his forehead, finally allowing him to let go of the paranoia of anxiety-inducing grief. One is inevitably reminded of Sedgwick's quiet comment: "[a]mong Klein's names for the reparative process is love" (128).

In turn, shame's reparative potential is bound up with the question of temporality in the climaxes of *L'Inconnu du lac* and *Eu Não Quero Voltar Sozinho*. As Sedgwick observes,

> the dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality, after all, in which yesterday can't be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that's characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness: . . . it happened to my father . . . it is happening to me . . . it will happen to my son (147)

In the context of *L'Inconnu du lac*, I argued that the representation of the queer microcosm of impersonal cruising sets up just such a repetitive, atemporal, narrative stasis as a result of the drive's perpetual present-ness figured by Michel as *sinthom*osexual. Henri's attempt to trouble this stasis is propelled by his shame-imbued wish to save to Franck, to keep Franck from being enfolded into the repetitive regularity of the death drive. Sedgwick suggests that the depressive position "inaugurates ethical possibility – in the form of a guilty, empathetic view of the other as at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care" (137). It is this ethical possibility of reparation, of extending love and care to Franck that Henri articulates in his final act of self-sacrifice: it happened to Ramière… I make it happen to me… but I don't want it to happen to Franck.

It is due to this insistence that things remain predictable that paranoid temporality forecloses surprise, lest it be a bad one. In the third chapter, I cast Leo's climactic moment in terms of ecstasy, of a stepping out of straight and able-bodied time that engenders a utopian potentiality. But this moment comes to him as a result of the *surprise* of not finding Gabriel's sweatshirt. In Tomkins's affect theory, surprise-startle is the "resetting affect" (*Affect* 273): that which allows one to move from one affective state to the another. Thus conceived, Leo's surprise is a move from the shame to the depressive position, where the smile of enjoyment may emerge.

Anticipating Muñoz's more extensive work on the subject, Sedgwick's essay offers hope as a reparative energy, which, although "often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience" ("Paranoid" 150), can also help one to inhabit the depressive position. There is no doubt that shame can also be traumatizing. But hopefully, this thesis helped to show that its energy can be exploited for transformational potentialities in our reading practices, too.

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