BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Representations of Gay, Lesbian and Queer Sex in Contemporary French and North American Cinema

by

Connor Winterton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Media and Cultural Studies)

Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research
Birmingham School of Media
Faculty of Arts, Design and Media

Abstract

Independent French and North American cinema over the last decade have been offering increasingly explicit but also exploratory representations of gay male and lesbian sex and sexual practices, in films ranging from *I Want Your Love* (USA, 2012) to *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (France, 2013) to *Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo* (France, 2016). This is as well as some contemporary mainstream films, especially those produced in America, stirring controversy for the avoidance of gay male sex acts, as evidenced in *Call Me by Your Name* (2017). This thesis, then, responds to this increase in representations of mainly gay male and lesbian sex by critically interrogating and examining: how the acts are stylistically and narratively represented; to what extent the representations either sustain or challenge normative notions of what typically constitutes sex (or that sex directly connects with intimacy, romance and love); and finally to what extent the representations connect with the normalising impulses evident within movements such as 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2002). Using textual analysis, para-textual analysis and theories centred on sex and sexuality (mainly Queer Theories), this extensive research has identified that most representations are in dialogue with, or relate to themes and arguments, revolving around: the politics of representation, explicitness, narrative purposes of sex, and notions of realism and idealism. However, the main theme that cuts across the entire research is the broader issue of 'normativity', and the central research finding of this thesis is that although representations of gay male and lesbian sex acts in French and North American cinema are now, arguably, more varied, explicit and nuanced, these films' messages in regards to sex are more limiting than they seem at face-value. This is because, as I identify in the thesis, the normalising impulses of homonormativity are pervading not *only* general representations of gay male and lesbian identities in contemporary, popular film cultures, but also their sexual activities and desires.

Previously Published Material

Parts of this thesis, mainly chapter two, contains some extractions from a previously published chapter in an edited collection: Winterton, C. (2017). 'Blurred Lines: The Case of *Stranger by the Lake*', in: L. Coleman & C. Siegel, eds. *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*, London: Lexington Books, pp. 43 – 66. A copy of this is included in the Appendix.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisory team (mainly John Mercer and Gemma Commane, but also Faye Davies too) for their continued help and support throughout my doctoral study. This thesis has changed substantially since I started to write and research for it in October 2016, and you all have helped me to think more seriously and critically about a whole manner of issues that arise here in the thesis, and for that I cannot thank you enough. I also need to offer my extended gratitude towards Birmingham City University and the School of Media for offering me a fully-funded scholarship, which enabled this thesis to happen. I would also like to thank the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research and the academics associated with it for their support, as well as financial support which enabled me to visit a whole manner of national and international conferences throughout my research.

Secondly, there are several colleagues outside (but also a few inside) of Birmingham City University that I would like to extend my gratitude towards. A massive thank you to the Media and Gender group at the University of Leicester for inviting me to the meetings, and also for providing a feminist and supportive space (Jilly Boyce Kay, Melanie Kennedy, Claire Sedgwick, Jessica Martin *et al*); I would like to thank Prof. Helen Wood for her guidance and advice throughout my study; and I would also like to thank Dr. Claire Jenkins for always supporting me and being a friendly face. Finally, I would like to thank *MAI Journal* (Anna Backman Rogers, Anna Misiak *et al*), Hassan Hussain, Emily Morris, Sebastian Svegaard, Andrew Moor, James Chapman, Llewella Chapman, Jenny Stewart, Daisy Richards, Carol Siegel, Stephen Tapert, Madita Oeming, Guy Barefoot and Gábor Gergely for always being friendly and supportive, whether that be over email, on campus (BCU), at conferences, at events and in collaborative work.

Lastly, I would like to thank some very special friends and family members for their support throughout my research. To put it simply, I have not had it very ‘easy’ over the last three years, and if it was not for my close friends and family, I do not think I would have finished this thesis. Firstly, then, I want to say the biggest thank you to my amazing parents; to my two brilliant brothers – Nile and Brandon; and to my wonderful grandparents: my nan Yvonne, my granddad Graham, and my granddad Mick. I want to thank each of them for always being there for me, for offering me advice, for always being supportive and loving, for all the laughs we have had, and for the special connection(s) we share. I would also like to thank Jane, a dear friend I met while tutoring at the Phoenix Cinema in Leicester, for her friendship,

support, guidance and friendly ear – you have helped me a lot with a whole host of things, and for that and for your friendship I will always be grateful. Finally, I want to thank my two best friends, Hannah and Bridgette, two wonderful women who have provided me with an abundant amount of love, care, support and a lot of laughs over the years and throughout my PhD journey.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone close to me, for being constants in an ever-changing life.

Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

"Sex sells" is a ubiquitous phrase. However, a very specific version of sex sells. The idea that if something has sex appeal it will sell, is a logic that has driven the production and circulation of a wide variety of media forms, from pornography to tabloid journalism, from cinema to reality TV.[1] "Sex sells", however, is arguably shorthand for: aesthetically pleasing, heteronormative, cis-gendered "sex" sells. These specific versions of sex have particularly led Western cultures to be accustomed to heavily mediated versions of sex, whether that be moving-image hard-core pornography or fictional cinema and television. However, what about sex that operates outside of the heteronormative rubric? How do representations of gay, lesbian and queer (GLQ) sex acts in contemporary French and North American cinemas, two of the world's dominant film cultures, operate either within or outside of this prevailing discourse? How do contemporary French and North American cinemas frame and represent GLQ sex acts? How has contemporary French and North American cinema played a part in offering representations of GLQ sex that either anchors the status quo or disrupts it? These are some of the central concerns that thread through this research.

Moreover, this introduction is going to be structured through three important questions. The first question is: *what are the research aims and objectives that have guided this work?* This section begins with a short self-reflexive account of how came to research this topic, which then feeds in to the aims and objectives of this thesis. This will then be followed by a short description of each chapter, its main line of enquiry, and how they fit in to the broader aims of the research.

The second question is: *why 'gay, lesbian and queer' in the title and content of the thesis, and not just 'queer'?* It is essential I comprehensively address this because it accounts for shifts in discourses around how mainly non-heterosexual individuals categorise their identities, as well as the (radical) potentials of 'queer', even within the realm of heterosexuality. This needs to be addressed as the radical power of queerness is being slowly dissolved in our contemporary era, as it becomes a term which simply stands in for 'LGBTQIA+', or is being

[1] Examples of sex 'selling' in tabloid journalism typically relates to 'sex scandals' which are shocking or surprising, such as Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, or the Weinstein scandal. In cinema the logic that sex sells is most prominently exemplified through the *Fifty Shades* (2015 – 2018) trilogy of films. In reality TV, shows such as *Love Island* (2015 -) and *Geordie Shore* (2011 -) include scenes of the participants having sex (nothing is shown besides the 'movements' of sex), and again this is often seen as being controversial or shocking, but also adds a unique selling point to the programmes.

used as an identity category by, for example, white, cis-gendered gay men who have assimilated in to the hetero-mainstream. Through this delineation, it will also become clear where I politically and academically situate (myself and) my work within these debates.

The third and final question is: *why contemporary French and North American cinema?* This section will address shifts within contemporary (post-2010) Western cinema's representations of mainly gay and lesbian identities (where France and America dominate in their number of productions), before turning more specifically to the sexually explicit gay and lesbian themed films that have come out of mainly France and the U.S.A (but also Canada) in the last eight years, which also provides important context for the entire thesis.

Question 1: What are the Research Aims and Objectives That Have Guided This Work?

Sex, Cinema, and Self-Reflections

The role sex plays within mainstream or non-pornographic visual media has been a continued fascination of mine throughout my life, and at points it has also confused and unnerved me. This is not an uncommon feeling for many others, too, as it is now a ubiquitous joke that it is awkward to watch sex scenes with your parents or your close family, especially in your formative years. Watching sex that was featured within theatrically-released films while in the company of other people was also awkward when I was a teenager (and beyond), usually because we did not invest ourselves in the narrative for the actual purpose of watching sex (unlike porn). Because of this, sex scenes often felt confusing too, leaving me with critical thoughts such as: "why is this actually happening?" or "what or who is this representation (of sex) serving?"

However, there was one key moment in my life that sex in non-pornographic visual media evolved from being confusing and/or awkward to intellectually intriguing. The instance was in early 2014 when I viewed *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (dir. Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013 – *BITWC* for short) at the Phoenix Cinema in Leicester, and at that time I was a second-year undergraduate student. I vividly remember this day because it was the first time in my life I had seen a film which contained an eight-minute explicit sex scene between women, which felt more like eighty minutes when I was watching it in the cinema. This was mainly because I was surrounded by older members of the public, and the average age in the room would have been around sixty, and at this time I was nineteen. Of all the times I have felt embarrassed while watching a sex scene with other people, this was the most mortifying due to the fact that I was having to watch a fairly graphic, long-running lesbian sex scene in a public space, in the

company of people who were, on average, around forty years older than myself. I was made to feel more uncomfortable because of (loud) coughing, shuffling, tutting and even people walking out, and it is fair to say the scene(s) was not very well received by the older people in the room. However, besides the fact it was somewhat socially mortifying, it was also intriguing to me: the lack of non-diegetic sound; the visceral breaths and moans; the slight glimpses of vulvas; scissoring; orgasms. I had never seen this played out in a theatrically-released film before and especially not in the context of sex which was non-heterosexual.

I left the screening of *BITWC* feeling hollow and emotionally bruised. There was something so powerful about the love the two protagonists Adèle (Adèle Exarchopoulos) and Emma (Léa Seydoux) had for each other, and this made the film stay with me for a long time, and so did the sex scenes. I was fascinated by their affective power, but also by the physicality of the sex acts and how the film suggested that scissoring, for instance, was not only natural but an orgasmic act that is conventional to lesbian sex (the problems concerning this are addressed in chapter three). I left most of this intrigue and these feelings behind until the latter stages of 2015, which was around the time I was thinking about ideas for a doctoral thesis. This instance was the second time the role of sex in cinema had evolved from confusion to intrigue.

This instance was when my grandfather and I were watching a film one summers evening at his home (in 2015). While watching the film, a brief sex scene occurred which prompted my grandfather to ask something along the lines of: "why do they do that in films … show you a little bit of sex and then cut away?" He then proceeded to say: "It's like they want you to be aroused by it, but then take it away – it's a tease. Why don't they just show more?" It was at this moment, a moment when another adult questioned the sex's purpose that my brain began to *critically* interrogate the role sex played in theatrically-released films.[2] I pondered (and still do ponder): 'what is the exact point of this?' Since we did not have the answer to this question, I decided to do a Google search using the careful phrase 'representations of sex in cinema'. On the first page of results I was greeted by key texts such as Linda Williams' *Screening Sex* (2008) and Tanya Kryzwinska's *Sex and the Cinema* (2006), as well as other influential works such as Linda Ruth Williams' *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema* (2005). While I was surprised to see a reasonable number of academic works that centred on sex in cinema (and even less regarding sex and television), I was even more surprised, after some digging, that there was (and still is) very few critical discourses surrounding LGBTQ+

[2] I am also aware that my granddad's perspective regarding this was born from a wanting of titillation, which in itself is interesting.

sex in cinema. Initially, I thought that perhaps this lack of critical discussion around LGBTQ+ sex was because LGBTQ+ sex had not been represented much within theatrically-released films since the dawn of narrative filmmaking. However, after some more research, I found this to not be true – whether it is explicitly represented or specifically evaded, LGBTQ+ sex in cinema is not a completely barren landscape but one that has flourished and grown through time, and through specific socio-cultural shifts too (below in section 3.1, I track the changes in representations of sex from New Queer Cinema [1990s] to today).

As well as the conversation with my grandfather, my thoughts regarding sex in cinema were further advanced by my second viewing of *BITWC*, after I had remembered my experience at the Phoenix in 2014. This viewing reminded me of just how explicit *BITWC* is compared to other lesbian-themed films, and generated some thoughts around other LGBTQ+ films and their representations of sex: regarding lesbian sex, had anything been this 'explicit' before in aboveground cinema? How are contemporary gay male films representing sex? Are there any 'queerer' representations of sex out there?

Essentially, then, the question 'what is the point of sex scenes in theatrically-released films?', as well as my viewing of *BITWC*, is what lead me to produce this thesis which is centred on GLQ sex in contemporary French and North American cinema. Instances like the ones I explained above also indicates that sex in non-pornographic media was a concern to me before I even knew it was a genuine research field that I could eventually be a part of. In many ways, then, my lived experience brought me to this very research, to this very moment in time.

Aims and Objectives

So, while there were experiences of viewing sex in cinema that led me to research this (sub)field, this thesis was of course driven by more formal research aims and objectives. These are:

- To discover how contemporary French and North American films are stylistically and narratively representing GLQ sex acts and practices.
- To determine to what extent the representations of GLQ sex in contemporary French and North American cinema either sustain or challenge normative notions of what can constitute sex, or that sex directly connects with intimacy, romance and love. This also links closely with my final aim, which is:

- To discover to what extent the representations of GLQ sex in contemporary French and North American cinema connects with the normalising impulses evident within movements such as 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2002).

These aims and objectives, as it is probably clear, are concerned with both the filmic elements of the texts but also the socio-cultural discourses that surround and affect them. This is because the understanding of the social and cultural context within which media operates is pivotal to my research in Media and Film Studies. When asked in an interview about the intersection of textual analysis and the socio-cultural structures that surround the production of a media text, Richard Dyer responded by stating: 'you have to do the contextual work in order to be a kind of corrective to any idiosyncratic subjective point of view' (Grant and Kooijman 2016). Therefore, not only does contextual work allow for a more objective point of view when analysing media texts or conducting audience research (although, objectivity is not always a 'good' thing depending on the research), but it also allows researchers to place media texts in their socio-cultural environments. This is important because media texts are almost always a reaction to the socio-cultural environments in which they are produced in, and often reflect, negotiate or challenge ideological systems that are embedded within certain socio-cultural structures. Moreover, in Jody Pennington's *The History of Sex in American Film* (2007), he states that considering social and cultural contexts in relation to sex on-screen are imperative. He writes:

> It is important to bear in mind that film is an aesthetic medium, and the way in which particular filmmakers choose to represent sexuality in specific narratives is immensely important … The analyses [in the book] go beyond the aesthetic to consider the social and cultural preconditions at various periods in American history. (2007: ix).

This thesis considers to what extent representations of gay, lesbian and queer sex in contemporary French and North American cinema reflects or challenges shifts in queer politics, and how homonormativity has influenced not only the representation of GLQ identities, but also particularly gay and lesbian intimacy and sex. In this sense, then, sociological structures (and shifts in these structures) significantly affect media representations, and my aims and objectives account for this. Additionally, and as explored in the methodology, this thesis draws upon a similar methodology to Pennington but instead it does combine textual analysis with socio-cultural theoretical frameworks) and para-texts (whereas Pennington focuses more specifically on historical, social and cultural contexts than aesthetic analysis).

Furthermore, my aims and objectives also align with the confusion and intrigue that I have maintained throughout my life regarding sex in cinema, but more intensely since 2014. The choice to 'discover how contemporary French and North American films are stylistically and narratively representing GLQ sex acts and practices' is one that relates to both the politics of representation and visibility, but also notions of explicitness and sexual performativity that had struck me when watching *BITWC*. It was (and is) an aim that was born from an intellectual curiosity as to what the *point* of explicit or relatively explicit sex was in gay, lesbian and queer films. This was not necessarily about whether these films were *more* or *less* explicit than their heterosexual counter-parts (such as *9 Songs* [dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2004]), or *more* or *less* authentic or nuanced than other films, but what *purposes* the sex in the films was fulfilling. This is essentially what chapter's two and three are concerned with.

However, this thesis starts with a chapter titled 'Cinema's Queer Sex Acts'. This chapter investigates films produced before 2010 (as my principal time-frame is 2010 – 2018, see section 3 of this introduction for more of a context as to why this is), more specifically *Crash* (dir. David Cronenberg, 1996) and *Hustler White* (dir. Bruce LaBruce, 1996). While hard-core, moving-image pornography has offered representations of a wide variety of sex acts and sexual practises, cinema is often constrained to what it can and cannot show, especially when it is not heterosex; (relatively) explicit gay and lesbian sex acts are becoming more prevalent, but representations of sex that step outside of typical acts such as anal sex, masturbation, oral sex or toy-play are scarce and difficult to get produced and distributed. However, this chapter takes two examples of films which offer representations of 'queer sex' (as opposed to 'gay male sex' or 'lesbian sex') since the 1990s, when 'graphic sex would again screen in theatres' (Williams 2008: 258). This chapter's central argument is that films such as *Crash* and *Hustler White* offer counter-discourses where dominant and normative notions of what constitutes sex (and sexual pleasure or intimacy) are not only called in to question but re-imagined and re-interpreted. This chapter also brings in to light the fact that after 2010, a large majority of gay and lesbian themed films have sustained and preserved normative ideals surround sex, love and intimacy, which aligns with the continued rise of homonormativity in Western cultures too. This chapter also looks at films from1996 for two reasons. Firstly, this is because 1996 was a key year in the history of (Western) cinema for the depiction of queer sexual practises, and not only this, but also in the history of both mainstream and independent GLQ cinema too. For instance, American press literature in 1996, such as *The Advocate*, *L.A Times*, *New York Times*, *Screen International* and *The Village Voice*, was interested with gay

and lesbian themed films making a move in to the mainstream, and often these were labelled as 'crossover' films. This is exemplified in Mike Goodridge's article 'Genre Bending' in *Screen international* in May 1996, where he states: 'as gay and lesbian themed flood on to the independent market, are studios and buyers getting serious about gay audiences or is it just a phase they're going through?' One of the central gay-themed films in this year was *The Birdcage* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1996), a film that apparently 'helped' get gay themes in to the mainstream, despite the fact it is problematic as it relies on stereotypes of gay men being flaming queens or screeching sissys. Alongside this gay and lesbian 'crossover' was also the continued release of films which were deemed 'New Queer Cinema' (NQC), and the main NQC release in this year was *Bound*, one of the first overt lesbian-themed films which honoured, but also parodied, the gangster genre.

Secondly, the decision to look at films released in 1996 was one that stemmed from my own disappointment in contemporary cinema's lack of queer sex (and this also relates to my film sample). When I began my research, I had to compile a list of films that have, primarily since the 1990s, represented gay, lesbian or queer sex in films which are broadly classed as 'cinema' or were theatrically-released (in other words, not underground or avant-garde film, as well as internet-only releases or TV).[3] This meant I had to compile a large list of films which involved or represented GLQ sex. At the beginning, this was a somewhat arduous task as many films would feature (very) short, non-explicit sex scenes.[4] This was not necessarily a time-wasting exercise, but highlighted two things: firstly, that there is now a saturation of particularly gay male themed films in cinemas (whether mainstream or independent), but also on streaming sites such as Netflix. Secondly, even though there are now several more films which feature explicit GLQ sex, a larger number of contemporary gay and lesbian films do not. This also provides important context for the films that are sexually graphic, as they stand out "from the crowd" because of their audacity, explicitness and at times transgressive themes. Furthermore, I could have extended my time-frame to include other erotic representations that could have been deemed 'queer' prior to the 1990s, ranging from *Un Chant D'Amour* (dir. Jean Genet, 1950) to *Querelle* (dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1982). However, as already outlined

[3] This was because originally, I had planned for all my chapters to look at films since 1990. This decision was later rectified as more interesting data results came from the contemporary GLQ texts. This is alongside the fact that the texts post-2010 were more explicit, which was one of the central reasons I decided to research them in the first place.

[4] This thesis does look at gay and lesbian films which are 'non-explicit' in chapter four, however, a lot of films featured sex scenes that were not particularly note-worthy, or if not this, the sex within these films did not completely align with my research aims and objectives.

in this introduction, I was more interested in contemporary representations, but I also felt looking at these films would make my work *even* broader, and, frankly, it would have been near impossible to fit everything in the thesis.

Furthermore, chapter two then shifts focus solely to recent gay male cinema and uses *Stranger by the Lake* (dir. Alain Guiraudie, 2014) and *I Want Your Love* (dir. Travis Matthews, 2012) as the central case studies. I argue that these films honour gay male cultural heritage through intertextuality that pulls together stylistic strategies from 'gay cinema' and 'gay porn', creating erotic hybrids which return to, but also re-imagine, earlier ideas of what 'gay cinema' actually was. I also consider how explicit sex can be used as a tool to try and achieve realism, and here I swap *Stranger by the Lake* for *120 BPM* (dir. Robin Campillo, 2017) to exemplify this. In this section I also consider how explicit sex not only creates 'realism', but also extends 'carnal knowledge' (Williams 2008) in the cinema regarding the mechanics and rituals common to many (typical) gay male sexual practices.

Chapter two then moves on to contemporary lesbian cinema, using *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Below Her Mouth* (dir. April Mullen, 2016) as case studies. Here I argue that, commonly, (relatively) explicit sex in lesbian-themed French and North American cinema is 'stylistically problematic but narratively imperative'. The politics of representation in relation to sex and lesbian cinema has always been bound to issues of the male gaze, authenticity and performative acts such as 'scissoring', and it is no different in *Blue is the Warmest Colour* and *Below Her Mouth.* However, I push these discourses forward by also demonstrating that the films are 'aesthetically problematic' due to film style (where cinematography often objectifies and fetishizes the women's bodies), but also the aesthetic and 'look' of the women's bodies, and here I argue that the representation of the lesbian characters are 'heterosexualised'. Yet, the exact role and function the sex plays within narratives centred on the lesbian sexual experience is over-looked by other scholars, and I reveal that in the case of *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Below Her Mouth*, sex is instrumental in the protagonists' formation of a lesbian identity (and therefore it is a rite of passage), which is also a sex-positive ideology. Essentially, the chapter posits that while issues of the (male) gaze and heterosexualisation/objectification/fetishization are prevalent, these films are more nuanced in their messages about sex, which are more apparent within the films' narratives than the surface of the image.

Finally, chapter four considers the ways in which some strands of modern French and North American cinema are entrenched in homonormative ideologies whereby sex and sex acts are represented as physical manifestations of romance and love, as well as sex being sentimentalised as not a physical act for pleasure, but a physical act that *creates* or *confirms* romance in a normative manner. This chapter, then, is divided in to three case studies that highlight some of the most prominent ways in which contemporary gay-and-lesbian themed films have rendered sex homonormative or have offered a homonormative way of expressing or representing (gay or lesbian) sexual acts. The first two case studies examine what I call 'homonormative gestures' in the form of panning away from sex as exemplified in *Call Me by Your Name* (dir. Luca Guadagnino, 2017), and the uses of blocking devices and the fade-to-black editing technique as exemplified in *Carol* (dir. Todd Haynes, 2015). The third case study looks at how sex is represented as a physical act that creates or confirms love (and therefore creates/confirms romance in a heteronormative manner) in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* (Olivier Ducastel & Jacques Martineau, 2016). This chapter ultimately highlights the ways in which some strands of contemporary French and North American cinemas have detached themselves from a queer radical politics in favour of a focus that explicitly puts gay and lesbian romantic partnerships front and centre, yet these are anchored to hetero-and-homo normative ideologies, *not only in their overall narrative focus,* but *also* in their representations of sex and intimacy.

My aims and objectives, as well as the focus' within each chapter, also calls in to question what it means for certain sexual acts and practises to be rendered 'normative', or on the other hand, 'queer'. As I identify in chapter one, queer sex acts are ones that challenge dominant notions of what typically constitutes sexual pleasure or intimacy. Queer, as a term or concept, has historically been seen to challenge hegemony and normativity, and I will now outline how I am using the term and identity category 'queer' in this thesis, as well as outlining contemporary shifts in discourses around what it means to be 'queer'.

Question 2: Why 'Gay, Lesbian and Queer' in the Title and Content of the Thesis, and Not Just 'Queer'?

Queer is popularly used nowadays as an umbrella term that simply stands in for 'LGBTQIA+', a word which is used to 'describe an "oxymoronic community of difference," which includes people who might also self-identify as gay and/or lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite, drag queen, leather daddy, lipstick lesbian, pansy, fairy, dyke, butch, femme, feminist, asexual, and so on—any people not explicitly defining themselves in "traditional" heterosexual terms'

(Benshoff 2004: 63).[5] However, and perhaps more importantly, it can also be defined as a sexual orientation that disrupts or dramatizes 'incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire' (Jagose 2010: 3). In other words, 'queer' as a sexual or gender orientation abrades the boundaries that are instrumental in the construction of normative identities. Moreover, instead of queer always being a dissidence in terms of gender and sexuality, queer can also be used to mean subversive and non-normative, which aligns more with the word's original meaning, which was 'strange', 'odd' or 'not straight'.[6]

While queerness typically relates to gender or sexual identities that transcend or abrade normative identity classifications, the term queer can also be applied to a range of desires, practises, and representations that oppose and subvert normativity in some way. However, as Suzanna Danuta Walters importantly asks: '[a]re queer politics simply a politics of the non-normative … could not the category queer include paedophiles, incest perpetrators, hetero BDSMers, dissatisfied straights, and so forth?' Walters then continues to ponder: '[i]n other words, if all that we share is a non-normative sexuality and a disenfranchisement, then why not be totally inclusive?' (2005: 8). Walters argues here that the term queer had (and still has) lost its currency as a word that denoted radicalism, subversion, and activism – if we are going to allow any 'non-normative' entity to be 'queer', we may as well say that almost everything in this world is besides a select few things. While Walters' question may be polemic in nature, what she is pointing towards is the issue of just how *slippery* and *malleable* the term and identity category 'queer' is, and since it does not have a fixed meaning (as some see rigidly defining queer and queerness as unproductive and 'un-queer'), the issue of who or what is queer is a continued debate.

This debate has been on-going primarily since the early 1990s when queer theory began to gain currency in the academy, with significant works including Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and Teresa De Lauretis' *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* (1991). These three scholars are often regarded as the 'founding mothers of queer theory' (Turner 2000: 5), and the turn to queer theory was, in essence, a move that also addressed the limitations of feminist theory, which often assumed 'heterosexuality as the

[5] Benshoff's inclusion of 'feminist' in his list is debatable.
[6] It is also important to remember that queer was not exclusively used in relation to gender or sexuality until it was appropriated as an insult by heterosexuals against homosexuals.

paradigm', meaning that most feminist analysis was filtered through a 'heterosexualizing lens' (Dean 2015: 614). Furthermore, queer theory is a wide-spread concept that 'operates at the conjunction of particular strands in feminist and lesbian/gay intellectual and political work, on one hand, and Continental Philosophy, on the other hand' (Turner 2000: 9). However, and as Donald E. Hall notes, '[s]imply put, there is no "queer theory" in the singular, only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called "queer theories"' (2002: 5). Hall's statement that queer theory is not singular pertains to the fluid and flexible nature of both queer theories and also queer as an identity category, and their radical nature relates to the fact they (the theories or identities) are not rigid and constrained, and in turn deconstruct or dramatize coherency and normalcy, but *primarily* in relation to gender, sexuality and 'identity' as a broader concept.

Moreover, as queer theories have grown exponentially since the 1990s, so have their concerns, and so have their applications within a range of academic fields beyond Philosophy, Sociology, or Cultural Studies. In Film Studies, the analysis of 'queers' on-screen, as well as the application of queer theories as frameworks for the analysis of cinema, has also grown steadily since the mid-1990s. This directly correlates with the rise of LGBTQIA+ representation in mainstream film (and media), because the *primary* 'visual media that [explicitly] dealt with non-heterosexual issues was underground and counter-culture film' before the 1990s (Field 1995: 4).[7] While queer theories have created diverse intellectual sub-fields within Film Studies, they have primarily been used in conjunction with the politics of representation and 'visibility'. In this sense, queer theories and the analysis of 'queers' have been evident within a growing number of academic and non-academic publications, ranging from some earlier works such as Ellis Hanson's edited collection *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (1999), to Schoonover and Galt's *Queer Cinema in the World* (2015). Within the last decade, in particular, queer theories have also been adopted for the re-framing or re-evaluation of certain historical periods, filmmakers or film cultures, in works ranging from Daniel Humphrey's *Queer Bergman: Sexuality, Gender, and the European Art Cinema* (2013) to David Greven's *Intimate Violence: Hitchcock, Sex, and Queer Theory* (2017). As is evident from the titles of these works, 'queer' is being used in a multi-faceted manner; one of which relates to gender and sexuality, but the other signals how queer can also be used as a verb ('to

[7] Obviously, before the 1990s there were mainstream and independent above-ground films which featured LGBTQ+ characters, sub-plots or entire narratives, however, after 1990 we saw the introduction of New Queer Cinema, and more LGBTQ+ themed films in the mainstream, so much so that a lot of American press release in the years 1996 and 1997 were concerned with, or celebrated, a 'gay crossover', as already mentioned.

queer') – whereby academics re-evaluate certain bodies or strands of cinema through a queer lens. This again pertains to the wide-spread and fluid nature of 'queer' and queer theories. This fluidity is again reinforced through the fact that Film Studies scholars have also analysed 'queer' cinematic techniques, or stylistic and narrative strategies that can be read as queer (see Nowlan 2010 as one example). This also pertains to the ways in which 'queer' as a term does not always have to be tied to debates or issues regarding gender and sexuality – instead, it can also be used similarly to terms such as subversive or alternative.

However, queer being used as a sort of synonym for words such as subversive or alternative once again relates to the *slipperiness* of queer and queerness, because, for example, putting salt in a cup of tea (instead of sugar or sweetener) could be considered 'queer', because this is not necessarily 'normal'. So in relation to queer and its application to 'non-normativity' (such as paedophilia, incest, 'straight SMers' and so on), Walters also states – '[t]his reduces queer politics to a banal (and potentially dangerous) politics of simple opposition, potentially affiliating groups, identities, and practices that are explicitly and implicitly in opposition to each other' (2005: 8). Therefore, individuals who identify as 'queer', although they perhaps live pretty ordinary homosexual lives, reduces the political potential for 'queer' to be radical and destabilising. However, aligning 'perverse' or taboo sex such as incest, paedophilia or bestiality with even the term queer or LGBTQ+ identities is problematic because of the long history of homosexuality, in particular, being seen as perverse and pathological (as well as being illegal), a standpoint that was challenged and then slowly de-constructed after homosexuality was made legal across (some) Western countries in the second half of the twentieth century (as well as the twenty-first century).

The most contentious and taboo of all the sexual perversions, in Western culture, is paedophilia. Paedophilia, which often involves adults molesting or having sex with (very) young children or minors, has been specifically shunned as a topic of interest or analysis by some queer theorists, while some others have 'overtly refuse[d] to rule out paedophile as "queer"' (Pickett 2009: 158). In light of the disputes around the paedophile being 'queer', my conceptualisation of 'queer sex' and 'queer' does not include representations of paedophilia, because from a personal viewpoint, paedophilic sex is not only illegal, but it is also deeply damaging and immoral to align this pathology with the flexible nature of 'queer', but also the LGBTQ+ community more broadly.

Considering all of these issues and debates surrounding 'queer', then, my use of the word and concept (and therefore the word's use in my thesis but also in my personal and political life) aligns with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who wrote in 1993 that 'there are some lesbians and gay men who could never count as queer, and other people who vibrate to the chord of queer without having much same-sex eroticism, or without routing their same-sex eroticism through the identity labels lesbian or gay' (1993: 13). This notion pertains to the way in which 'queer' and queer theories are fluid and malleable, moving away from same-sex desires as being the *only* markers of 'queer'. Instead, integrating non-normative desires and practices in to the definition of queer represents the flexibility of the term because non-normative desires and practices may have a relationship with heteronormativity while still being 'queer'. Therefore, I call these *queer potentials*. I call them this because almost everybody has the *potential* to either perform a queer act, involve themselves in a queer activity, or enact a part of their identity (perhaps through sex) that can be deemed or rendered queer. This also calls upon an issue Kosofsky implicitly raises in the quotation above, which is the fact that 'queer' is most commonly an identity that one chooses, a performativity or set of acts or practises that are *conscious*.[8]

Moreover, for some scholars and critics, a flexible definition of queer that absorbs heterosexual practices or non-normative desires that relate to heterosexuality is at best complicated and at worst infuriating. As Calvin Thomas writes, the "queer heterosexual" 'has haunted queer theory, and annoyed or appalled identity politics, from the very moments of queer theory's all too maculate conception' (2006: 2). Queer heterosexuality, for example, is often seen to be a performance of heterosexual identity that does not 'fit in' with (hetero)normative ideals.[9] This absorption of heterosexuality in to the realm of 'queer' and queer theories also acknowledges the point that even though heteronormativity is defined as normal in society, this does not mean that heterosexuals cannot indulge or take part in practices that are 'queer'.

This integration of heterosexuality in to the realm of 'queer' was also notably acknowledged by the activist, sex educator and columnist Tristan Taormino in 2003 when she wrote that, for her, 'all this gender fucking has … rubbed off on heteros, who are ditching the script in favour of writing their own' (2003). If 'straight queers' reject normativity (in some

[8] This would be opposed to people who are queer because of their biology or physiology (elements people cannot necessarily 'control'), such as intersex or asexual people.
[9] Just one examples of this is David Walliams' camp attitude and performance in *Little Britain* (2003 – 2006) and as a judge on *Britain's Got Talent* (2007 -).

way), then it could be argued that they represent a sign of success for queer politics, as something that wants normativity to be rejected or challenged. Therefore, as Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson note, 'queer heterosexuality' is 'a necessary component of "gender-fucking", in Butlerian terms (1996: 411 – 412). Or in other words, 'gender-fucking' and gender subversion cannot only stem from non-heterosexual individuals. Ultimately, then, just because heterosexuality is defined as normative, this does not mean that heterosexuals individuals cannot have the *potential* to partake in queer sex acts or practices. In short, the use of 'queer' within this thesis relates to non-normative, subversive and alternative sex acts (and identities) that do not fit in with hetero-or-homo-normative standards of sex. However, this does not necessarily mean that the individuals taking part in these acts are deemed as being 'queer' in their sexual orientation, and this is vital when we consider the political *potentials* of queer sex, potentials which appear to be disintegrating in contemporary representations of gay and lesbian sex, as I will explore throughout this thesis, and especially in chapter four.

These discussions regarding queerness are now also called in to question in the following contextualisation of how Western films are representing GLQ people in our contemporary era, as well as the representation of sex more particularly in French and North American cinema. As 'queer' increasingly becomes an 'umbrella' term, contemporary films which are being called labelled 'queer' are only called this simply because they focus on non-heterosexual individuals. However, representing queerness, as well as what constitutes a queer film (as opposed to a film which simply centres on gay men), has become messier and complicated due to changing discourses around what is defined as queer. Through my delineation of these films, it will become clear that there has been a continued shift away from the radical nature of queerness, to the normalising impulses of homonormativity and hetero-mainstream assimilation.

Question 3: Why French and North American Cinema?[10]

Since 2010 there has been a noticeable shift in the ways in which Western cinema, but more specifically French, North American and British cinema, has been representing GLQ identities. This is as well as shifts in the styles, narratives and themes that come with these representations (which is discussed below). These popular and dominant film cultures have been trying to

[10] It is worth explicitly noting that this thesis is not a study of national cinemas, but instead is a study of the sexually explicit (and some non-explicit) films which have come out of these countries in recent years. However, some of the case studies (namely in Chapter One, Two and Three) which have interesting relations to their national cinematic identities, and this will be elaborated on where appropriate.

satisfy a continued demand for narratives centring on gay and lesbian lives and experiences, through both mainstream and independent films, and this has been primarily enabled through: technological advancements (mainly more accessible and affordable filming equipment);[11] a wider variety of distribution and exhibition options (especially streaming sites such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and so on); and an apparent increase in the "acceptance" of homosexuals. Moreover, while the mainstream has offered several commercially successful gay and lesbian films, it has been *independent* contemporary Western cinemas which have been innovative in ushering in what Ben Walters first claimed to be 'new wave queer cinema' (2012), and North American and French film cultures have particularly been instrumental in ushering in this new 'wave'.

In an article written for *The Guardian*, Walters stated there had been a 'new wave of queer filmmaking' piloted by films such as *Weekend* (dir. Andrew Haigh, 2011) and *Keep the Lights On* (dir. Ira Sachs, 2012). He stated the films 'show the gay experience in all its complexity', and that a 'fresh crop of directors [were] rejecting stereotypical roles and predictable plots, creating films that deal with real life and rounded characters' (Walters 2012).[12] As similar films were released between 2011 and 2014 (mainly ones produced and released in France, North America and Britain), other academics noted there had been a revival of New Queer Cinema in the form of internet-released lesbian films (see Beirne 2014); Stuart Richards called it a 'New Queer Cinema Renaissance' (2016); I called it 'Neo-Queer Cinema' (2017);[13] and Andrew Moor labels it 'New Gay Sincerity' (2018). The films included within these discussions and which are seen to be innovative in their contemporary portrayal of (primarily) gay and lesbian life includes (but are not limited to): *Weekend*, *Keep the Lights On*, *I Want Your Love*, *Interior. Leather Bar* (dir. Franco & Matthews, 2013), *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, *Stranger by the Lake*, *Tangerine*, *Below Her Mouth*, *The Pass* (dir. Ben A. Williams, 2016), *Paris 05:59: Theo and Hugo*, *God's Own Country* (dir. Francis Lee, 2017), *Beach Rats* (dir. Eliza Hittman, 2017), and *120 BPM*.

[11] For instance, Sean Baker's *Tangerine* (2015) was primarily filmed with an iPhone 5 camera.

[12] I am dubious of the term 'real life characters' - what Walters is perhaps trying to say is the characters in these films are not represented through a set of common stereotypes. His claims are also ahistorical, because New Queer Cinema also offered characters who were not represented through a common set of stereotypes, and this is one of the reasons why the queer wave of cinema was so celebrated.

[13] I used 'queer' here more in the "umbrella" sense of the word. I do not regret this decision as at the time of publication this was the political standpoint I adhered to, which has now changed mainly due to the advances in both my personal and academic life.

Moreover, in 'A New Queer Cinema Renaissance', Richards claims that films such as *Stranger by the Lake* and *Weekend* are fresh types of 'queer' films that present a realist or naturalist aesthetic and contests heteronormativity or homonormativity through dialogue and sexually explicit acts. He notes: 'contemporary queer cinema is experiencing a wave of films that are a response to the contemporary political climate and state of independent film-making' and that 'as progressive texts, they [*Weekend* and *SBTL*] make…unambiguous queerness accessible to wider audiences' (Richards 2016: 217-224). Richards uses the term 'A New Queer Cinema Renaissance' as he believes that this new flow of gay and lesbian films hark back to the early 1990s and the important film movement 'New Queer Cinema'.

New Queer Cinema is the most important wave of gay, lesbian and queer filmmaking in Western cinema history. This is also the first period in cinematic history where a concentrated number of narratives that centred on GLQ individuals were released; before this, GLQ films were dotted around, and GLQ characters were often rendered stereotypical. However, New Queer Cinema is best categorised as an independent and innovative form of filmmaking but also an 'aesthetic language' (Mennel 2010), which occurred within its own culturally and historically specific era, as it was an explicit and defiant response to *both* the AIDS crisis but also the problematic and stereotypical representation of gays and lesbians in cinema but also visual culture more broadly. Films which are deemed 'New Queer Cinema' includes (but is not necessarily limited to): *Paris is Burning* (dir. Jennie Livingston, 1989), *My Own Private Idaho* (dir. Gus Van Sant, 1991), *Poison* (dir. Todd Haynes, 1991), *Swoon* (dir. Tom Kalin, 1992), *The Living End* (dir. Gregg Araki, 1992), *Go Fish* (dir. Rose Troche, 1994), *The Watermelon Woman* (dir. Cheryl Dunye, 1996), *Bound* (dir. The Wachowskis, 1996), and *High Art* (dir. Lisa Cholodenko, 1998). In her now famous essay that coined the phrase 'New Queer Cinema' (first published in *Sight & Sound* magazine), Rich celebrates and criticises the NQC wave of filmmaking, as one that was dominated by (white) men, but as a wave of cinema that also offered new and exciting stories focused solely around 'queers' (non-heterosexuals). Furthermore, in 2013 Rich also released an extended monograph entitled *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*, which considered the wave of filmmaking in more depth. In the book, Rich interestingly claims NQC was a more of a 'moment' than an actual 'movement' (Rich 2013), as later its radical nature started to disintegrate (see below).

Furthermore, even though New Queer Cinema, as Michele Aaron notes, 'ushered in a queerer culture' (2004: 8), it declined in the late 1990s. This decline arguably began with the film *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Kimberly Peirce, 1999), as well as others such as *The Talented Mr.*

Ripley (dir. Anthony Minghella, 1999). Hilary Swank's portrayal of Brandon Teena in *BDC* led her to win the Best Actress Academy Award, which meant that she was one of the first Oscar winners for a piece of work where a transgendered person was the central protagonist. The film also featured a cast of well-known performers (such as Chloë Sevigny and Peter Sarsgaard), it was made on a medium-sized budget ($2,000,000), and its U.S gross was $11,533,945, considerably more than *any* of the other NQC films released earlier on in the decade. *Boys Don't Cry*, while it openly represented a trans character, it moved away from the overtly political and aesthetic 'language' of the NQC. As B Ruby Rich noted: 'in the old days the New Queer Cinema tended to be peopled by friends or lovers of the director, or sympathetic actors who wanted to help put the picture over … [n]ow it's turned out that starring in a gay- or lesbian-themed film can be a career-making move' (2000). In many ways, queer scholars, commentators and filmmakers felt as if the 'queer' content of NQC was compromised because GLQ stories had been assimilated in to the 'mainstream'.

Following the decline of NQC, between 2000 and 2010 popular cinemas, like Hollywood, started to offer homonormative approaches to LGBTQ+ identities. This period of American cinema history particularly offered palatable versions of gay male and lesbian identities. This was evident in films such as *Transamerica* (dir. Duncan Tucker, 2005), *Brokeback Mountain*, *I Love You, Phillip Morris* (dir. Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2009), *Milk* (dir. Gus Van Sant, 2008), *A Single Man* (dir. Tom Ford, 2009) and *The Kids Are All Right* (dir. Lisa Cholodenko, 2010).[14] This is alongside a narrative and thematic focus that was completely different from the radical politics evident in New Queer Cinema, and in this era there was more of an explicit focus on personal relationships, love, and domestic life. Moreover, the fact all these gay and lesbian films had 'star' actors or actresses playing roles within them, were produced with medium-sized budgets, and were nominated for or won Academy Awards, means that the films were given a broader release world-wide and therefore gained more audience attention, especially from heterosexual spectators. The move towards a more explicit focus on homosexual life in mainstream American cinema, then, could be seen under a conservative or neoliberal rubric as a move towards acceptance and equality, in cinema more specifically, and in society more broadly. Yet, this 'move' supports Lisa Duggan's idea that, under homonormative ideals, 'equality becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions' (2003: 65), which in this case, would be the conservative institution

[14] Before 1999, there were mainstream GLQ films ranging from *Boys in the Band* (dir. William Friedkin, 1970) to *The Birdcage* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1996). However, these films were (and are) deemed problematic, and a lot of these films did not delve in to themes such as gay/lesbian/queer love, kinship/partnership, marriage or domesticity.

of Hollywood. Moreover, the very fact that the focus in this era was on homonormative lives and ideals (whether that be the exploration of domestic life or personal relationships), also functions to preserve heteronormative values and ideologies.[15]

Returning now to Richard's notion of 'A New Queer Cinema Renaissance', in my delineation of 'Neo-Queer Cinema', I state that while NQC 'challenged gender identification, offering radical or experimental narratives that spoke more widely to queer issues and politics', Neo-Queer films tend to 'focus more narrowly on personal struggles, revolving around homonormative/heteronormative problems such as marriage, monogamy … and socio-cultural critiques, often ripe in the New Queer Cinema, are still largely eluded' (Winterton 2017: 49). This also pertains to the way in which whatever this contemporary wave of filmmaking may be labelled as, it has (largely) moved away the radical nature of New Queer Cinema to try and, as Ben Walters first identified, 'show the gay experience in all its complexity' (2012). As I write, 'Neo-Queer films do not simply continue a legacy [the legacy of NQC], but instead they have revitalised it, changing narratives and styles to suit contemporary issues and appeal to contemporary spectators', and 'this may be due to the fact that *some* LGBT+ persons in real life are beginning to reap the rewards of "equality" and neoliberalism' (2017: 45 – 47). This idea that *some* LGBT+ persons in real life are beginning to 'reap the rewards of "equality" and neoliberalism' is, arguably, pivotal to the very fact that Western cinemas began to focus even more intensely on homonormative characters and concerns. The fact that since 2011 and the release of 'Neo-Queer' films, 'same sex marriage was legalised in the UK and was becoming legal in many US states (Maine/Maryland/Washington 2012, New Mexico 2013, Florida/Alabama 2015)' (2017: 47), reifies the idea that these films *tried* to reflect social shifts and changes within the gay and lesbian 'experience'. This idea that contemporary gay and lesbian films are trying to reflect shifts in socio-cultural discourses surrounding homosexuality (in particular), is also reinforced through the increased use of 'realist' film techniques to represent the modern gay and lesbian 'experience'. As I identify:

> Most of the films include long takes, shaky or imperfect cinematography and composition, a lack or a minimal presence of non-diegetic sound, the use of tight close-

[15] Of course, there were overlaps in independent and mainstream GLQ cinema in this period of time, and not everything was homonormative or assimilated in to mainstream ideals. Some of the notable independent films in this period included *Dorian BITWCs* (dir. Tennyson Bardwell, 2004), *Mysterious Skin* (dir. Gregg Araki, 2004), *Eating Out* (dir. Q Allan Brocka, 2004), and *Shortbus* (dir. John Cameron Mitchell, 2008).

> ups to convey emotion, a lack of extravagant or camp aesthetic, colour or *mise-en-scène*, the use of natural lighting, and a slow narrative pace. (Winterton 2017: 48).

Moreover, nearly all of these films fit in with Marshment and Hallam's four types of film realism, which includes a 'sound-track design in which underscore is absent or minimised,' 'observational or static camerawork,' 'unsteady image[s]' and sometimes favour 'mid or long shots' (2000: 102-104).[16] These stylistic techniques strive for a naturalistic aesthetic which attempts to communicate a more visceral and 'realistic' portrayal of gay and lesbian love, romance, intimacy, and *sometimes* social and cultural struggles. These realist techniques have also been used to try and communicate more nuanced ideas around gay and lesbian sex, and this introduction will now finish with a consideration of the history of explicit sex in French and North American cinema, which brings in to light the significance of the sexually explicit modern GLQ films under analysis in this thesis.

Explicit GLQ Sex in French and North American Cinema

To reiterate, France and the U.S.A have been two of the most instrumental film cultures in the last decade to usher in more sexually explicit gay and lesbian themed films. To some, it may be no surprise whatsoever that France, one of the World's dominant film cultures, has offered explicit representations of gay and lesbian sex in the last decade. This is because European cinema more broadly has a long history of pushing the boundaries in relation to depictions of sex in cinema, whereas American cinema often avoided it outside of exploitation or underground forms. As Linda Williams notes:

> *Last Tango* was certainly not the first film imported from Europe to screen adult sex beyond the kiss. As early as 1959, Louis Malle's *Les Amants* had engendered controversy … with a long scene of adulterous lovemaking … Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967) had structured its narrative around the multiple sexual encounters of an upper-middle class housewife who takes up prostitution. (2008: 113 – 114).

Belle de Jour was one of the first aboveground erotic French films which was not afraid of exploring sex, and as Roger Ebert notes, it is 'possibly the best-known erotic film of modern times, perhaps the best' (1999), and therefore *Belle de Jour* is a fitting example of French cinema's often daring and provocative approach to not only film form and style, but narrative

[16] An argument could be presented that aligns these filmmaking practises with documentary and documentary strategies. However, even though the films appear to strive for a realistic effect, the filmmakers do not simply follow the characters in a cinema vérité style, instead the stylistic elements of the films still carefully crafted.

and thematic content too. Other French films which concerned themselves with sex in the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, range from *Emmanuelle* (dir. Just Jaeckin, 1974) to *Maîtresse* (dir. Barbet Schroeder, 1975) to *Beau-père* (dir. Bertrand Blier, 1981).

However, at the end of the twenty-first century French cinema began to become increasingly extreme in its depiction of sex and also violence. As Coulthard and Birks write –

> Torture, genital mutilation, rape, murder, cannibalism: with extremes in gore, violence, and sexuality, films associated with European New Extremism mix 'lowbrow' genres of pornography and horror with 'highbrow' art film aesthetics. (2016: 71).

A sizeable portion of these films, which are also labelled as *cinéma du corps* by Tim Palmer (2011), were produced in France and include (but are not limited to): *Romance* (dir. Catherine Breillat, 1999), *Baise-Moi* (dir. Despentes & Trinh Thi, 2000), *Trouble Every Day* (dir. Claire Denis, 2001), *Irreversible* (dir. Gaspar Noé, 2002) and *Martyrs* (dir. Pascal Laugier, 2008).

These types of films also correlate with what Palmer identifies as 'brutal intimacy' (2011), and as Palmer identifies, films which contain 'brutal intimacy' tend to display 'an increasingly explicit dissection of the body and its sexual behaviours: unmotivated or predatory sex, sexual conflicts, male and female rape, disaffected and emotionless sex … [and] arbitrary sex stripped of conventional or even nominal gestures of romance' (2006: 22).[17] However, as Coulthard and Birks point out, 'Palmer's descriptive list … misses the crucial point that the films [which] most closely align with New Extremism … focus their excessive sex and violence not on transgressive modes of sexuality, but rather almost exclusively on the interrogation of heterosexual, sexually active and romantically involved couples' (2016: 72). This is a valuable and imperative point: although French cinema (and European cinema more broadly) has continued to push the boundaries of sex/eroticism/violence and has become more 'extreme' over the last two decades, these 'extreme' films are hetero-centric and mainly heteronormative. Therefore, sexually explicit gay male and lesbian films such as *Stranger by the Lake, Blue Is the Warmest Colour, Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo* and *120 BPM* continue the trend of *cinéma du corps* but within a gay male and lesbian context, and also more importantly, they represent some of the first films in the history of aboveground French cinema to explicitly depict gay male and lesbian sex acts.

[17] Most films which feature 'brutal intimacy' are also the ones included in the New Extremism category.

On the other hand, North American cinema has a long history of avoiding explicit sex in particular, and only a handful of aboveground films before the 1990s pushed the boundaries in regard to sex. Although, as Linda Williams writes, 'it might seem that the history of screening sex would be one long progression toward a greater revelation of the naked facts of sex … [i]n fact, however, this screening offers a complex dynamic of revelation and concealment' (2008: 72). In other words, North American cinema has not necessarily progressed towards 'explicitness', but instead the journey of sex on-screen is much messier. Pennington also identifies this in *The History of Sex in American Film*, where he states that '[a]lthough American films … are often belittled for their one-dimensional portrayal of sex, a close examination of the history of sex in American motion pictures reveals that American cinema has actually represented sex in myriad ways', and, according to Pennington, these representations also sit alongside shifting developments in American cultural values. Moreover, Canadian cinema has, much like Australian cinema, sat in the shadow of more dominant film cultures such as the U.S.A, UK and France for most of its life, yet three of the most explicit and dynamic films regarding sex were produced and distributed in Canada: *Hustler White*, *Crash* and *Below Her Mouth*. While Canadian cinema is split into distinct categories such as English-Canadian cinema, Québec cinema, and Aboriginal cinema (White 2006), its English-Canadian strand is the most noticeable globally, and its marginal status (or its status as a cinematic 'Other', as briefly explored in chapter one) has led it to produce filmmakers and films which are transgressive or challenging, with Xavier Dolan being one of the most prominent contemporary director of queer aesthetics and narratives in recent years.

Furthermore, Pennington's also sketches 'salient issues in the historical experiences of gays and lesbians in the United States and their fragmentary representations on-screen', and the chapter 'focuses on the ways gays and lesbians have been treated and perceived since the 1930s and represented in American films' (2007: 129). The most striking thing about these statements is how Pennington focuses on the ways gay men and lesbian women have been 'treated and perceived' since the 1930s in American cinema, and therefore he does *not* explicitly focus on representations of gay male and lesbian sex since the 1930s. This is because, historically, representations of gay, lesbian and queer sex in American cinema have been purposefully evaded, within the mainstream more specifically. Before New Queer Cinema, GLQ spectators would have to mainly rely on pornography, underground or avant-garde cinema to witness erotic or sexual scenes between homosexual or queer individuals. However, there were some (problematic) representations of gay sex dotted around in, for example, films

such as *Cruising* (dir. William Friedkin, 1980), and representations of lesbian sex were prevalent in films such as *The Hunger* (dir. Tony Scott, 1983) and *Desert Hearts* (dir. Donna Deitch, 1985). However, it was eventually New Queer Cinema that provided more visibility regarding gay and lesbian sex. Yet, even in this period representations of (particularly explicit) sex were scarce. In *The Living End*, for instance, 'all the audience witness in the film's sex scene is the bottom of the protagonists' feet, which is perhaps a playful nod to how mainstream cinema often 'avoids' (heterosexual) sex acts' (Winterton 2017: 48), which does also fit in with the aesthetic and narrative playfulness of most NQC films. In *Bound*, for example, there is a short sex scene which displays Corky (Gina Gershon) and Violet (Jennifer Tilly) naked on a bed, while Corky masturbates Violet; the movement of her hand and the way Violet grinds against it is fairly graphic, but nothing compared to film such as *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* or *Below Her Mouth*. However, in this period, the only director to be producing films which featured totally explicit and challenging representations of sex, within French or North American cinemas, was Bruce LaBruce. However, and as I discuss in chapter one, LaBruce identified more with the 'queercore' movement, which was even more subversive and dissident than New Queer Cinema.

Furthermore, depictions of GLQ sex in mainly American cinema between 1999 and 2010 were still primarily tame and coy. *Brokeback Mountain*, as I discuss in chapters one, two and four, 'entered the mainstream consciousness like no other widely distributed gay- themed independent film before it' (Needham 2010: 1), and the 'tent scene', where the protagonists Jack (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis (Heath Ledger) have rough, aggressive sex is one of the most infamous and revered scenes of gay sex in cinematic history. As Linda Williams writes: 'Ang Lee's staging of pleasurable anal sex between two cowboys who spend the summer herding sheep high in the Wyoming mountains in 1963 and then conduct an illicit affair over twenty years has deep cultural significance' (2008: 236). It has deep cultural significance because anal sex, as Williams identifies, was rendered painful and humiliating in American culture, and since *Deliverance* (dir. John Boorman, 1972), anal sex 'between men has been portrayed much as heterosexual rape was in the nineteenth century – as the fate worse than death that spoils the innocence and reputation of its victim' (Ibid). *Brokeback Mountain*, on the other hand, presents the anal sex as pleasurable, but also as aggressive and 'primal'. However, 'much of our understanding of the scene' comes from the grunts and pants of both men (Williams 2008: 246), and the scene avoids any explicitness, and I would argue this is not down to artistic choices, but by the mainstream imperatives that the film, in the most part, adhered to.

In other films, such as *I Love You, Phillip Morris*, shots of oral sex, masturbation, and anal sex are briefly shown, but there is no nudity and the scenes are carefully manipulated so 'the hydraulics of sex' (Williams 2008: 6) are never even close to being shown. Moreover, these scenes do not have narrative significance or develop characterisation (like some of the films I discuss in this thesis), so they are included for spectacle or titillation, whilst also reifying the stereotype that gay men are hedonistic and promiscuous. In *The Kids Are All Right*, hardly any lesbian sex is displayed, yet there is a relatively explicit sex scene between Jules (Julianne Moore) and the children's biological father Paul (Mark Ruffalo), where the audience witnesses the two have penetrative sex in the cowgirl position. This inclusion of heterosex in the film, when lesbian sex is eluded, is offensive because it reifies the fact that heterosex in more 'mainstream' films is palatable, while lesbian sex is clearly not. This is made even more surprising by the fact that the film is directed by Lisa Cholodenko, a key figure in the lesbian strand of NQC. Yet, as Fine and Whitlock note, 'Lisa Cholodenko asserted that one of her primary intentions for the film was to make it popular and ''viewable'' to mainstream audiences' (2012: 180) and the evasion of lesbian sex reinforces this.

Perhaps the two most prominent films which represent GLQ sex in this period were *Mysterious Skin* and *Shortbus*. *Mysterious Skin* centres on the story of Brian (Brady Corbet) and Neil (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), two young adults who were sexually abused by their sports coach (Bill Sage) when they were young boys. The film is a daring and shocking mediation on the damage child sex abuse has on an individual, and the film does not shy away from (carefully) depicting the paedophilic sex that occurs too. Although no explicit shots are included, the film carefully blocks the sex, which functions to place the action within the spectator's imagination, which arguably makes the sex *even more* disturbing, because it is in our minds and not only on the screen. In one instance, the coach persuades Neil to fist him, while Brian also watches – this is represented by only showing the coach's back and head, and no fisting is actually shown. However, the coach says to Neil "it's okay, go in Neil", and as he does the coach reacts with a mixture of pain and pleasure, which is disturbingly visceral. This use of blocking paired with the explicit dialogue and facial reactions creates a confrontational and audacious representation of child sexual abuse and paedophilia. In *Shortbus*, an 'American hard-core art film' (Williams 2008), a whole plethora of straight, gay, and lesbian sex acts are shown. For instance, the film quite explicitly presents images of: a man fellating himself; a domanatrix whipping a man who eventually ejaculates over himself; a three-some between men which includes rimming and anal sex; a man performing oral sex to his wife; two women

in bed together using an electric toy for sexual stimulation; female solo-masturbation; as well as lots of full-frontal nudity, including shots of vulvas, soft and hard penises. Nick Davis writes that *Shortbus* represents a 'reanimation' of New Queer Cinema where 'aesthetic energies and political engines' had 'shape-shifted' (2008: 625 – 626), and in *Shortbus*' case, not only human *sexuality* (which NQC was concerned with) but human *sex* are explored more intensely and explicitly, as well as the fluidity and malleability of sexuality itself. The film also provocatively blurs the boundaries between 'cinema' and 'porn', much like contemporary gay-centred films such as *Stranger by the Lake* and *I Want Your Love*, but still mainly 'holds back from close-ups of penetration' (L.R Williams 2016: 96). Moreover, while the film is undoubtedly important in its portrayal of numerous sexual activities (in a celebratory manner), I have not included the film in chapter one, as although it does depict some queer activity (such as polyamory and three-somes), the physicality of the sex acts do not particularly re-imagine what can constitute sex and sexual pleasure, like films such as *Crash* and *Hustler White* do. However, *Shortbus* is still a significant film due to its exploration of a myriad of sexual experiences shared between heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals, and *Shortbus'* inclusion of explicit gay male sex meant that it was one of the first aboveground films to *unapologetically* screen gay male sex.

This now brings us to my principal time-frame: 2010 – 2018. This period of time is the most concentrated for more explicit and exploratory portrayals of particularly gay and lesbian sex, and because of this, this also means this is the principal timeframe for the thesis, mainly chapters two to four. Almost all the films I listed above which are included in Neo-Queer Cinema *et al* include scenes that function to explore the role of sex within the gay and lesbian 'experience'. In *Weekend*, a film credited for ushering in this new era of gay and lesbian filmmaking (as I noted above), there is not much sex shown (only masturbation and later ejaculation on one of the character's stomachs) but discussions of sex are nuanced and at least note-worthy. The two protagonists, Russell (Tom Cullen) and Glen (Chris New), both symbolise two sides of contemporary gay male culture – Russell believes in and wants marriage, adoption, and domestic life, whereas Glen subscribes to queerer politics, and believes in activism and not giving in to heterosexual institutions such as marriage. Both characters embody the conflicts that are rife within contemporary gay male culture(s), which is increasingly submitting to the normalising impulses of 'homonormativity'.

Moreover, in Linda Williams 'Cinema's Sex Acts' (2014), an update of her 2000 article of the same name, she claims that contemporary European films (both straight and LGBTQ+),

such as *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, *Stranger by the Lake*, and *Nymph()maniac* (dir. Lars Von Trier, 2014), present 'relatively explicit' sex. She writes - 'I prefer to call all the sex in these contemporary European art films relatively explicit sex: neither pornography, nor the R-rated, acceptable norm' (2014: 15). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, Williams notes that these films are 'are really concerned with sexual relations between human beings', rather than the sex being delivered as mere spectacle or for titillation (2014: 23). I say this is 'more important' as these contemporary films which feature gay male or lesbian sex are, arguably, trying to offer a more nuanced representation of the role sex can play in gay and lesbian people's lives. These films *take sex seriously*, and delve in to the ways in which GLQ intimacy is achieved through sex, or as acts that develop character and plot. In many ways, then, these films I have identified and include in this thesis, could be seen as being liberal in both their increased explicitness, as well exploring the role of 'sexual relations between human beings'. As Stuart Richards also writes, the increased focus on sexually explicit acts (or dialogue) challenges heteronormativity (2016), yet as I will identify throughout this thesis, even though these modern films do explore same-sex sexual interaction (in a more nuanced manner than in the past), these films do often preserve and anchor (hetero)normative ideals that sex directly connects with love and romance.

Considering these points, then, the flow of sexually explicit gay and lesbian films coming out of France and North America are ushering in a new era where the role(s) of sex in gay men and lesbian women's lives are taken seriously and are given more screen time. These are, to some extent, transgressive films which push boundaries in regard to taste and acceptance through their increased graphicness, and in some cases increased porno*graphicness* (see chapters two and three). Yet, the role of sex in these films, as well as how they are stylistically and narratively represented, is yet to be explored, and this is how this thesis makes an important contribution to knowledge. Moreover, chapter four shifts focus on to homonormativity but also focuses on two films, *Call Me by Your Name* and *Carol*, which are not sexually explicit. This is because gay and lesbian sex can stir attention and controversy not only when it is explicit, but also when the acts are evaded.

To continue, the focus will now shift on to the literature review, which further reveals and delineates the works that have focused on representations of sex in cinema up until 2019. This body of literature is primarily hetero-centric, and I will tease out in the literature review both the hetero-centrism of the literature, as well as where discussions of GLQ sex have previously been given space, analysis and reflection.

Literature Review

This literature review is principally concerned with scholarly work that has centred on sex in cinema since 2005, when 'representations of sex in cinema' as a scholarly area in Film and Media Studies began to proliferate.[18] For the sake of clarity, I want to stress here that the phrase 'representations of sex in cinema' means that the literature I have surveyed are primarily concerned with theatrically-released films (as opposed to underground or avant-garde films). However, there will be some mentions of (hard-core) pornography throughout, as some pieces of literature deal with notions of explicitness, which means these discussions extend to porn. This is also alongside a consideration of literature that has discussed gay/lesbian/queer identity and sex but in monographs, edited collections or journal articles that may not solely concern themselves with representations of sex. Discourses concerned with the intersection of queer theory and sex acts will be outlined in chapter one instead of here, as the literature in this area provides important contexts for my own discussions around queer sex. This review begins with a short consideration of literature prior to 2005 that dealt with sex in cinema, before turning to this research area's most saturated era, 2005 – 2008.

1. Sex, Cinema, and Academia: The Long Infancy (1960s – 2004)

Academic literature that is concerned with analysing representations of sex in cinema dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. In this period, (a small amount of) scholars would primarily assess the presence of, or the lack of, sex and sexuality in classical Hollywood or European cinemas.

The first piece of (extended) literature that focused on sex in classical Hollywood and European cinema was *Sex in the Movies: The Celluloid Sacrifice* by Alexander Walker (1966). Walker's work is a three-part study of the 'goddesses', 'guardians', and 'victims' of sex in cinema – those being stars who projected a unique sex appeal ('goddesses' - Mae West, for instance), the censors of sex (Production Code) as well as a section regarding American and Italian sex comedies (the 'victims'). While Walker may have been one of the first writers to discuss sex in cinema, he was not a formal academic (he was a journalist who worked for the *Birmingham Post* in the 1950s and then became a film critic for *The Observer* in the 1960s) and his book predates the teaching of Film Studies in most universities. This is evident with *Sex in the Movies* itself, as the tone of the book is, at times, more journalistic, with discussions

[18] The literature that has been surveyed were concerned mainly with sex in 'Western' cinema (France, UK, USA, Canada, Italy, Germany, Denmark and so on), and not *only* sex in French and North American cinema.

of narrative or industry taking precedent over more formal Film Studies methodologies such as textual analysis (a method that would become standardised in the two decades that followed Walker's book). Following Walker there were a couple of texts that focused on sexuality and cinema or pornography in the late 1970s – 1980s, one of these being Richard Dyer's short edited collection *Gays and Film* (1977). Caroline Sheldon's chapter in *Gays and Film* focuses on lesbians and their representations in film; she discusses both male and female homosexuality in porn and avant-garde cinemas too, as well as lesbians in mainstream films and the stereotypes that accompany them (Sheldon 1977). Sheldon's chapter, overall, provides a useful inter-section in to the study of lesbians in film and porn (mainly about what 'types' of lesbians appear and are represented), an area that gained more focus in the 1980s and after.

However, in the 1990s, with the arrival (and then the departure of New Queer Cinema), the proliferation of Queer Theory and post-feminism, works that focused on either sex or 'queer sex' in cinema became slightly more popular, if not still considerably uncharted. Gever's, Greyson's and Parmar's edited collection *Queer Looks* (1993), Clare Whatling's *Fantasising Lesbians in Film* (1997) and Michele Aaron's edited *The Body's Perilous Pleasures* (1999) are a few works that focused on pleasure, desire and the representation of LGBTQ+ in visual culture.

Two chapters in *Queer Looks* delve in to porn (Speck's 'Porno?' and Fung's 'Shortcomings: Questions about Pornography as Pedagogy'), as well as there being a chapter in Aaron's collection that focuses on abjection and explicit sex films (Krzywinska 1999). In Krzywinska's chapter she analyses *Cicciolina in Italy* to 'tackle the question of what it means to call Explicit Sex Films transgressive' (1999: 189). Krzywinska also looks at how 'Explicit Sex Films are symptomatic of, and also employ, conflicts between identity and the body's perilous pleasures' (189). This chapter is one of Krzywinska's early works, and the themes of 'transgression' and theories regarding explicit sex is expanded in her monograph *Sex and the Cinema* (2006 – see below). Whatling, in *Fantasising Lesbians in Film*, discusses 'deadly pleasures' and 'the eroticism of lesbian taboo' in cinema, placing importance on the vampire-like lesbians, a theme that signifies both sex and death (1997: 93). Again, though, even when books or collections focus (if only slightly or moderately) on sex, the discourse surrounding queer sex, in particular, is rare. Thomas Doherty extended academic work on sex in classical Hollywood in 1999 when he released *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934*. Doherty, focusing on the small era before Hollywood was dominated by the constrains of the Production Code, writes about homosexual representations,

stating that homosexuality was 'played for laughs' and was one of the most 'scandalous vice elements' (1999: 120). Although, most obviously, queer sex in this time was nowhere to be seen, because heterosexual sex was nowhere either (it was only implied or the act was signified with just a kiss).

Overall, then, the decades between the 1960s and early 2000s saw a slight focus on sex in cinema, where academics tended to respond to certain moments or key films. However, the period 2005 – 2008 was when the most concentrated number of works were released which centred on sex in cinema, and this is also when the *history* and *theorisation* of sex in cinema began to be taken (more) seriously and charted more substantially, but mainly within a heterosexual context. After this, work regarding sex in cinema has proliferated, while still maintaining a primary focus on straight sex acts. The rest of this review, then, will also bring in to light the uniqueness of this thesis, as it will become even clearer after the literature review that this thesis is both timely and much needed.

2. Sex, Cinema and Academia: The Formative Years (2005 – 2008)

2005 – 2008 saw the most noticeable and increased surge of writing that dealt with representations of (predominantly heterosexual) sex in cinema. These include (Linda Ruth) Williams' *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema*, Duncan and Keesey's *Erotic Cinema* (2005), Krzywinska's *Sex and the Cinema*, Pennington's *The History of Sex in American Film* (2007), and (Linda) Williams' *Screening Sex*. Each of these pieces of literature take different (methodological) approaches in their analysis of sex in cinema, yet they all share a common theme: each of them contributes a theorisation of sex in cinema or the history of its presence, but they all lack extensive discussion of gay, lesbian or queer sex.

Released in 2008, Linda Williams' *Screening Sex* is one of the most extensive and important studies regarding representations of sex in cinema. Throughout *Screening Sex* Williams analyses the cinematic grammar of sex on-screen and how certain stylistic and narrative strategies have changed through time, as well as how representations of sex in cinema have altered due to social, cultural and industrial shifts. The first area she focuses is on in *Screening Sex* is 'the long adolescence' of classical Hollywood, where the kiss was the most erotic act projected on-screen. Williams labels this extended period of cinema (1895 – 1960s) the 'long adolescence' of Hollywood because it is a time where 'carnal knowledge' was beginning to appear on-screen but it never fully went all the way. She writes that 'the movie kisses of the era [classical Hollywood]… were more infantile and more adolescent than the

kisses of today' (2008: 26), and the Hollywood Production Code (1934 – 1966) also 'prohibited any movie to "infer that low forms of sex relationships are the accepted or common thing"' (2008: 33). In her next chapter, 'Going All the Way: Carnal Knowledge on American Screens (1961 – 1971)', Williams states that 'new forms of carnal knowledge, beyond the kiss, were creeping on to American screens' (2008: 68), and begins her analysis by focusing on "foreign films" that ushered in this new form of carnal knowledge, and then turns to 'sex talk' and what she identifies as the 'Hollywood sexual musical interlude'. In Chapter Three, Williams then turns her attention to films in the 1970s that went 'further' – *Boys in the Sand* (dir. Wakefield Poole, 1971), *Last Tango in Paris* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972), and *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972). Williams' analysis of *Boys in the Sand*, one of the first gay male, commercial, hard-core moving-image porn movies, is only one of three instances in the book where non-heterosexual sex is given space and reflection. However, for more of an extensive discussion of this film and her theories in the chapter, please see chapter two.

Furthermore, in chapters four and five Williams turns her attention to the importance of Jane Fonda's filmic orgasms and then to 'hard-core eroticism' in the Japanese film *In the Realm of the Senses* (dir. Nagisa Oshima, 1976). In these chapters she explains how these representations advanced discourses around female pleasure on-screen, and the relationship between art and sex, and sex and violence. In chapter six ('perverse provocations on-screen'), Williams writes that films like *Blue Velvet* (dir. David Lynch, 1986) and *Brokeback Mountain* brought 'perverse sex to the American heartland' (24), challenging viewer expectations and to some extent their heteronormative ideologies. Both films show what Williams calls 'perverse sex' within quintessentially American locations (the American Mid-West and the American suburbs) that in turn 'brought primal fantasies of sex home to the American heartland' (257). *Brokeback Mountain* is one of three non-heterosexual films Williams pays attention to, and although she praises its ability to bring 'primal fantasies of sex home to the American heartland' (257), she states that 'Lee's film falls short of… 'homocinema' – a cinema capable of disrupting social and symbolic order' (248). I would like to point out that Williams' use of the term 'homocinema', one of which apparently disrupts social and symbolic order, is probably better understood as 'queer cinema', as homocinema was coined by D.A Miller (2007) but now has very little currency in academia. This also shows Williams' reluctance to use the term 'queer' or use queer theory within *Screening Sex*, which essentially eludes a whole mode of representation in favour of straight sex which has dominated screens for decades.

Moreover, Williams then moves in to 'Hard-Core Art Film since 1990', a decade that saw the re-introduction of 'graphic sex' in theatres (258). Williams focuses on a range of representations across America and Europe, which include: 'lyrical sex' in *9 Songs* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2004) 'Idiot Sex' in *The Idiots* (dir. Lars Von Trier, 1998), 'Urgent sex' in *Intimacy* (dir. Patrice Chéreau, 2001) 'Sexual Humiliation' in the cinema of Catherine Breilliat, and 'American Hard-Core Art' in *Shortbus*. In bringing together a group of (art) films from across the world (and that differ in style and narrative) Williams acknowledges a shift in the late 1990s – early 2000s where explicit sex became more integral to cinematic narratives, departing from hard-core porn. She notes that these kind of 'hard-core art films' 'will break down the prolonged adolescence of American film' (298) and that they often mix 'ambivalent emotions and philosophical thought' with sex, challenging the idea that 'sex is without thought' (296). In her conclusion to the book, Williams recognizes the important changes in regards to technology and how spectators watch films, claiming that 'no one kind of screen can be said to have hegemony [anymore]' (322) and the 'the very act of screening has become an intimate part of our sexuality', where 'carnal knowledge never fully reveals the scratch we imagine "it" to be, but the itch that keeps us screening' (326).

Williams' *Screening Sex*, then, is broad but detailed, it is expansive but insightful – Williams examines sex in cinema right from the beginning (1895), until 2006, and the significance of her work cannot be under-estimated. However, while *Screening Sex* is important, it does have its pitfalls, especially in relation to what Williams chooses, or does not choose, to analyse. She thoroughly explores how sex on-screen has changed, how it arrives never too early but never too late to notice (2008: 69) but ignores a variety of other representations of sex that were established across a number of film cultures and genres. These include, for instance: sex in American teen comedies (particularly those of the early 1980s and late 1990s), erotic thrillers, New Queer Cinema, lesbian sex, 'queer sex', and sex in horror films. As well as these genres or movements, other pivotal films that represented sex like *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975), *Emmanuelle* (dir. Just Jaeckin, 1974), *Cruising*, *Crash* or *Ken Park* (dir. Larry Clark and Edward Lachman, 2002) are ignored. While Williams does of course focus on significant changes in cinema, the broad scope of her work means certain (or certainly important) areas or films are disregarded. She does focus on three films that deal, in some way, with gay male representations, however the issue of GLQ sex and its prevalence in cinema (particularly its slight presence in New Queer Cinema) is largely and unfortunately overlooked.

Furthermore, Tanya Krzywinska's *Sex and the Cinema*, released two years before Williams' text, is also a comprehensive study that sets out to examine how sex acts are (like Williams did) revealed, concealed and stylistic negotiated. In comparison to Williams, then, Krzywinska's *Sex and the Cinema* deconstructs the cinematic lexicon and grammar of sexual acts, dedicating the first half of her work to the 'forms and frameworks' of sex in film (Krzywinska 2006). Here, Krzywinska discusses a range of themes and modes of representation in relation to sex in cinema, such as: realism, idealism, conservatism, narrative purpose, and explicitness. Krzywinska's comments on the 'realistic' or 'idealistic' representations of sex will be applied throughout this thesis, particularly in chapters two and four, where I reveal that sex in gay and lesbian films can also either complicate or extend Krzywinska's theories. After discussing stylistic strategies, Krzywinska then turns to the 'narrative formulas' used to integrate sex into a story (49). In this chapter, Krzywinska examines the ways in which narrative plays a crucial role in 'shaping the meaning' of sex (49). In one section of this chapter, she discusses the 'sexual initiation and self-discovery' narrative (62) found in teen films like *American Pie* (dir. Paul Weitz and Chris Weitz, 1999) where sex is used as an act that 'signifies growing up' (62), as well as in female-centred 'sexual self-discovery' films such as *The Story of O* (dir. Just Jaeckin, 1975). She asserts that the sex in the latter is typically 'graceful' and the sex scenes are shot with 'soft-focus lenses' that creates a sense of romanticism, and the sex is usually accompanied by 'dreamy music' creating an 'idyllic fantasy' (63). By not focusing closely on history and how representations of sex have changed or matured like Williams did, Krzywinska's first section in *Sex in the Cinema* offers a fairly detailed look in to how sex in cinema is narratively and stylistically represented, across a range of film genres, cultures and time periods. The focus on how sex is stylistically and narratively constructed is one of the key objectives for my own thesis regarding GLQ sex in French and North American cinema, and Krzywinska's theories around the 'forms and frameworks' of sex in cinema, while primarily hetero-centric, has been beneficial for my own analysis and understanding of the case studies.

Furthermore, in the second half of her work, Krzywinska studies 'themes of transgression', and focuses more specifically on representation of sex such as bestiality, incest and sadomasochism, and views 'transgression' as vital in the study of sex in cinema. Krzywinska also comments that 'the location and formation of these [transgressional] boundaries are bound to the contours of a given socio-cultural landscape' (2006: 108) and 'the films that are most closely focused on sex and sexuality tend to put social and sexual ideals and

norms under pressure' (Ibid). For Krzywinska, transgressive representations of sex are both controlled by, and respond to, a specific 'socio-cultural landscape', but this also highlights the issues of 'normalised' representations of sex in aboveground cinema, as these representations of sex tend to challenge spectator expectations. In the chapter 'Real Sex', Krzywinska discusses explicit sex films that include unsimulated intercourse, examining a few of the same films Williams did in her chapter 'Hard-Core Art Film since 1990' (*The Idiots*, *Romance*, *Intimacy*). Krzywinska notes that 'real sex' in cinema is a 'complex business' (217) and that 'real sex' is often 'authenticated by images of ejaculation and penetration' and these factors distinguish 'hard-core from other legitimated cinemas' (Ibid). Krzywinska's use of the term 'legitimate cinema' is ambiguous here, but it seems that she means that 'legitimate' cinemas are mainstream, 'popular' cinemas that show only theatrically-released films.

In her conclusion, Krzywinska also states that the representation of sex in cinema is 'informed by a range of epistemologies, formal conventions, theories and rhetorics' and that 'films can often open up new sexual vistas for viewers and contribute to ensuring that sex and desire are regarded in multiple ways' (228). In her final paragraph, Krzywinska also makes an insight which is also implicitly present throughout this thesis, she claims – 'it is often those films that are made for niche audiences and in less-than-good-taste that present the greatest challenge to the palliative rhetorics of romance, sex and desire found in mainstream cinema' (231). Films such as (for example) *I Want Your Love*, *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Stranger by the Lake* arguably present a 'challenge to the palliative rhetoric's of romance, sex and desire found in mainstream cinema' through their focus on non-heterosexual sex, but at the same time, and as this thesis reveals, they also do complement normative rhetoric specifically regarding sex directly connecting with romance and love. Overall, Krzywinska's book offers a broad and accessible examination of the representation of sex in cinema which logically assesses various styles and narratives, as well as 'themes of transgression'. However, since Krzywinska does have an extended section devoted to 'themes of transgression', it is somewhat surprising that she does not pay attention to films that represent gay, lesbian or queer sex. Once again, like Williams, the importance of *Sex and the Cinema* cannot be under-estimated, yet it does unfortunately ignore GLQ representations, which means yet again GLQ sex is being written out of both the *history* of sex in cinema but also *theories* regarding sex in cinema too.

Moreover, Linda Ruth Williams' *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema* is another important study in the field of sex in cinema, which primarily deals with 'soft-core' representations in the once-popular but now (somewhat) deteriorated genre of the erotic thriller.

She writes that ‘mainstream cinema embraced neo-noir in the 1980s and 1990s, threading through contemporary thriller narratives to form the theatrically released erotic thriller’ (2005: 77). The book covers a whole manner of topics and issues such as: definitions of the ‘erotic thriller’ genre, its place in both mainstream cinema and the ‘straight to video’ marketplace, the types of characters, narratives and styles these films re-produce, alongside interviews with ‘key players’ in the genre like Brian De Palma and Paul Verhoeven. Since Williams deals with such a heteronormative and hetero-centric sub-genre, it is not surprising that there is no discussion of gay male or queer sex. However, she does discuss how the genre negotiates ‘lesbianism for men’, focusing on Gina Gershon’s star persona and her status as ‘prime lesbian icon’ (197). Like hard-core porn, the erotic thriller often (but not always) sexualises and objectifies bisexual and lesbian women for the male gaze, producing ‘disseminated images of lesbianism’ that are set up to ‘titillate heterosexual men’ (206). As I noted in the introduction, Williams focuses on the lesbian-protagonist film *Bound* in relation to the idea of ‘lesbianism for men’. In her conclusion to the book, Williams also writes that the erotic thriller is ‘resolutely American’ and that the genre itself is of an American interest, and other variations, especially in Europe are ‘interesting if sporadic’ (383 – 384). The erotic thriller is not a sub-genre that my thesis is necessarily concerned with, however, *Stranger by the Lake* could be categorised as a gay erotic thriller, which subverts the sub-genres conventions particularly with its slow pace and its lack of explicit violence.

Additionally, Duncan and Keesey’s *Erotic Cinema* is another broad piece of literature that discusses a whole range of representations of sex acts in cinema, although each section is less detailed or insightful than that of Williams or Krzywinska, and images actually dominate the book. This means that *Erotic Cinema*, while released by an academic publishing house, reads more like a ‘coffee table’ book than one which is scholarly. There is, however, a chapter regarding ‘homosexuality/ lesbianism/ transvestitism/ transsexuality’, as well as ones that examines perversion, fetishism and three-somes. In these chapters, Duncan and Keesey tend to highlight whereabouts through history these specific representations have took place, rather than theorising or examining their aesthetic value, or their importance in a wider culture of sex on-screen, and instead they just provide a history of the representations in a manner not too dissimilar to earlier works regarding homosexual representation. Duncan Keesey in 2014 released a sequel to the first book entitled *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, which discusses similar thematic areas but again lacks any detailed discussion of gay, lesbian or queer sex.

Jody W. Pennington's *The History of Sex in American Film* is, as the title clearly indicates, a chiefly historical study that tracks (like Williams) how sex has been represented since early cinema. As I wrote in the introduction, Pennington goes beyond 'the aesthetic to consider the social and cultural preconditions at various periods in American history', and 'draws on social and cultural history, as well as non-Freudian psychology and sociology' (ix). Pennington, then, does not specifically focus on *how* or *why* filmmakers stylistically or narratively represent sex; instead he opts to 'consider the social and cultural preconditions at various periods in American history' (Ibid), something that Williams also does, but even less directly than Pennington. Pennington does delve in to some areas that Williams and Krzywinska neglect or skim over (the teen sex comedy is discussed in this book, for example) and also includes a chapter entitled 'From the Closet to the Screen', as I outlined in the introduction. To reiterate, however, the problem with this chapter is that representations of sex are eluded in favour of Pennington discussing, for example, the repression of homosexuality under the Production Code, or the 'gay bar' as 'an iconic space in films depicting homosexuality as a marginalized sexual orientation' (2007: xi), or how AIDS impacted both queer cinema and Hollywood. While Pennington's chapter offers a concise history of the gay man or lesbian woman on-screen, he does not really focus much on where 'queer', 'gay', or 'lesbian' sex has appeared or been represented. In this sense, then, the history of GLQ sex acts in cinema is ignored.

Overall, the pieces of literature regarding sex in cinema published between 2005 – 2008 were principally concerned with either the *history* of sex in cinema, or the *theorisation* of both the stylistic and narrative framing of both 'soft' and 'explicit' sex in theatrically-released films, mainly because this had not been done before. These works were highly original and timely, but both the history and theorisation of sex in cinema largely translates to the *history of heterosexual sex in cinema*. There are some accounts and considerations of gay and lesbian sex in the texts I have outlined, however, these are ignored in favour of more heteronormative representations, or representations which are transgressive but only in a heterosexual context.

3. Sex, Cinema and Academia since 2008

Following the texts released between 2005 and 2008, there has been a steady stream of collections or monographs that analyse sex in cinema. Xavier Mendik's edited collection *Peep Shows: Cult Film and the Cine-Erotic* (2013) includes a variety of chapters that investigate erotic representations, primarily in cult film and pornography, or what Mendik refers to as the

'cine-erotic'. In the introduction Mendik states that the term "cine-erotic" 'refers to the extent to which taboo sexual imagery is often recirculated by a wide range of cult cycles that transcend soft and hard-core pornographic divisions' (2013: 2), and that the cine-erotic has a plurality of 'genres, trends and national traditions' (ibid). In this sense, then, Mendik establishes a historic trend of films that surpass formal categories of 'hard' and 'soft' sex, often prominent in alternative porn or 'cult film'. While the collection focuses on a wide range of representations that considers alternative sexualities and practises (such as Marcelle Perks' chapter on 'the thrill of the transgendered peep show', pp. 239 – 250), analysis of gay, lesbian or 'queer sex' is eluded, and even sex *within* queer cult films is unnoticed.

Furthermore, in 2014, Linda Williams offered one of the most detailed *stylistic* analysis of gay and lesbian sex in contemporary cinema. In her journal article 'Cinema's Sex Acts' (2014), which I also referred to in the introduction, Williams analyses sex acts in European cinema (French and Danish), in the films *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Stranger by the Lake* which both feature what she labels as 'relatively explicit' sex (15). Williams in the article discusses the complex and intricate debate around what constitutes pornography, and how explicit sex in narrative film is often thought to be 'pornographic', decreasing its artistic value in some way(s). To reiterate, she writes - 'I prefer to call all the sex in these contemporary European art films *relatively explicit* sex: neither pornography, nor the R-rated, acceptable norm' (2014: 15). Williams also claims that 'there is no such thing as authentic sex whether in art films, R-rated films, or pornography' (15), and this is something I discuss more in chapter two and three in relation to 'realistic' representations of gay male sex in contemporary French and North American cinema, as well as the apparent inauthenticity of lesbian sex acts in cinema. Williams concludes her article by stating that '[t]here are things to learn from relatively explicit films and, in the end, sex is too important to leave to the pornographers' (25). Like a large amount of Williams' work, this article is an important and insightful, but it is only a short entry in to the field of GLQ sex in contemporary cinema.

Furthermore, Carol Siegel's 2015 book *Sex Radical Cinema* is also a contemporary piece of literature that focuses on the representation of ('radical') sex in contemporary, (mainly) American and European cinema. Siegel states in the introduction that her book aims to define what it means for a film to be 'pro-sex' and 'supportive of gender sexual equality' (2015: 1), as to have a 'sex radical feminist' position is to believe that *both* men and especially women can *enjoy* consensual sex. Siegel's use of the term 'radical' in the book relates not to a typical 'left-wing' or 'right-wing' political stance, but one that steps outside of this binary to

bring a 'sex radical feminist vision' that can 'renew our sense of what radicalism [actually] is' (2). Siegel also claims that American films that represent sex are always 'contextualised… through reference to the fear of departures from the norm that might undermine the current American ideal of family' (5). This 'fear of departure from the norm' can also be related to representations of sex in gay, lesbian and queer cinemas, but Siegel neglects this area to focus on other topics such as 'America's Virginity Fetish', 'Sex Trafficking Films' and 'Interracial Sex'. While these topics have lacked attention being paid to them over time, and are original contributions to existing knowledge, GLQ sex is again generally ignored. Moreover, Siegel's feminist approach to the representation of sex in a plethora of films is innovative, but the 'radical' nature of some queer sex acts, as I outline in chapter one, are also evaded, which is somewhat surprising as film such as *Crash* and *Hustler White* offer truly radical visions that escape dominant ideas of what constitutes sex and sexual pleasure (and therefore could be seen as 'sex radical' films).

In the same year (2015) Barry Forshaw released his examination of the history of sex in cinema, titled *Sex and Film: The Erotic in British, American and World Cinema*. Like Williams and Pennington, Forshaw takes an historical approach to the changing nature of sex on-screen. Extending the scope to outside of America also means that he examines areas that others have somewhat over-looked. Although Forshaw offers a detailed account of the history of sex in American, British and 'World' (read: European) cinema, he does so in a similar vein to those before him, and yet again gay, lesbian and queer sex is neglected, even though at the time of release there was a proliferation of sexually explicit gay male and lesbian films. Forshaw's book, then, makes for another hetero-centric piece of literature that adds to the (small) canon of works regarding sex in film.

Additionally, in 2015 Bradley J. Bond's article 'Portrayals of Sex and Sexuality in Gay- and Lesbian-Oriented Media: A Quantitative Content Analysis' was published in the journal of *Sexuality and Culture*. Bond's study, as the title of the article instantly points out, is a quantative study and the object 'was to quantify sexual instances in GLO [Gay and Lesbian Oriented] media popular with LGB adolescents … [and] [f]or the purpose of this study, sexual instances included depictions of sexual talk and sexual behavior' (2015: 42).[19] Through his extensive quantative analysis which not only included instances of sexual acts but also discussions of sex, Bond also used a questionnaire given out to 6 G&L people after focus

[19] He states he decided to look at 'popular media' because '[b]y examining media popular with LGB adolescents, the findings will more validly reflect the media content to which LGB adolescents are exposed' (2015: 42).

groups to 'quantify sex and sexuality in GLO media popular with LGB adolescents in order to more accurately hypothesize how GLO media exposure may influence LGB adolescents' sexual identity development' (2015: 46). In the 'results' section, Bond writes that '[s]exual talk in GLO media depicted a variety of realistic aspects of being LGB including relationship talk, talk of sexual interests, talk of sexual experiences, coming out talk, talk of equality, and talk about gay culture, as well as identifying that '[t]he most common sexual behaviors in GLO media were LGB physical flirting and romantic kissing' (2015: 51 – 52). In the conclusion, Bond states that 'GLO media depict LGB sexualities in a diverse, realistic fashion that ventures into the various components of sexual identity ranging from sexual behaviors to relationship talk to issues surrounding equality' (2015: 54). While Bond's article is one of the only pieces of literature that focuses on audiences and quantative analysis (therefore his study is firmly placed in the social sciences as opposed to Film Studies as such), his conclusion that 'GLO media depict LGB sexualities in a diverse, realistic fashion' does not account for the textual construction of these 'realistic' depictions, or how the textual or narrative elements of the texts are indeed 'realistic'. Therefore, the article advances knowledge around some GLB audiences and their relationship and attitudes towards 'GLO' media, but does not offer a clear sense, as I do in relation to gay male sex in chapter two, how these 'realistic' representations are arguably achieved.

Furthermore, in 2016 Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti published a paper entitled 'Lesbian Sex in Mainstream Cinema and Audience Enjoyment', also in the journal of *Sexuality & Culture*. Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti use *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* to try and 'understand in more depth how the enjoyment of movies about lesbian protagonists relates to the sexual orientation and gender of the audience' (2016: 556). They write in their introduction that 'cinemas do not usually show movies about lesbian relationships, and much less so with this kind of lengthy, explicit female sex acts… [t]he industry and academia need to address the phenomenon' (556-557). While 'phenomenon' is somewhat of a hyperbole, this is one of few works that tries to discover *who* is 'enjoying' lesbian sex in aboveground film though quantitative analysis, rather than typical Film Studies theories of spectatorship. In the conclusion they note - 'our study provides data to confirm that considering scenes beautiful and romantic is important for a positive evaluation of lesbian sex scenes and movies' (575) and that 'the perceived realism in the representation of sex (plausibility and being life like) is a critical aspect of how spectators respond to 'explicit' lesbian sex' (574). Their conclusion on the 'perceived realism' of scenes is interesting and will be further explored in chapters two and three. Also, while Soto-Sanfiel

and Ibiti's study also differs entirely in terms of methodology (and their use of terms like 'beautiful' and 'romantic' is subjective), their journal article provides a timely interjection in to the field of spectatorship and representations of lesbian sex. This kind of audience study is something Tulloch and Middleweek also do in their book *Real Sex Films: The New Intimacy and Risk in Cinema* (2017), yet they come to less academically rigorous conclusions.

In *Real Sex Films,* Tulloch and Middleweek promote the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of 'real sex' in cinema. Their film case studies include *Intimacy, Le secret* (Virginie Wagon 2000), *The Piano Teacher* (Michael Haneke 2001), *Shortbus* and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. They call this trans-disciplinary approach 'rainbow scholarship', which includes a dynamic combination of theories such as risk sociology, feminist theory and feminist mapping theory, that they then blend with concepts more specific to Film and Media Studies such as narrative and spectatorship. This 'rainbow' approach is the most innovative element of the work, alongside a chapter regarding how performers in 'real sex films' negotiate the ethical issue of performing "real" sex acts on-screen. Regarding discussions around GLQ sex in cinema, chapter four (which is split in to two parts) presents an audience study around the representation of lesbian sex, intimacy and love in *Blue Is the Warmest Colour,* which was conducted by Middleweek and a postdoctoral researcher "Catherine" (2017: 79). In the chapter, Middleweek states that they firstly screened *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* at the University of Technology Sydney, they then held two separate focus groups made up of six mix-gendered students from The University of Sydney and University of Technology Sydney, as well as 'observing' an IMDb web forum centered on the film (77). The authors write that their qualitative methodology (particularly the focus groups) 'allows participants to generate meanings in dialogue, to change or adjust their interpretations as a result of other people's views, or, alternatively, to defend their positions and therefore think more deeply and discursively about them' (Ibid). While I agree with this point, the focus within the groups (some transcript extracts are included in the book) tends to veer away from specific discussions of the sex to the way the film elicits emotional responses, as well as the emotions surrounding Emma and Adèle's relationship and break-up. Therefore, their study does not particularly advance any discourses around lesbian sex in cinema and audience responses to this, as their results mainly correlate with Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti's results, but also somewhat counter the idea that the film's sex scenes are damaging or reductive due to the explicit representation of acts such as 'scissoring'. However, the authors do not particularly extend any discourses surrounding this debate, and mainly rely on delineations of other

scholars who have discussed this (which shows a lack of academic rigour), mean they lack a set of purely *original* theories around the depictions.

Furthermore, 2016 also saw the publication of Mattias Frey's timely monograph *Extreme Cinema: The Transgressive Rhetoric of Today's Art Film Culture* (2016). Frey notes in his introduction that extreme cinema 'is an international production trend of graphically sexual or violent "quality" films that stoke critical and popular controversy' (2016: 9). In particular, extreme films often include explicit or graphic sex scenes, over-the-top, gut-wrenching violence, or themes that are seen to be controversial or taboo (these themes may include, for example, incest, bestiality, or paedophilia). Extreme films include: *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, *Funny Games* (dir. Michael Haneke, 1997), *A Serbian Film* (dir. Srdjan Spasojevic, 2010), and *Nymphomaniac Vol 1 &* 2. Consequently, then, Mattias' book has two sections dedicated to sex, one of which acts as a useful literature survey on other academics theories around the role of explicit sex in cinema, and then the second takes a 'discursive' approach to 'Hard-Core Art Cinema', which provides some new ways of approaching the role of 'real' or 'explicit' sex in cinema. These newer ways of understanding include a consideration of 'artistic intention' where interviews with key filmmakers are used (see chapter two for more of a discussion of this section), the use of 'references' as a way of contemporary filmmakers justifying their inclusion of explicit sex, as well as how Hard-core Art films are advertised and marketed.[20] However, within these newer, discursive approaches to sexually explicit films, Frey mainly relies on films which exist in a heterosexual context and filmmakers who are heterosexual. While Frey advances discourses around how we approach sexually explicit 'art', once again this only primarily relates to hetero-centric cinema. This is also discussed more in chapter two, along with a table of 'sexually explicit' films since 1998 that Frey put together himself, a table that only contains two films which (if only in part) focus on non-heterosexual sex.

Moreover, three (other) up-to-date edited collections that focuses solely on sex in cinema are: Coleman's *Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema* (2016), Kerr and Peberdy's *Tainted Love*: *Screening Sexual Perversion* (2017), and finally Coleman and Siegel's *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts* (2017). Coleman's

[20] Frey's discussion around the use of 'references' as a way of contemporary filmmakers justifying their inclusion of explicit sex draws upon interviews again, with filmmakers such as Michael Winterbottom or Gaspar Noé. It should also be noted that these are interviews with the popular press, not interviews conducted by Frey himself.

two edited collections, in particular, present some of the most original and extensive examinations of sex in cinema since the 2005 – 2008 period.

Subsequently, then, Coleman's *Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema* has a range of essays from notable scholars such as Barbara Creed, Linda Ruth Williams, David Andrews and Torben Grodal. The only chapter, though, that focuses on a non hetero-centric film is L.R Williams' '*Shortbus*: Smart Cinema and Sexual Utopia'. In the chapter Williams asserts that *Shortbus* is 'shockingly overt for a mainstream film' and even though it is 'explicit', it still 'holds back from close-ups of penetration' unlike pornography (2016: 96).[21] She also discusses the film as being part of what Jeffrey Sconce called 'smart cinema' (2006), a 'genre or cycle' that relies 'heavily on irony, black humour, fatalism, relativism, and occasional nihilism' (99). As well as examining *Shortbus* as a 'smart film', Williams likens the film's scopophilic and voyeuristic nature to that of *Rear Window* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) and writes that *Shortbus* 'offers eroticised framings, and uses the aperture of *mise en scène* as neat narrative transitions' (106). Finishing her chapter Williams examines the particularly 'American flavour' of *Shortbus* (116), and that, overall, the film offers (sexual) spectacles that are 'queer and straight', as well as reincarnating 'sexual and social freedom in the wake of the AIDS epidemic and 9/11' (p. 116). While Williams offers a fresh insight to a film that has been written about moderately (also see Davis [2008] and Johnson [2012]), her approach acknowledges the sexual explicitness of the film but never looks at the film's queerer aspects, such as the three-somes or the polygamy. Moreover, another useful but arguably problematic chapter in Coleman's collection is Jacob M. Held's section on 'What is and what is not Porn? Sex, Narrative and *Baise-Moi* [dir. Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, 2000]'. However, instead of delineating this argument in more detail here, this chapter is interrogated more extensively in chapter two.

Moreover, Kerr and Peberdy's *Tainted Love* sets out to seriously consider film genres and movements that 'have repeatedly dressed their narratives in the sexually perverse, whether through motifs of sexual sadism in film noir, themes of deviancy and promiscuity in horror, explorations of reproduction in science fiction or experiments with sexual liberation in comedy' (2017: 6). The use of 'perversion' as a term in the collection is akin to 'transgression', and therefore the contributors within the collection discuss and analyse films which presents sex acts or sexual moments that are 'measured against normative behaviour' (2017: 10). This

[21] I would argue that *Shortbus* is not a 'mainstream' film, but rather an independent film which is aboveground.

is in a very similar vein to what chapter one discusses ('queer sex acts') and is representative of a historical and long-standing mode of analysis that defines the Other or the perverse or the 'queer' through its opposition to normativity. However, the only chapters to focus on 'perverse' sex in a homosexual or queer context is Lisa Downing's 'Straight Necrophilia as Queer Perversion in Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* [1996] and John Mercer's 'The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name: *O Fantasma* [2000] and Erotomania'.

In Downing's chapter she makes an argument very similar to mine in chapter one which is that certain straight (perverse) sex acts can be rendered queer, and in the case of *Kissed,* this is achieved through 'a filmic version of queer that is gender-transgressive and paradoxically both 'straight' and 'perverse' for a nascent *Fin de siècle* twentieth-century audience' (2017: 21). Using queer theories from the likes of Butler (1991), Downing also claims that *Kissed* 'fills the familiar frame with subject matter that is deviant, disturbing and gender-unconventional', which makes the film a 'queer, perverse one' (2017: 29). For a more detailed discussion of this chapter, please see chapter one. Moreover, in Mercer's piece, he 'discusses the theme of sexual and romantic obsession in gay [male] cinema, in particular the most extreme variant of romantic obsession: erotomania' (2017: 23 – 33). Mercer proceeds then to explain that erotomania is 'a form of psychosis where an individual believes that romantic connection exists between them and an individual who is often a complete stranger' (33). Moreover, Mercer writes that he is not himself suggesting that homosexuality is 'perverse' but instead the focus is on gay male cinema which represents gay male love or desire as 'unhealthy and self-destructive', asking the question 'why is it that, in cinema, gay [male] desire is so often positioned as an impossibility?' (2017: 34). In the conclusion to the chapter Mercer writes that '*O Fantasma* is a film that engages with, produces and expressions obsession … [and] [i]t emerges from the obsessive desire of the gay filmmaker to develop a cinematic language, rhetoric and narrative to situate gay [male] desire' (2017: 44). Over the last ten years gay male and lesbian filmmakers have been attempting to offer 'a cinematic language, rhetoric and narrative' for the representation of gay male and lesbian sex and (romantic) desire. This has most prominently taken the form of realistic strategies, which I outlined in the introduction. Also, Mercer's question around gay male love or romance being an 'impossibility' is something I have partially explored in my own work but in relation to more modern GLQ cinema and is also picked upon within this thesis. Overall, Mercer's chapter offers remarks around gay male cinema's mediation of desire, but this is obviously limited as only one case study is used.

Furthermore, Coleman and Siegel's *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts* (2017) is the only edited collection to-date that has a section dedicated to sex in 'queer cinema', as well as an essay by Tim Palmer where he assesses *BIue Is the Warmest Colour* in the section 'Sex and Cinematic Traditions'.[22] In the introduction of the collection, the editors write that '[i]n the last few years there has been significant changes in the way visual narratives use sex', and that 'a new age of sexual presentation has begun' (2017: ix). This is something I delineated in the introduction of this thesis and stated that GLQ representations have been instrumental in this new of age of sexual (re)presentations. Moreover, Siegel and Colman (like myself) stress the important of critically evaluating sex in narrative film (and not just pornography) since 'visual media presents a forum and a platform … for our attitudes towards sex … [and therefore] there is a constant need to critically engage with the myriad representations of human sexuality' (2017: xi). While I would argue that it is too difficult and subjective to suggest that fictional narrative films directly influence our 'attitudes' towards sex, I would instead suggest that visual representations of sex outside of pornography have a *part* to play in the legitimisation of particular (read: non-normative, queer or non-heterosexual) sex acts in society and culture.

The two essays in the queer cinema of the book section are Sara Janssen's 'Documenting Everyday Male Intimacies in Contemporary Queer Cinema' and my own article 'Blurred Lines: The Case of *Stranger by the Lake*'.[23] In Janssen's chapter she uses *Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo* and *Weekend* as case studies, and outlines how contemporary gay male cinema uses documentary and realist strategies to capture gay male sex and intimacy, and her argument is very similar to my delineation of 'Neo-Queer Cinema' that I established in the introduction. However, she also states:

> I argue that the relation between sexuality and space is of particular relevance, here as most of these films not only emphasize the special specificity of their setting, but also mark a shift from an emphasis on public sex to the privacy of the apartment, specifically the bedroom, construed as a "counterpublic" and a "safe space" for the exploration of what Sara Ahmed calls "queer feelings" [2014]. (2017: 69).

The relationship between sex and space has been important in some Cultural Studies works that are concerned with gay male (or even 'queer') sexual practices (see Warner 1999, Berlant

[22] This chapter's argument and its limitations are outlined more in chapter three.
[23] Since I have already discussed my own chapter in the introduction, I will not discuss it anymore here.

and Warner 2013), but is something that is relatively under-studied in works that centre on sex in cinema, and Janssen identifies that some 'queer' (or what I would call gay male) films nowadays are constructing "counterpublics" on-screen, but these also connect to a politics of privacy. Here, Janssen's argument would have benefitted from the application of theories surrounding homonormativity, as this is ignored and the part it plays within contemporary GLQ politics is overlooked. While Janssen's chapter is timely, and relates closely to my own work, the lack of discussions around homonormativity arguably weakens the rigour of her overall argument which is concerned with the politics and the tensions between the 'public' and the 'private', a pivotal element to Duggan's ideas around homonormativity (see chapter four).

4. Conclusion

As this review has demonstrated, academic work that examines GLQ in terms of style, narrative, themes and symbolism is scarce. However, with the arrival of more and more GLQ orientated films, work around GLQ sex is bound to proliferate, yet scholarly analysis of these representations is infrequent and under-studied, as this the review has extensively highlighted. While scholars like Linda Williams, Linda Ruth Williams, Tanya Krzywinska, Carol Siegel, and Lindsay Coleman *et al* may have laid the groundwork for contemporary discourses regarding representations of sex in cinema, their works (as well as others), have largely ignored GLQ sex in mainstream and independent spheres, and not *just* French and North American cinema. Even when there are chapters devoted to gay male sex, for instance, these are far from comprehensive (Williams' section on *Boys in the Sand* or Pennington's 'From the Closet to the Screen' are just two examples). My thesis, then, makes a clear and important entry to the field, but also departs from the mainly hetero-centric literature discussed here in the review, to take GLQ sex in (contemporary French and North American) cinema seriously.

Methodology

This methodology chapter begins by simultaneously justifying and scrutinising the methodological approach that I have also utilised to conduct this research (see Fig. 1), which includes two primary methods which are textual analysis and para-textual analysis, alongside the application of theoretical frameworks. However, the frameworks will be outlined in the chapters themselves, while here I will outline the use of just my primary methods. Proceeding this, I will also make some short comments around researcher positionality and subjectivity.

1. Research Methods

1.1 *Textual Analysis*

The research I have conducted for this thesis is firmly based within the scholarly field of Film Studies. This meant that I utilised a standard approach familiar to most Film Studies research which centres on texts (as opposed to works that centre on audiences), which is a methodology comprised of two primary methods (textual analysis and para-textual analysis), alongside the application of theoretical frameworks. These methods intersect to rigorously reveal new discourses and theories regarding a whole range of sub-fields within Film Studies, but especially works that centre on representational strategies, as well as the politics of representation and visibility.

Furthermore, textual analysis is perhaps the most crucial primary method within the standard methodological formula I have adopted, and it has a long-standing heritage within the scholarly field of Film Studies, so much so it has become a fundamental imprint on the academic practice itself. Textual analysis, a method that primarily emerged from studies of English Literature, gained currency from the mid-1970s, when Film Studies as a discipline was slowly being introduced in to Higher Education syllabuses, and as Laura Mulvey notes, 'textual analysis made a crucially important contribution to film criticism', beyond discussions of performance in particular (2005: 228). Textual analysis is, in its formality, the scrutiny and interpretation of a film's cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, editing, lighting and soundscape; it is the close analysis of the text and how it constructs and mediates meaning. Subsequently, then, the textual analysis I conducted and that is included in this thesis typically involves close readings of sex scenes, which ultimately reveals *how* certain filmmakers or film cultures have represented GLQ sex, and the ramifications that accompany such representations. This functions to answer one of my central research questions, that being: 'how are contemporary

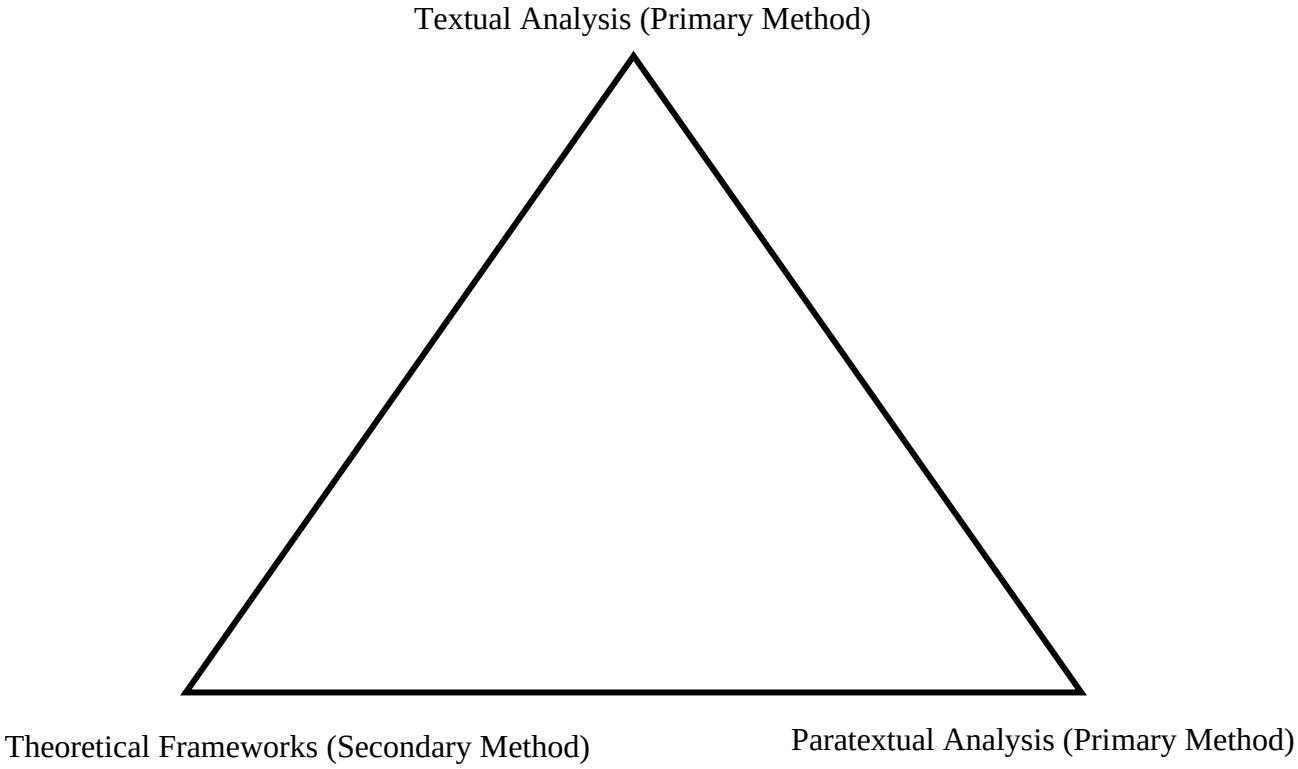


Fig. 1: The triangular methodology familiar to most Film Studies research

films stylistically and narratively representing gay, lesbian and queer sex acts and practices?' Moreover, while textual analysis allows for the examination of style, aesthetic and narrative, it can also help to bridge a relationship between text, context and theory, moving away from the traditionally structuralist mode which textual analysis grew from. Bob Nowlan, for instance, outlines five key elements that constitute a 'queer film', one of those being the queering of 'form, genre and style' often through 'hyper-self-reflexivity and intertextuality' (2010: 18), and other techniques to achieve a queer form or style, in his paradigm, includes 'pastiche, irony, expressionism or magical realism' (Ibid). However, as noted in the introduction, contemporary GLQ films now often present cinematic styles grounded in realism or a more formal filmmaking approach, and the films included within this thesis typically lack an ostentatious or overtly experimental style. To come to this conclusion and to interrogate others' theories like Nowlan's, textual analysis is the key tool to back up my own arguments *and* to interrogate others. Textual analysis, then, is the base for the *evidence* of my theories and analysis.

Additionally, and as Alan McKee notes:

> Textual analysis is a methodology: a way of gathering and analysing information in academic research. Some academic disciplines (particularly in the physical and social

> sciences) are extremely rigorous about their methodologies; there are certain, long established and accepted ways in which it is acceptable to gather and process information. Media Studies and Cultural Studies do not police their methodologies in this way. (2001: 3).

In other words, the process of textual analysis is not as rigid or 'set' as methods familiar to other areas of research which have been refined and prescribed over years.[24] However, and as McKee also writes, '[w]hen we apply textual analysis … we are not trying to find the 'correct' interpretation of it', instead we are 'we are implying a certain approach to it, and a certain way of making sense of it; including the fact that we do not think it has a single correct interpretation' (2001: 4). This relates closely to ideas around subjectivity, and the idea that we are not 'trying to find the 'correct' interpretation' of a text is a crucial part of the methodology of textual analysis, because it can sometimes be easy to present interpretations as definitive (and this is discussed in some more detail below).

Moreover, textual analysis also grew from structuralism and theories of semiology and re-orientates 'the aims and methods of interpretation according to a series of theories of the *text* (therefore *textual analysis*) and *reading* as a critical activity' (Bergstrom 1988: 159 – 185). Jacques Aumont *et al* also note that there are two basic characteristics to the methodological process of textual analysis, which includes: 'precise attention to form or signifying elements' and an 'interrogation of the methodology being used [by the filmmakers(s)] and thus imposes a theoretical autoreflection upon every stage of analysis' (1992: 174). While I do not disagree with these statements, there is also an irony in Jacques Aumont *et al*'s 'basic two basic characteristics to textual analysis'. There is an irony because even though 'theoretical autoreflection upon every stage of analysis' is often achieved by Film Studies researchers (this denoting the autoreflection of the meanings gathered from the analysis), rarely is the specific approach of textual analysis reflected upon or scrutinised, mainly because of its supposed inevitability within the scholarly practice. This thesis, however, is about challenging and unpacking dominant and normative values and systems, so it is only appropriate that I offer an examination of this methodological process, instead of taking it for granted that this is the best way to conduct the research I have.

[24] Other methods such as interviews or focus groups, well-established qualitative methods, often (but not always) have prescriptive procedures, unlike textual analysis.

Therefore, while textual analysis is a crucial primary method in the field of Film Studies, it can also be a subjective task, and my interpretive readings could be viewed as being biased or flawed. Janet Staiger claims that while textual analysis is a significant research method in Film and Media Studies, it has 'methodological concerns' (2005: 9), particularly in regards to how some scholars may interpret a text (or more specifically a 'media text'), as well as how they could 'read' other textual forms in additional primary research (for example, interpreting questionnaires). This also relates to the Dyer quotation that I included in the introduction, around the importance of doing contextual work when carrying out textual analysis, to avoid an 'idiosyncratic' and overly 'subjective' point of view. To try and avoid subjective readings, then, I adopted a rigorous research procedure. Like most Film or Media scholars would do, my own textual analysis involved re-watching films several times and re-analysing specific scenes, to make sure my responses were fair and thorough. This kind of process would not be foreign outside of Film/Media Studies too – this approach to try and be as 'fair' as possible is not so dissimilar to when scientists carry out a test three (or more) times, to try and achieve the most balanced outcome. While this may seem an obvious, even glib procedure, on each viewing I took new meanings and messages from the text(s), and on each occasion I would watch for nuances, to avoid taking the film at face-value, or to avoid always coming to the same conclusion(s). Doing this, as Jacques Aumont *et al* noted above, meant that in every stage of my analysis there was an 'autoreflection' on my part, which meant that I had to re-evaluate my own opinions and readings, in relation to the wider purpose of my work. Therefore, with each re-evaluation my analysis became more nuanced, thoughtful and rigorous. This methodological procedure, then, was about trying to achieve nuance and objectivity.[25]

Consequently, then, the inclusion of textual analysis within the thesis, and the ways in which I approached such research, was in no way radical or even queer. However, textual analysis functions to answer one of my main research questions, provides evidence for my own analysis and theories, and allows me to interrogate others' theories with my own textual readings, which are crucial elements to any Film or Media Studies research.

1.2 Paratextual Analysis

[25] However, it is debatable as to whether any Arts and Humanities research can be totally objective, as Patricia Hill Collins, a prolific academic in the area of black feminist thought (as well as epistemology and intersectionality), has written about the intersection of 'objectivity' and self-reflexivity in academia, and that discouraging self-reflexivity essentially promotes a repudiation of the self and ignores the embodied or lived experience of research altogether (2000).

Para-textual research, the second primary method in this thesis, is concerned with texts that surround a film. Para-texts, in Film Studies, are usually thought to be (but are not limited to): reviews of films at their time of release, newspaper articles, blogs, adverts and posters, production scripts and documentaries or TV programmes about the films. This method of research, popularly utilised in media 'reception studies', allows for a contextualisation of a film's industrial, cultural or social impact or value, how it was possibly received by audiences and critics, as well as other information not possible by analysing *just* the text. As Jonathan Gray notes – 'any filmic or televisual text and its cultural impact, value, and meaning cannot be adequately analyzed without taking in to account the film or program's many proliferations' (2010: 2). In other words, the text alone does not always communicate its own cultural importance – its review in, for example, *Sight & Sound*, discussions of the film on online forums, and information from DVD extras will do this instead, so it is important that a film's 'proliferations' are not only considered, but critically analysed too.

In terms of the para-textual research I conducted, film reviews have been a principal element and have allowed me to gauge how audiences may have reacted to the GLQ sex that was present in both older and contemporary gay, lesbian and queer films, and in turn gauge the socio-cultural importance of certain texts. For example, my para-textual research around *Crash* lead me to discover that it was a notoriously controversial film in the UK in particular and was banned because of its exploration of taboo and deadly sexual desire and practices (see chapter one). Reading reviews then also gave me an idea of how people were reacting to the film; Roger Ebert in his initial review called *Crash* 'courageous and original--a dissection of the mechanics of pornography' (1997). The fact that *Crash* was being labelled as 'courageous and original' by some while others were trying to ban it (such as the film critic Alexander Walker), speaks volumes about the film's cultural impact. I could never have solely gathered this from the text. Para-textual research such as reading reviews, therefore, serves a distinct purpose within my methodology as it has enabled me to place films in certain social and cultural moments, as well as giving me a snapshot of the significance of the films on their initial release. While reviews particularly carry the burden of subjectivity, researching a range of reviews at least gave me a sense of how some spectators could have reacted to the sex acts, and how culturally important they were at the time of release.

Alongside reviews, I conducted contextual research about the films from mainly UK (but some U.S) newspaper and magazine articles, which reveals more information not available

by analysing the text itself.[26] Newspaper and magazine articles often report on the news, controversies and gossip from film sets and casts, as well as in the case of *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, a leaking of information by the popular press (discovered through interviews with the cast) had a negative impact on the film's reception that endures today (see chapter three). After the film's release, newspapers such as *The Independent* and *The Guardian* in the UK, reported that the director (Abdellatif Kechiche) forced the two lead women Adèle Exarchopoulos and Léa Seydoux to wear fake vaginas during the sex scenes, and apparently he 'ranted and raved at them as he sought to achieve optimum realism during the production' which included a ten day shoot for the sex scenes, and in a later fight scene where Seydoux slaps Exarchopoulos, he 'refused to allow his stars to simulate blows' (Childs 2013). This partially tainted the film to the point that Kechiche said it should not be released because it had been '"sullied" by controversy' (Romney 2013). Academic literature examining *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* has also discussed the film in relation to its controversies and para-textual elements, suggesting that the film merely presents a 'male gaze' (Richards 2016), and an inauthentic representation of lesbian sex and love (Patches 2013).

Knowing this information from para-textual research prompts the need for critical reflection as a researcher, as para-textual elements can often collide with the textual analysis that was or is conducted. Both personally and ethically, it is important to acknowledge the role para-textual information plays in the formation of one's analysis. For example, para-textual information can mould and change one's view of the stylistic or narrative elements of a film, and how certain images can be interpreted. Responses to *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, for instance, have been highly influenced by para-textual information, changing the mode of analysis to become more post-structural, than structural, and with this also comes a sense of subjectivity. *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, by academics such as Stuart Richards (2016), is even discounted as a 'queer film' because of its 'objectifying sex scenes', and as aforementioned, its 'male gaze'. However, what if this information was never leaked? What if we never knew anything about the sex scenes and the director's actions? This sort of para-textual information needs to be merged with textual analysis both carefully and sensitively, and critically reflecting on the role it plays within a researcher's analysis is vital. Instead of allowing para-textual information to dominate my own critical analysis of a film, I have instead been mindful of the

[26] On a trip to L.A in December 2018 I also carried out some archival research at both the Margaret Herrick library and the ONE institute at University of Southern California, and the research that came out of these visits are delineated more in chapter two.

role it plays and used the information only when it is relevant, or links in with textual analysis or theoretical research in a more rigorous and objective fashion.

Additionally, in December 2018, I carried out archival research at both the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries in L.A. (where the world's largest collection of LGBTQ+ materials are held) and the Margaret Herrick library, which is the main repository of print, graphic and research materials of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. At the Margaret Herrick I sorted through newspaper and magazine clippings from the late 1990s, most of which were concerned with a gay and lesbian 'crossover', a crossover from the margins to the 'mainstream'. The majority of this research did not particularly reveal anything new to me (since I had conducted in research in this area in the past), but did reveal the considerable extent to which gay and lesbian films in this era gained traction and increased attention in the U.S.A (from, for example, *The New York Times*, *Screen International* and *L.A Times*). However, the research conducted at the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives proved to be more beneficial. Initially, the majority of materials they had either did not relate to my object of study or were materials I had previously read or accessed. This was until I found an unpublished doctoral thesis from 1975, entitled 'The Beginnings of Gay Cinema in Los Angeles: The Industry and the Audience', by Paul Alcuin Siebenand. Siebenand's thesis offers an oral history of how 'gay cinema' began and proliferated in L.A more specifically, and he conducts interviews (as opposed to any textual or performance analysis) with gay male filmmakers (Bob Mizer, Pat Rocco, Tom DeSimone), performers (Jimmy Hughes, Cal Culver, Jim Cassidy) and critics (Jim Kepner, Harold Fairbanks). This thesis and its proclamations around gay cinema helped to re-configure my argument in chapter two, primarily because it enabled me to have a better understanding of the historical relationship between 'gay cinema' and 'gay porn', which helped to bring my argument in to light about how contemporary, sexually-explicit gay male films honour a cultural heritage (please see chapter two for more of a discussion regarding Siebenand's thesis).

2. Researcher Positionality and Subjectivities

While I have already discussed the subjectivities of textual analysis, there are other subjectivities to be acknowledged in this methodology, as well as my position as a researcher looking at and analysing sexual identities and practices that are distinct from my own lived experience.

The first subjectivity to acknowledge mainly centres on my research conducted in chapter three, which is concerned with (explicit) lesbian sex, as well as the politics of these representations. I am a white, working-class gay man who has analysed films that are concerned with (mainly) white, middle-class or working-class lesbian women. These films, such as *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Below Her Mouth*, present sex acts, such as scissoring, that I have never performed, nor can I perform even if I wanted to. This means that I have no right to *personally* claim that these sex acts are authentic or inauthentic, because I have no experience of them and never will. However, a large body of criticism that is concerned with films like *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Below Her Mouth*, often discuss the inauthenticity of scissoring or other lesbian sex acts which seem to only appeal to the male gaze and male spectator. This then became a challenge for me, because initially I was unsure where I could place myself in this debate, as an outsider of some kind. I then decided that my analysis of these films could not include any personal sentiments from me trying to claim if scissoring, for instance, is authentic or inauthentic. This would place me in an unethical position, as a gay man trying to claim lesbian sexual practices are fake, real, right, wrong, authentic, or inauthentic, and so on. This is also not my role as a researcher, and as I noted above, my role is to try and offer an objective and fair evaluation of the sex scenes in line with my research aims and objectives.

Furthermore, I faced similar challenges in my analysis of queer sexual practises in chapter one, and this again relates to notions of morality and ethics. In films such as *Hustler White* and *Crash*, characters partake in sex acts and practises that are widely seen to be shocking, taboo or outrageous. These films often test one's own view of what constitutes sex or sexual pleasure, offering openly visible representations of desires that in their very nature disrupt heteronormative, conservative, or even religious ideas of what sex is or can be. I must admit that I found these films challenging, stimulating, shocking, cringe-worthy and exciting all in equal measure. This is because all of them delve in to sex acts and practises that I either have never performed or wish to perform. Because of this, my own analysis of these films *could* have become bound to a morally conservative standpoint, one of which judges these acts and their potential harm to spectators, as other critics and commentators have previously done. For example, and as also discussed in chapter one, Alexander Walker (author of the first ever piece of literature regarding sex in cinema), was totally outraged by *Crash* and called for it to be banned. This moral conservatism, I believe, does not have a place in academia as it can lead to the promotion of one's own moral and ethical positioning. My thesis is not about *judging*

these representations, but it is about *analysing* them, to reveal new discourses and approaches to the sex acts which are represented in a whole range of (mainly) gay, lesbian and hetero-centric films. This is not about my own morals or ethics; it is about striving for objectivity and fairness.

However, this can be complicated by the fact that examining and unpacking 'normative' representations either implicitly or explicitly leads to the promotion of one's own politics, morals or ethics. Claiming that certain 'normative' representations are either insidious, harmful, regressive or damaging (to marginalised groups in particular) means that there *is* a judgment, one of which stems from our own subjectivities and lived experience. Subsequently, then, I took the decision within this thesis to avoid *personally* describing or rendering representations as 'positive' or 'negative', 'authentic' or 'inauthentic', 'progressive' or 'regressive', because *who* are these representations 'progressive' for? Will *everyone* think one certain representation is inauthentic? *Who* deems a film 'positive' or 'negative'? Informally, these phrases can be used in a useful manner to describe representations. For example, informally I could suggest that *Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo* is 'progressive' because it contains a twenty minute opening that displays gay men having sex in a Parisian sex club – something rarely seen before in a theatrically-released film. However, in an academic space, progressive becomes ideologically loaded and can become quickly tied to issues of subjectivity, and although academic research often relates to subjectivity, my analysis was about striving for as much objectivity as possible (some parts of chapter two are somewhat subjective, but this is because it relates directly to my own experiences and identity).

3. Conclusion

Overall, my methodology does not re-invent the ways of analysing, de-coding or discovering information in Film Studies, but instead it is a standardised approach that in turn reveals new discourses and theories regarding contemporary French and North American cinema and its representations of GLQ sex acts. There is nothing radical or even queer about the standardised approach that I have adopted. Yet, the intersection of textual analysis, theoretical frameworks and para-textual analysis has allowed me to shed new light on the representation of GLQ sex in contemporary French and North American cinema, the importance of these acts, and how they feed in to wider socio-cultural discourses surrounding sex and sexual pleasure, but also GLQ identities and lives.

Chapter One:

Cinema's Queer Sex Acts

As the title clearly indicates, and as stated in the introduction, this chapter is concerned with representations of 'queer sex acts' in cinema, and as also discussed in the introduction, the case studies for this chapter break out of the confines of my principal research parameters. This is because gay and lesbian sex acts are not always 'queer' and may not even carry any transgressive power when depicted in cinema in our modern era, beyond the integration of hard-core pornographic strategies within their representation of sex. Regarding *Stranger by the Lake* and *I Want Your Love*, this integration of hard-core porn strategies is clearly evident, and I extensively outline this point in chapter two. This chapter, however, turns away from typical gay and lesbian sex acts to deconstruct the representation of sexual acts and practises that queer concepts of 'sex' and/or 'pleasure'.[27] This chapter begins by providing a short consideration of the national/cultural context of both case studies, before then offering a discussion of 'queer sex' in popular press or non-academic sites, which extends the 'why not just 'queer'?' section from the introduction, to contextualise current discourses around the notion of 'queer sex'. Proceeding this are two key case studies: the first concerns itself with 'queer penetration' in *Hustler White*; and the second examines how fetish and masochism render sex queer in *Crash*, as well as demonstrating how the film suggests that fetishes are *beyond sexuality*, where bodies are simply hosts for fetishes which is also gender-transgressive. Each case study's analysis of queer sex acts will also be accompanied by theoretical debates from Michel Foucault (1984), Gayle Rubin (1982 and 1985), Robert Rees-Pharr (2013), and Lisa Downing (2017).

Moreover, the case studies within this chapter also correlate with Tanya Krzywinska's 'themes of transgressions' that she identifies in her foundational book *Sex and the Cinema*. Therefore, I do not claim that highlighting and analysing representations of fetishes, for example, is a new or radical thing to do, or that it has not been done before. However, these representations of sex that are framed as 'transgressive' have rarely been read through a queer lens and doing this helps to reveal the counter-discourses the films offer, as well as offering a new framework to read these films through, beyond the lens of 'transgression'. Subsequently,

[27] It is worth briefly delineating the difference between 'queer sex acts' and 'acts/practices that queer the concept of sex itself'. Queer sex acts are those that offer a radical re-imagining of what sex and pleasure can be, such as stump-fucking in *Hustler White*, as detailed in case study one. 'Acts/practices that queer the concept of sex itself', on the other hand, queer sex acts that are usually normative – in *Crash*, for instance, sex is rendered queer due to some non-normative acts being enacted while heteronormative sex happens. These two things are closely connected, and this chapter explores both.

then, this chapter's core argument is that films which explore and represent queer sex acts offer counter-discourses where dominant notions of what constitutes sex are not only called in to question but re-imagined and re-interpreted.[28]

However, before turning to the discourses around 'queer sex' and what it may entail, it is also worth temporarily considering the national and cultural context of both texts, as the introduction only briefly touched upon Canadian cinema. Moreover, while *Hustler White* and *Crash* do not noticeably concern themselves with ideas around 'Canadian-ness' or what it means to be 'Canadian' like some Canadian New Wave films (implicitly or explicitly) did in the 1990s,[29] they both firmly fit in with a cinematic trend where Otherness has been explored, mirroring a national/cultural context of Canada as North America's 'Other'.

The notion of 'Other', then, is important to (at least briefly) consider when we discuss Canada and Canadian film culture, precisely because it has almost always been cast into the shadow of its neighbour, and hegemonic (film) culture, the United States. In 1992, for instance, Jose Arroyo aptly called Canadian cinema the 'younger brother' of American film culture (1992: 77). However, Canada has (as briefly mentioned in the introduction) a diverse film culture, one of which that has, as Peter Harcourt notes, 'run in countless directions, from the art film, to low-budget horror, "runaway" Hollywood productions, and swinging '70s "maple sugar porn."' (2004: 237). Canadian cinema is also, as referenced in the introduction, often split in to three categories: English-Canadian cinema, Québec cinema, and Aboriginal cinema (White 2006).[30] Furthermore, the notion of Otherness was prominently explored within a cinematic trend referred to as 'New Wave Canadian Cinema', which occurred in the 1990s, when both case studies were released. The Canadian New Wave, which included filmmakers ranging from Patricia Rozema to Guy Maddin, was a wave that 'economically and aesthetically' helped to establish a new, 'distinctively Canadian cinema' one that did not reject a 'some essential 'Canadianness'' but instead sent the national cinema in a 'new direction' (Pike 2001).

As David L. Pike also states, this re-configured Canadian cinema of the 1990s offered a fresh way of reflecting a Canadian sensibility and culture, and while it offered films which had a Global appeal (enabled, at times, through multi-national film productions), these films

[28] I am using the term 'counter-discourse' in the Foucauldian sense, where a counter-discourse is an opposition to 'dominant truths' (Ramazanoglu 1993: 20). Counter-discourses may also be referred to as reverse discourse.
[29] *Hustler White*, for instance, is not even set in Canada.
[30] To which this brief context will be solely concerned with the English-language strand.

alienated some audiences because of their experimentation with form, style or narrative (2001). These were films that could be described as 'Other' (especially when lined up against the normative cinema of Hollywood, Canadian cinema's "big brother"), just like Canada is the 'Other' of North America. As mentioned above, while neither *Hustler White* and *Crash* make overt comments or connections to a sense of national identity, the defiant focus on both taboo and queer practices, representations which are 'Other' in their nature, means that these films offer an interesting, if not implicit relationship between a national context and a cinematic focus concerned with Otherness (as well as queerness, sex and identity).

This chapter will now switch its focus to establish what is meant by, and what can entail, 'queer sex'.

1. Queer Sex

When I began my research for this chapter, one of the first things I wanted to discover was the debates and discourses around 'queer sex' that were being circulated in popular press and non-academic areas, to see how the term was being used and what sex acts or practises were being referred to as 'queer'. While conducting this research, I was struck by two articles which were in dialogue with one another. One was written by Alex Garner and was published by *The Huffington Post* in January 2017 with the title 'Queer Sex is Our Greatest Act of Resistance'. The other, picking up on the issues within Garner's article, is a NY Mag Online article written by Kate Heaney called 'Queer Sex Is Not Resistance — or at Least, Not Resistance Enough' (2017).

Garner's article forcefully states that '[t]here is tremendous power in queer sex' and that 'our sex is also profoundly political' (2017). Writing primarily in relation to the presidential election of Donald Trump in November 2016 and then his inauguration in January 2017, Garner continues to write that: '[n]ow is the time to be unapologetically queer and that must include our sex… [we] must talk openly and honestly about our sex because it's not something that only "belongs in the bedroom"' (2017). At the end of the article Garner suggests some steps for queer people to take, which include: 'make queer sex part of your politics', 'read about queer sex', 'talk about sex', and 'have sex and lots of it' (2017). In essence, Garner is trying to communicate the idea that non-heterosexual sex out of the bedroom would symbolise a direct resistance against right-wing ideologies. In response, Heaney writes that 'to argue that sex is inherently radical because it takes place between two men, two women…is to give

ourselves far too much credit for engaging in a pretty basic animal act',[31] and continues to state that '[c]alling queer sex "resistance" allows us to let ourselves off the hook for activism that requires more of us than getting off' (2017). Heaney also highlights Garner's suggestion to 'have sex and lots of it', positing the question: '[d]oes arguing that sex is queer people's "greatest form of resistance" mean that queer-identified people who aren't having sex aren't doing their part to fight fascism?' This is an incredibly important issue to highlight, as Garner's article excludes those who identify as asexual, as well as those who do not have high or intense sex drives and therefore cannot make sex an integral part of their 'activism' or 'resistance'.

However, while both Garner and Heaney have different views on the radical or political potential of 'queer sex' and its possibility as a valid form of activism, what they both do is loosely use the term ('queer sex') with no explanation of what it is or what it may entail. This is symptomatic of a contemporary discourse, as I outlined in the introduction, where 'queer' has begun to simply and reductively mean 'LGBTQIA+'. Queer is popularly used as an umbrella term nowadays, which can signal inclusivity, but I would argue this shift means that the radical potential of queerness has become diluted, especially when we consider shifts in 'equality' and 'progression' for homosexuals in Western liberal societies in particular.[32] In Garner's article, there is a hint towards sex's radical potentials as well as a nod towards a queer cultural heritage where sex has been important in 'queer' people's expression of their sexuality and identity. Garner's article, however, only scratches the surface and does not reveal anything substantial, nor does it cogently outline what kind of 'queer sex' is radical either: would two gay men cruising in a park and having anal sex have as much political 'resistance' and radical potential today as it did in the 1960s or 1970s, for instance? On the other hand, Heaney's article counters Garner's propositions by striving for pragmatism, but this essentially eludes LGBTQ+ cultural heritage and the role(s) sex has played within this. Moreover, Heaney's point completely under-estimates the fact that queer sex is not always *just* a 'basic animal act' (is hetero-sex either?). By stating this, Heaney simply means that 'queer sex' is two women or two men fucking, probably in very typical positions, as opposed to performing urolagnia or fisting, for example. However, what Heaney is perhaps trying but failing to say is something similar to my remarks in the introduction, which is that considering shifts in mainly

[31] Heaney's point completely under-estimates the fact that queer sex is not always just a 'basic animal act' (is 'straight' sex either?). By stating this, Heaney simply means that 'queer sex' is two women or two men fucking, and in very typical positions.

[32] In other words, calling a white, middle-class, married, monogamous gay male couple 'queer' is a spit in the fact of queer people's activism, past, and heritage(s).

homosexual ‘equality’ means that gay and lesbian sex is not necessarily axiomatically taboo anymore, just as John Mercer writes that neither are homoerotic or homosexual images, and I would argue this is more specific to a Western context (2017: 38). This means that two gay men giving each other blowjobs, for instance, is not necessarily ‘radical’ anymore, since being gay is no longer so intensely taboo or frowned upon (or even legally/socially punished).

Overall, these two articles do not represent some kind of authoritative and definitive idea that all non-academic arenas dilute ‘queerness’, but what they highlight is that in a lot of popular press or non-academics articles, queer sex as a term is typically (but not always) taken for granted and simply means ‘sex *between* LGBTQIA+ individuals’, as I have stated already. However, queer sex has the possibility to be more radical than this, and the potential for sex to be queer is not a culturally or historically specific issue for *this moment in time* either, as Garner seems to suggest.

So, what counts as ‘queer sex’ then? Is making a list of what is ‘queer sex’ and what is not ‘queer sex’ actually unproductive and un-queer, given queerness’ inherent fluidity and flexibility? Finding the answer to this even within academic or scholarly discourses is a challenge – as I identified in the literature review, most academic works that are concerned with sex in cinema are hetero-centric, and have not really looked at the possibilities of sex and pleasure beyond the ‘hegemonic ideal of heterosexual coitus’ (Krzywinska 1999: 193) or beyond sets of typical sex acts which are often shared across heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality (vaginal sex, anal sex, masturbation, cunnilingus and so on). However, critical discourses around sex and queer sex has also seldom been thoroughly explored within the realm of Queer Studies. This sentiment is directly echoed in the opening of Tim Dean’s review of Berlant and Edelman’s book *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014), where he cogently states (as I also quoted in the methodology): ‘[t]here is an open secret about sex: most queer theorists don’t like it (2015: 614). Dean then writes that ‘[t]hree decades after anthropologist Gayle Rubin inaugurated what would become known as Queer studies by announcing “[t]he time has come to think about sex,” the field remains deeply conflicted about its object of study’ (Ibid). The work by Rubin that Dean discusses is one of the most generative and foundational pieces of work regarding sex, titled ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’ (1984).

In the article, Rubin discusses (Western) social and cultural views on sex, sex laws, ‘sex negativity’, and the limits of feminism in relation to discussions of sex, which mainly

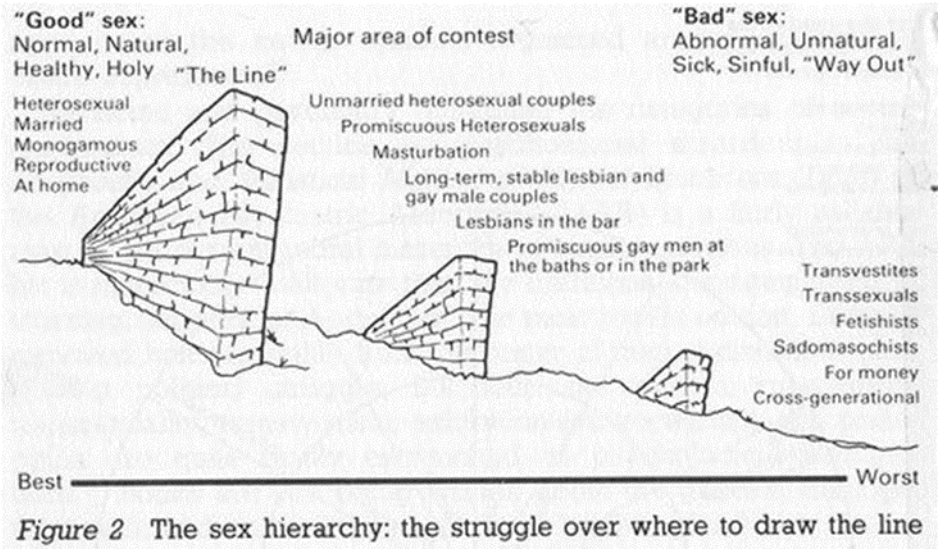


Fig. 2: Gayle Rubin's 1984 diagram of "good" and "bad" sex in Western societies

centres on the idea that feminist theory at that time prioritised heterosexuality. Firstly, in relation to society's attitude towards sex, Rubin writes that '[w]estern cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force… [v]irtually all erotic behaviour is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. The most acceptable excuses are marriage, reproduction, and love' (1984, republished in 1999: 150 – 151). This is also reverberated in the beginning of Foucault's ground-breaking *The History of Sexuality Vol 1*, where he writes that 'the legitimate and procreative couple laid down the rules [of sex]' (1976: 1). Essentially, Rubin here shines a spotlight on the ways in which modern Western cultures render sex 'acceptable', which mainly relates to ideas of re-production, marriage or love. Moreover, capitalism, a ubiquitous system based on productivity and the exchange of 'capital', dictates that sex should be re-productive (and therefore heterosexual), and as John D'Emilio identifies, capitalism 'needs to push men and women into families, at least long enough to reproduce the next generation of workers' (1983: 110). In this sense, then, capitalism *needs* heterosexual men and women to have sex to produce more children to, essentially, create new workers and keep capitalism alive.

Secondly, Rubin pragmatically delineates what western society and culture see as being 'good' sex and 'bad' sex (see Fig. 2). Separating what society and culture see as being 'good' and bad' sex is an important distinction as these sexual hierarchies actually create and define what we can consider being 'queer' (or taboo) sex. Rubin's diagram, which was drawn in 1984, still has resounding relevance today, and the only point of contestation would be masturbation, which is more acceptable in our contemporary era. Symbolically, and perhaps even

theoretically, masturbation can always be 'bad' sex to (moral) conservatives because it is a solo activity that is non-productive – 'good' sex, on the other hand, is almost always defined as being partnered and productive (in other words: monogamous and pro-creative). What Rubin achieves in this article, then, is a critical discourse that strikes the heart of heteronormative attitudes towards sex, by pragmatically outlining what Western societies deem as acceptable forms of sex, and then by contrast the sex acts or practices which are beyond the pale or taboo or queer. This is alongside a rallying cry for more feminists, gay, lesbian and queer scholars to take sex and queer sex seriously.

Moreover, in Robert Reid-Pharr's chapter 'Dinge', which is in the section dedicated to 'Sex' in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (2013), he discusses (if only briefly) what 'queer sex' may be or may entail, and he is one of the only scholars to do so (in a Western context).[33] At the start of the chapter, Reid-Pharr states that 'if there is one thing that marks us as queer… it is our relationship to the body, particularly the expansive ways we utilize and combine vaginas, penises, breasts, buttocks, hands, arms, feet, stomachs, mouths and tongues' (2013: 213). He continues to write that 'it is surprising… that so little within queer theory has been addressed to the question of how we inhabit our various bodies, especially how we fuck, or rather, what we think when we fuck' (Ibid). This, of course, also relates to Dean's idea of queer theorists being 'afraid' of sex.

Furthermore, Reid-Pharr claims that 'it would seem that every time a fag or dyke fingers a vagina or asshole that is [seen as] a demonstration of queer love or community', instead however, 'dominance, submission, violence, real or imagined, are often integral parts of queer sexual practices' (213). Firstly, the idea that 'every time a fag or dyke fingers a vagina or asshole that is [seen as] a demonstration of queer love or community' relates to the naivety of Garner's proposals that queer sex (or sex between gays and lesbians) is 'profoundly political' (2017), but also relates to both Gayle Rubin's and Michel Foucault's idea that S/M practices (or as Reid-Pharr writes 'dominance, submission, violence, real or imagined') can escape heteronormative notions of what constitutes both sex and pleasure. Additionally, Reid-Pharr's point that how we combine our bodies relates to how queer people *use* their bodies for pleasure, which is explored in both case studies. This chapter now turns to fetish, queer penetration and S/M in *Hustler White,* before then turning to fetish and masochism and in *Crash*.

[33] This is before closely analysing James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962), and how instead of inter-racial sex offering 'transparency of [cross-racial] desire', it renders whiteness temporarily visible and vulnerable (2013: 212).

2. Sadomasochism and Queer Penetration in *Hustler White*

2.1 Fetish and S/M: Definitions and Presence in Cinema

Before discussing how other academics have contextualised the non-normative and queer nature of fetishes or S/M sexual practises (and then later notions of 'queer penetration'), it is worth outlining what is meant by these terms as they cut across both case studies, as well as their presence in cinematic history.

Sadomasochistic (S/M) sexual relations are predicated on the idea that one sexual partner will be 'dominant' and the other the sexual partner will be 'submissive'. This does not mean, for instance, that a man fucking a woman in the missionary position would be S/M,[34] but rather S/M sexual practises are established on the dynamic that one individual is masochistic and therefore gains pleasure from having (some kind of) 'pain' *inflicted* on them, and one individual is sadistic and therefore gains pleasure from *inflicting* the 'pain'. S/M sexual dynamics, however, can closely relate to the heteronormative binaries of active/passive, penetrator/penetrated or dominator/dominated, and even though S/M practices have the power to render sex acts as queer, they can also often reify heteronormative sex 'roles', more particularly the roles of active/passive. This was also the case within Freud's conceptualisation of sadomasochism, where he did also consider gendered divisions, and as Stephanie Wardrop notes – '[w]hile Freud believed that s/m took on gendered divisions for biological reasons – man's natural aggressiveness and woman's inherent passivity - he also believed that "the nucleus of the unconscious (that is to say, the repressed) is in each human being that side of him [or her] which belongs to the opposite sex," thus allowing for the possibility of female sadists and male masochists' (1995). Therefore, and even though I noted that S/M sexual dynamics can reify heteronormative sex roles, this does not necessarily mean that reductive gender roles (man = active, woman = passive) are *always* called upon or reinforced. Moreover, as William Grossman also states: '[o]ne sense in which the meaning of the term sadomasochism seems to be specific is the simple descriptive sense of a conscious or unconscious fantasy that is similar to sadistic or masochistic perversions, which are the behavioural enactment of fantasies' (1991: 22). These behavioural enactments of fantasy are most often constructed through consensual S/M practices and allow a conscious or unconscious desire for what is usually viewed as a 'perverse' pleasure to be enacted, but within a safe and

[34] More specifically, I mean just because someone is on 'top' and someone is on the 'bottom' (as the missionary position is predicated on) this does not equate to the same kind of 'domination' and 'submission' inherent to S/M sexual relations and practices.

supportive environment. However, this idea was challenged by second wave feminism's insistence that S/M sexual practices were, as Audre Lorde stated, 'an institutionalised celebration of dominant/subordinate relationships', and that they would lead to the belief that 'domination is inevitable and legitimately enjoyable' (1988, reprinted 2017: 4). Lorde, as a feminist, believed that the personal is political, so therefore S/M sexual practices tie to wider economic and social issues relating to capitalist, gendered and racial domination. However, the relation between S/M sex as being 'personal' or 'political' is a continued debate.

Furthermore, fetishes often (but not always) come hand-in-hand with sadomasochistic practises, and fetishes which relate to sex can be described as a 'specific sexual interest in an object, situation, or aspect or part of a person that results in a heightened sexual state in the individual so interested' (Houston 2016). The term dates back to the nineteenth century but was used by Freud in relation to childhood trauma, and in 'Freud's interpretation, the fetish object is a substitute for the absent genitals' (Dingewell 2010: 268). Donald Winnicott also extended these thoughts in the 1950s when he 'described fetishism as an extension into adulthood a form of obsession normally seen only in infants' (Dingewell 2010: 268). Fetishism is, then, an *obsession* of some sort, whether sexual or not, that often has deeper, psychological implications. Fetishes are often seen in Western cultures to be 'deviant' desires that are pathologised, when in reality fetishes are often 'translocation[s] of desire' (Brame, Brame, Jacobs 1993), and as Lola. D Houston identifies, '[t]he use of the term "desire" can be seen to move the idea of "sexual fetish" from a problem into a simple facet of human sexual behaviour, something to be celebrated, perhaps, but not necessarily pathologized' (2016).

Furthermore, throughout the history of mainstream and independent cinema across the globe, representations of S/M sexual practises or fetishistic desires have been scarce, primarily because S/M and fetishes are marked as 'taboo' in most cultures. Moreover, and as Krzywinska identifies, '[m]any films featuring sado-masochism are based in and marked overtly as fantasy and are intended to be consumed as such' (2006: 187). Or in other words, the representations of S/M sexual practises in cinema often function as titillating fantasy, as opposed to offering the realities of how these sexual relationships operate. Films across the history of cinema that have represented or dealt with S/M sexual practises (as opposed to offering characters who are sadistic or masochistic or relationship dynamics that are masochistic or sadistic) include: *Belle de Jour, The Story of O, 120 Days of Sodom, 9 ½ Weeks* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1986), *Crash, Preaching to the Perverted* (dir. Stuart Urban, 1997), *Secretary* (dir. Steven Shainberg, 2002),

A Dangerous Method (dir. David Cronenberg, 2011) *R100* (dir. Hitoshi Matsumoto, 2013) and *Nymphomaniac Vol II*.

Krzywinska, in her chapter dedicated to BDSM, bondage and domination in *Sex and the Cinema*, also delineates the key ways in which S/M is depicted in cinema, and she identifies how depictions and manifestations of S/M sex on-screen pertain to the fairly broad ways in which S/M is 'regarded more generally: from harmless, consensual erotic fun, to manifestations of deeply psychopathic behaviour that feeds on non-consensuality' (2006: 196 – 197). S/M sexual practises were also given wide-spread, mainstream attention with the release of E.L James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* book trilogy, which was later adapted in 2015 for the silver screen. The film adaptation was a success and was also widely marketed as being a film for (heterosexual or bisexual) women (the book was also an erotic piece of fiction which was particularly aimed at heterosexual women), and later lead to an increase in women taking bondage classes or S/M DIY lessons (see Wellman 2015). However, as Carol Siegel states, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (dir. Sam Taylor-Johnson, 2015) shows that audiences 'are ready to accept sexual sadists as romantic heroes … [b]ut that acceptance is given only when the sadist is male and contextualized within a traditional romance narrative …[s]adomasochism, consequently, functions in the film as a metaphor for the compromise demanded of women in traditional marriages' (2015: 186). *Fifty Shades of Grey*, much like *Secretary*, was also criticised by S/M and BDSM practitioners as being dangerous, misogynistic and inauthentic, and the books and films were always doomed to be problematic for these practitioners because 'the women who love the series aren't interested in the BDSM but, rather, the variations from vaginal sex and the light kinkiness' (Siegel 2017). Because of this, the sex and sexual practises in the books and the films were made more palatable for a wide audience.

Regarding the representation of fetishes, cinema has been even more resistant to these queer sexual practises. While there are a handful of documentaries which explore fetish and kink communities, such as the 1996 film *Fetishes* (dir. Nick Broomfield), others are sparse, and the type of fetishes that have prominently been explored include the likes of fetishism and voyeurism in *Blue Velvet* (dir. David Lynch, 1986), auto-erotic asphyxiation in *Ken Park*, and cannibalism in *Trouble Every Day*. However, Bruce LaBruce has offered some of the most subversive, queer and radical visions of sex, sexual pleasure and sexual intimacy within narrative film history, and this also includes an exploration of fetishes and S/M sexual practises.

2.2 Queercore, Queer (Punk) Praxis and Bruce LaBruce

Bruce LaBruce (real name Bryan Bruce) is a Canadian writer, filmmaker and photographer who is renowned for transgressive and experimental films such as *No Skin off My Ass* (1991), *Super 8 ½* (1994), *Hustler White* (1995), *The Raspberry Reich* (2004), *LA Zombie* (2010) and his latest film, *The Misandrists* (2018). LaBruce attended York University (Canada) as an undergraduate and was educated in Film Studies and film theory by Robin Wood. It was at York University, under the supervision of Wood, that LaBruce began to realise his desired approach to filmmaking, which has continually been radical, unapologetic, and decidedly queer.

After writing for *Cineaction* magazine, which was edited by Wood, LaBruce caught public attention with the queer punk zine *J.D.* (1985 – 1991), which was co-edited with G.B. Jones. LaBruce's work with punk zines was a fitting start to a career that has also adhered to a 'punk' ideology. Punk, as a subculture, was initially music-based, but is also a 'refuge, a feeling of belonging, a community … [punks] are all underdogs and outcasts', and the subculture is characterised by '… a form of resistance that has evoked a sense of identity, authenticity and community' (Stewart 2017: 19). This 'punk' ideology and attitude also fits in with the queercore movement of the 1980s, which LaBruce was a crucial part of. Although he was (and sometimes still is) associated with the New Queer Cinema by critics and scholars, LaBruce identified more with queercore (initially known as homocore), which was (and is) 'an alliance with anti-establishment radical queer politics – as opposed to liberal gay politics of social integration' (Nault 2018: 2). The queercore movement was also an offshoot of punk and believed in a drastic re-ordering of society and a (politically) radical approach to LGBTQIA+ issues. Queercore also arrived at a time of wide-spread conservatism in the West, with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Britain and Ronald Reagan president of the U.S., which fuelled the radical politics of the movement even more, as well as the AIDS crisis.

After working on *J.D.* for six years, LaBruce produced and directed his first feature film *No Skin off My Ass* (he had made three short films before that) and has since made ten feature films. All these films have been radical, queer and have adhered to the 'punk' ideology, as I mentioned above. This is reiterated by the fact that LaBruce has continually experimented with the boundaries between hard-core pornography and independent cinema, with all of his films being sexually explicit and 'hard-core' in some instances, where close-ups of penetration are exhibited, as well as queer sex acts such as stump-fucking, or zombie and vampire sexuality and sexual acts, as depicted in *Otto* and *L.A. Zombie*. This integration of hard-core porn strategies within narrative films also feeds in to this idea that LaBruce's works adhere to a

'punk' attitude and ideology. Porn and punk have, historically, shared a relationship with each other too. As Curran Nault notes, 'examples of punk and pornographic convergence are abundant in the chronicles of punk … with a name signifying prostitutes and passive homosexuals, punk has consistently mined the pornographic for inspiration and edge' (2018: 76). The integration of porn strategies in more conventional, narrative films has given a distinctive (punk) 'edge' to LaBruce's works since the beginning of his filmic career.

Considering LaBruce's academic background, and his investment in topics ranging from punk to Marxism, from sexuality to racial politics, his works can be seen as a queer praxis. Praxis describes the process by which a theory or theoretical observation becomes enacted or realised and is both a practice and a methodological approach in subjects ranging from linguistics to the humanities to the social sciences. Praxis, the act of realising theory through 'doing' and 'being', can also be a tool that can actively disrupting normalcy in certain spheres, and this attitude also underpins the praxis behind LaBruce's work too. Understanding sexual politics, gay assimilation, Marxist theory, punk, and radicalism, has meant that LaBruce's films have actively engaged with and brought in to practice certain theories. For example: racial politics is evident in the gang-bang scene in *Hustler White* which relates to "black power", gender and feminist politics is evident in his latest film *The Misandrists*, which is a 'loose remake' of Don Seigel's *The Beguiled* [1971], as well as aesthetic innovation and hybridity, which is evident in his continual integration of hard-core porn strategies in narrative films. This praxis, which we could call both queer and punk, means that LaBruce's films are often "hard" for spectators to watch, as the themes and representations that LaBruce presents are both academic and intellectual, and are heavily informed by, and involve themselves in, both "big P" politics (or in other words, governmental politics), and "small p" politics (or in words, the politics of gender, sexuality, race, class, and so on). This praxis is also exemplified, reflexively, in *Super 8 ½* - a film which stars LaBruce as an aging former porn star who breaks in to the underground film scene, and as Barnaby Welch notes: 'in one scene LaBruce is approached by a film critic who describes his films as "early Warhol while simultaneously able to achieve those pure moments of Brechtian middle-Godard"', meaning that LaBruce 'is aware of the intense need to fit [his character] in to a constructed and comfortable genre', although LaBruce himself has always been difficult to categorise and 'does not fit comfortably within any pre-constructed category (2003: 307). Considering LaBruce's praxis, his films' sexual explicitness and the fact his films do not 'fit comfortably within any pre-constructed category' has meant that LaBruce's films have struggled to penetrate the mainstream market, with his most

profitable film being *Hustler White*, which, to-date, has made a lifetime gross of $127, 251 in the U.S. (IMDb 2018). However, LaBruce's films have offered (if only limited) audiences some of the most transgressive, radical, intellectual and queer representations of sex, sexuality, gender and desire, as well as re-imagining what sex and sexual pleasure can be. I will now turn to how *Hustler White* in particular represents 'queer penetration', as well as how the film not only challenges but visually re-imagines what sex can be or what it can constitute.

2.3. Queer Penetration in Hustler White

In a 1982 interview entitled 'Sex, Power, And the Politics of Identity', Michel Foucault is asked: 'how do you view the enormous proliferation in the last ten or fifteen years of male homosexual practices [1967 – 1982]: the sensualization, if you like, of neglected parts of the body and the articulation of new pleasures?' (1982, reprinted in 1994: 165). Foucault's response was this:

> Well, I think what we want to speak about is precisely the innovations those practices imply … [l]ook at the S&M subculture ... I don't think that this movement of sexual practices has anything to do with the disclosure or the uncovering of S&M tendencies deep within our unconscious, and so on. I think that S&M is much more than that; it's the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously. The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence, that S&M practice is a way of liberating this violence, this aggression, is stupid. We know very well what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body - through the eroticization of the body. (165).

Foucault's idea that individuals who involve themselves in S/M practices are creating 'new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body', overtly suggests that these practices not only have the power to invent new possibilities for pleasure, outside of the penile-vaginal or penile-anus discourses, but also what we think of as actually being sex. S/M practices also have the power to break down the boundary between sex *and* pleasure; Foucault claims, 'if you look at the traditional construction of pleasure, you see that bodily pleasure, or pleasures of the flesh, are always drinking, eating, and fucking. And that seems to be the limit of the understanding of our body, our pleasures' (165). Breaking away from this dominant discourse would be to consider the role of drugs and pleasure, as Foucault notes in the same interview, as well as pleasure that derives from bodily parts that are not considered sex organs, such as being whipped or even taking part in acts such as urolagnia (also known more informally as

'golden showers' and 'watersports' - an act which traverses the boundaries of fetish and sado-masochism).[35]

Moreover, while Rubin does not extensively discuss S/M sexual practices in 'Thinking Sex', her article 'The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and BDSM' (1982) addresses the radical and queer potential of S/M sexual practices. In the article, Rubin notes that '[s]adomasochism is the other sexual practice [alongside cross-generational sex] which to date has been used with great success to attack the gay community, and at greatest cost to those who actually practice it… [t]he shock value of BDSM has been mercilessly exploited by both media and police' (first published 1982, republished 2011: 113). This statement has been supported by several cultural theorists and psychologists, and Susan Wright identifies that 'when individuals who practice BDSM are brought to the attention of authorities, they are regularly misdiagnosed with a mental disorder' (2010: 1230). Subsequently, this means that S/M sex (as well as BDSM) is not only seen as perverse or deviant, which is most often reified through conservative media outlets, but it is also a concern to juridical authorities as well as psychologists, psychotherapists and mental health practitioners. This is because S/M practitioners are seen to be mentally unstable because they "get their kicks" from either inflicting pain on to others (which in western society is rendered as "evil") or from being hurt, which is seen as perverse and 'wrong'. However, as Foucault notes in the quote above: 'I don't think that this movement of sexual practices has anything to do with the disclosure or the uncovering of S&M tendencies deep within our unconscious' (1982: 165). In other words, S/M sexual practises are not *always* physical acts that uncover our unconscious desires, and sadistic or masochistic tendencies we have in everyday life do not always neatly align with S/M in a sexual context. These issues, particularly around how S/M sexual practises can be instrumental in creating 'new possibilities of pleasure', are comprehensively explored in *Hustler White,* and two scenes which bring these in to issues to light are one where two men engage in 'stump-fucking', and the other where two men engage in skin-cutting.

2.3.1 *Queer Penetration: Stump-Fucking*

Part narrative film, part faux-documentary, part ethnography, *Hustler White* is LaBruce's most revered and celebrated feature film. The story is centred on the male porn and male prostitution 'scene' in Los Angeles, and primarily follows both Monti Ward (Tony Ward) and Jurgen Anger

[35] Foucault's notion that bodily pleasures typically centre on eating, drinking and fucking is undeniable, however, we could also include everyday activities too such listening to music, dancing, or laughing, all of which could be 'bodily pleasures', or pleasures of the flesh.

(Bruce LaBruce). Monti is a hustler and male prostitute, and Jurgen is a writer who is on a field trip to L.A to study the hustler and prostitution 'scene', in preparation for a new book. Shortly after arriving in LA, Jurgen takes a taxi drive around Santa Monica Boulevard and this is when he first lays eyes on Monti and instantly falls in love with him, to the point where he chases him to return the bloody t-shirt Monti had dropped (but eventually fails to meet him and return the shirt). However, Jurgen does get to smell Monti's bloodied t-shirt, which Monti used to wipe the blood off the bonnet of a car, after he committed a hit-and-run. This is also an important moment in the film (the hit-and-run) as it later informs and contextualises the amputee fetish scene. Later, Jurgen is on-set at a porn shoot, and Monti is also there as the 'fluffer' (a person employed to keep a male porn performer's penis hard on-set). When Jurgen sees Monti, he decides to take this moment to introduce himself, but as he approaches Monti, he comically trips over the porn set and ruins the shoot. At this point, Monti decides to leave and Jurgen once again misses his chance to meet him. At a later point in the film (after the stump-fucking scene), Jurgen is outside in a restaurant when Monti passes by, finally giving Jurgen the chance to introduce himself. Jurgen takes this chance to return Monti's bloodied t-shirt – Monti fears that Jurgen would have "turned him in", but Jurgen explains this is not the case. Monti leaves, but Jurgen pursues him and then they drive around Santa Monica Boulevard and the surrounding areas, while Monti gives Jurgen an insider's tour of the hustler scene. After this, Monti and Jurgen head back to Jurgen's hotel to relax at the Jacuzzi with cocktails. While Jurgen is away making the cocktails, Monti approaches the Jacuzzi, slips on a bar of soap, bangs his head and remains unconscious face-down in the water. When Jurgen returns, he is shocked to find Monti in the pool, throws the cocktails down and runs over to drag him out of the water. Monti appears dead, and Jurgen wraps him up in a towel, drags him to his car and then hits the road. The remainder of the film follows Jurgen and the supposedly-dead Monti, until on the beach, Monti breathes back to life. Jurgen and Monti then kiss, run along the beach together, and live happily ever after.

While the main story of *Hustler White* follows Monti and Jurgen, there are a number of sub-plots and digressions. One digression follows a blonde, "pretty" hustler who thinks he is going for an interview but is gang-banged by a group of black men. At the end, the leader of the gang announces, "here is the real seat of black power … crawl", and the pretty boy does so, passively accepting the leader's dominant gesture for oral sex. Another digression is the amputee fetish sub-plot, involving the victim of Monti's hit-and-run and an unknown man, who is introduced to the audience in a jarring fashion, when he is masturbating to images in a

magazine (centred on amputee fetishes) called Amputee Times. Initially, the masturbating amputee fetishist is introduced to the audience as a 'random' character – and there is no immediate relationship between the hit-and-run victim and the amputee fetishist earlier on in the narrative. This is until in the later stages of *Hustler White*, when the fetishist is driving around Santa Monica Boulevard (and the surrounding area) and sees the hit-and-run victim has had his ankle amputated, which immediately catches his attention. The amputee hustler gets in the car, and the scene cuts to Monti. Six minutes later, the film cuts back to the fetishist and the amputee, and this is where the film offers a queer representation of penetration, re-imagining what 'sex' can be.

The stump-fucking scene, in its entirety, only lasts for a minute and a half, and is irrelevant to the broader narrative of *Hustler White*. However, its function in re-imagining what sex can be cannot be underestimated. The scene begins with the two men talking, and the fetishist states that the hustler must wear a condom over his stump while he fucks him, and the hustler agrees, but also (comically) says that he is sure it is considered "safe sex", to which the fetishist replies - "as safe as it may be, you never know". While these funny and flirty comments may be satirically nodding towards the politics surrounding gay male sex and the AIDS crisis that extended in to the 1990s, the discussion of putting a condom on the stump also sexualises it. This is alongside symbolically aligning the stump with the phallus, forcing the stump to simultaneously be a disability *and* a sexual and penetrative tool.[36] The scene then cuts to a shot of the hustler taking off his prosthetic leg, and the comedic flirting continues, when the fetishist says "it's a good thing I bought extra-large [condoms]". The scene then cuts away to another hustler who is involved with a transvestite sadist, and when the scene cuts back to the fetishist and the amputee, they are engaged in 'sex'.

As detailed in Fig. 3, the two men are lying on the ground while having sex, and the hustler is thrusting his amputated ankle in to the anus of the fetishist, creating a typical top - bottom dynamic. Pragmatically, the mere act of one person fucking another person's anus with an amputated ankle is undoubtedly queer, because firstly it is unequivocally non-normative, and secondly it offers a visualisation of penetration that moves beyond penile-vaginal and penile-anus sex, which furthers its 'queer' status. Furthermore, it is the context of the act that contributes to its rendering as queer, as it is the figure of the amputee that arguably makes the

[36] Here, I say it 'also symbolically [aligns] the stump with the phallus', and I use phallus instead of penis because phallic symbols and the dominant rendering of the penis and its cultural signifiers can be imprinted onto other phallic symbols – as in this case, the stump.

Fig. 3: Stump-fucking in *Hustler White*

act queer (or queerer), as well as the niche fetish of stump-fucking. In other words, the act is particularly queer because it is a non-sexual organ penetrating the anus, effectively re-imagining what sex can be or can involve. However, this is perhaps too simplistic of an equation because people do penetrate anuses (or vaginas) with 'non-sexual organs' within foreplay acts such as 'fingering', which is a colloquial term for masturbation involving the fingers, and more specifically 'fingering' is the penetration of the vagina, anus or even mouth. Fingers are not sexual organs, although they are not rendered 'queer' when used in sex acts such as foreplay (or more specifically 'fingering') because they are somewhat normative when used in sex.

Furthermore, the representation of stump-fucking relates to Foucault's notion that homosexual communities are and were creating 'new possibilities of pleasure', with 'strange parts of their body'. It is here I would like to point out the fact that the disability of the amputee significantly contributes to the queering of the sex act, as able-bodiedness usually reads as 'normative' in culture more broadly, as I also discuss in relation to *Crash.* The amputee's 'strange' body is celebrated in *Hustler White*, and the man's handicap is used in a way that also re-imagines 'penetration' and 'sex'. Moreover, the representation of this queer penetration is framed and represented as romantic and intimate. However, unlike other films which use romanticisation and sentimentality to pacify (heterosexual) audiences or connect sex to heteronormativity (see chapter four), LaBruce uses soft music, romantic lighting and nuanced performative gestures to offer the idea that queer sex acts are not perverse and disgusting, but

instead they can be intimate and, as well, not always predicated on notions of aggression or violence.

Regarding the stylistic techniques used in the stump-fucking scene, it is shot in a simplistic manner, with one wide shot capturing the sex for twenty-eight seconds. However, a strategic use of lighting, music and performance, as I just noted, contributes towards the scene being rendered as a representation of romantic queer penetration. The lighting is soft throughout the scene, and is produced by sunlight gently creeping in through drawn blinds (the lighting also helps to romanticise and soften the setting of the sex, as the men are in what looks like a run-down apartment or hotel room); the music is instrumental and light, mainly with soft harps constituting the non-diegetic sound; and the performance of sex is slow, intimate and caring, as the amputee gently thrusts his stump in the fetishist's anus, while the fetishist lets out sounds of pleasurable (and indulgent) moans and groans. The merging of these stylistic (and performative) techniques contributes to the framing of the queer penetration as romantic and intimate, as well as the spectatorial knowledge that the fetishist has an extreme appreciation for amputees, and this is his moment to fulfil his queer desire.

Moreover, throughout the short scene the 'romantic' use of lighting, music and performance is also reminiscent of soft-core pornography or erotica, which, in many ways, contradicts or at least opposes the hard-core techniques LaBruce typically adopts. However, in an interview with the *Irish Times*, LaBruce said that '[f]etishes are often misunderstood… [s]ometimes there's a real reverence and appreciation and love underlying fetishism… [t]hat demands our empathy' (2014). This LaBruce quotes tell us of two things. Firstly, that the visual framing of the sex was purposefully romantic and functions to show that fetishes are not disgusting or grotesque habits, attractions or practises; and secondly that the representation of a form of queer penetration was not only constructed for the sake of transgression, but instead for the sake of representing queer desires in an intimate, romantic manner, which is not often found in cinema, television, or visual culture more broadly. The scene is also constructed in this 'romantic' way to visually manifest the fetishist's desire – the scene and the sex being rendered romantic ultimately functions to represent and express the fetishist's queer desire and longing, in a manner that translates as both satisfying and intimate (for him).

2.3.2 Queer Penetration: Skin-Slicing

As I have demonstrated so far, the stump-fucking scene in *Hustler White* presents a form of penetration that is queer due to the fact a stump is used as a penetrative tool, but that the scene

Fig. 4: Ambrose Sapperstein in *Hustler White*

is also rendered romantic through certain stylistic strategies such as lighting and music (as well as performance), which ultimately serves to represent and express the fetishist's queer desire. However, this is not the only form of queer penetration within the film, and the other representation centres on a character with a more masochistic fetish, although this time it involves a daytime television actor, Ambrose Sapperstein (Graham David Smith), who sexually enjoys his skin being sliced with a razor blade while also, at the same time, being tied up with hands above his head.

The audience is first introduced to Ambrose Sapperstein through his voice when he is on the phone to Monti, asking him for his services. Monti agrees, and tells the actor to meet him at the "Yukon Mining Company Restaurant in five minutes". When they meet, Monti appears unimpressed and Ambrose, a quintessentially (and comically) English, grey-haired gentleman, greets him with "oh dear boy, you must be the young person I arranged to meet here" (as if they had not arranged this *only* five minutes ago). Ambrose then formally introduces himself to Monti as a "semi-regular on *General Hospital*". After some toing and froing, with Ambrose claiming he was once a Versace model (to which Monti dryly responds with "in what, 1945?"), Ambrose hands Monti some photographs which detail what his (Ambrose's) "body has been subjected to". After seeing the photos, Monti refuses to offer his services and gives Ambrose a number for a friend who can "hook him up". Proceeding this, Ambrose calls Monti's friend and later the film cuts to a scene of their S/M activities in an unknown location (probably a hotel room). Ambrose has his hands tied above his head with a leather belt, and an unknown skin-head hustler is putting out cigarettes on his body. After this, the skin-head

hustler starts to slowly slice Ambrose's skin with a thin razor blade, all over his torso, back, and buttocks, while Ambrose bleeds lightly. It is these acts, the acts of penetrating the skin, which I label as both queer pleasure and queer penetration, simply because it abrades the normative classifications of what we consider as being 'penetration' and 'pleasure', as I outline in my analysis of *Crash* too. While the skin-slicing scene is not framed as being 'romantic', it once again functions to depict a form of queer pleasure and queer desire, and it is the stylistic strategies adopted by LaBruce that are, once again, most effective in conveying this. While lighting, music and performance romanticised the stump-fucking scene, this time it is cinematography and diegetic sound that that are crucial in representing a fulfilment of queer desire.

The skin-slicing scene last for two minutes and ends with a somewhat harrowing image of Ambrose stood still, his back sliced in many places, blood running down his body (see Fig. 4). While the scene is on-going, close-up shots of Ambrose's face, alongside dialogue and the diegetic sounds of moans and groans are instrumental in conveying the masochist's longing for queer pleasure and queer desire. When the scene begins, we witness (through a wide shot) the hustler putting out cigarettes on Ambrose's body, and every time the cigarette touches his skin, Ambrose lets out the sounds of expressive (sexual) moans, as if there is no pain, only pleasure.[37] These diegetic sounds of pleasurable moans is paired with close-ups of Ambrose's facial reactions, whereby he throws his head back and bites his lip in anticipation for the next burn or next slice. These close-ups, together with the sounds he is making, create a representation of a fetishistic, queer sexual practise that communicates as being extremely pleasurable (for Ambrose). This pleasurable representation of skin-slicing once again helps it to be rendered as a representation of queer desire, and that queer desire being fulfilled.

Moreover, and it is important to consider, to what extent is the slicing of skin 'queer penetration' in itself? To claim that a blade penetrating skin is 'queer' would, at the same time, suggest that stabbing somebody, for example, is queer. This is, quite frankly, wrong. However, and as in the case with the stump-fucking scene, it is both the context of the sexual act, alongside the people partaking in it, which renders the act and the pleasure as 'queer'. Considering that the act of slicing the skin is aimed at masochistically gaining pleasure in *Hustler White*, the representation of skin-slicing as 'queer penetration' offers a complete re-imagining of what constitutes sex, pleasure and desire, and this representation exists outside of

[37] Ambrose does wince from time to time throughout the entire scene, but he is primarily in the throes of pleasure.

normative discourses. Therefore, *Hustler White* offers a visual counter-discourse where sex and pleasure are re-interpreted, through transgressive acts which are usually marked as 'taboo' or 'perverse'. This chapter now switches focus to demonstrate how *Crash* renders sex acts 'queer', as well as how the film suggests that fetishes are 'beyond sexuality', a gender-and-sexual transgression that is both radical but also queer (here, I bring in some discussions from Downing [2017]).

3. *Crash*, Masochism and Fetishes as 'Beyond Sexuality'

David Cronenberg's *Crash* is one of the most important films in Western cinema history that unapologetically explores the connections between sex and danger, which is ultimately masochistic, as well as exploring the intense and extremely niche fetish for car-crashes and car-crash victims. The film has been seen, as Anthony McCosker identifies, as an expression of a particularly 'postmodern form of amoral sexuality, or as a manifestation of cyberculture, illustrating the posthuman as the context of everyday life' (2008: 104). In line with Cronenberg's continuous fascination with corporeality and body horror, *Crash* is an adaptation of the 1973 J.G. Ballard novel of the same name and follows the story of James Ballard (James Spader) after he has a car crash on a freeway in Ontario (Canada). James then, through a set of bizarre circumstances, discovers an underground sub-culture of scarred car-crash victims, and he uses the sexual energy they generate to try to rejuvenate the sexual and romantic life with his wife Catherine (Deborah Unger).

While *Crash* won the Special Jury Prize at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival, and received mixed critical reviews, it also faced a backlash from conservative media in the UK when it was first screened at the London Film Festival in November 1996 (as noted). The film became a tabloid sensation, with the *Daily Mail* boldly printing on its front page: "Ban This Car Crash Sex Film". The article was written by Alexander Walker, a long-time film critic and author of *Sex in the Movies* (which was referenced in the literature review), and he wrote that the film depicts some of the most 'perverted acts and theories of sexual deviance I have ever seen propagated in main-line cinema …. [i]t involves deliberate participation in car crashes, all engineered to top up their libido by courting injury, mutilation, [and] sometimes death' (Walker 1996). This was then also tied to political issues when the National Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley insisted that local authorities should refuse to show the film, and Westminster Council then took the step of threatening to ban it unless certain cuts were made. This conservative attitude (and outrage) was likewise reverberated across the world – as McCosker

writes, ‘media articles around the world reiterated [a] sense of moral outrage and asserted that the film’s sexual perversity posed a broad social threat’ (2008: 106). This ubiquitous outrage surrounding *Crash* is also why it remains a film that has an ‘enduring cultural significance’ (2008: 105). Moreover, due to *Crash*’s exploration of fetishes and queer sexual desires, it was also discussed in relation to pornography as well as how ‘explicit’ the film was, with Roger Ebert calling it ‘courageous and original--a dissection of the mechanics of pornography’ (1997). While the film does depict taboo and queer sexual practises and desires, something hard-core pornography is also associated with, the film’s aims are arguably not to dissect the mechanics of pornography as such, but to dissect the very notion of what constitutes sex and pleasure, and how this interacts with scarred or non-normative corporeality and desires, as well as the merging of the body, technology and sexual pleasure.

It is also important to acknowledge the mainstream status of *Crash*, as it was released relatively widely for a film which features such taboo and queer acts, and was made by David Cronenberg, a well-known filmmaker who had directed twelve feature-length films prior to *Crash*, including *Scanners* (1981), *The Fly* (1986), and *Dead Ringers* (1990).[38] As Walker wrote in 1996, *Crash* exhibits the most ‘perverted acts and theories of sexual deviance’ he had ever seen in ‘main-line cinema’, and the film’s status as ‘main-line’ was arguably why it was deemed so shocking too – this was not a niche porn, or an underground product, but instead a film which seemed (and seems) to want to challenge the very nature of human sexuality and desire. Before *Crash* was released, underground and counter-cultural filmmaking (and moving-image hard-core pornography) had dealt with queer or alternative sexual practises, one of which includes LaBruce’s *Hustler White*. However, the ‘main-line’ status of *Crash*, its controversies, as well as its representation of masochistic and fetishistic desires, is why it is such a vital film to analyse within this chapter.

Furthermore, in the introduction I extensively outlined my position on the use of queer, as well as the idea of almost every citizen in the world having *queer potentials*. In regard to sex, *Crash* offers a visualisation of these queer potential’s but within a specific context which centres on sex, desire, masochism and fetishism. While fetishes and sadomasochistic sexual practises essentially queer the notion of what ‘sex’ is or can be, as well as offering corporeal pleasures that escape dominant discourses of penile-vaginal or penile-anus intercourse, the question as to whether the people who take part in these acts are queer themselves is

[38] *Crash* had a small opening in 1996 but then was shown in 339 theatres worldwide in 1997 (Box Office Mojo).

continuously debated. In February 2018 *The Advocate* published an article online entitled 'Kink Is Part of My Identity — but Don't Call Me LGBTK'. Alexander Cheves, the author of the article, responds to the growing idea that a 'K', which stands for kink, should be added to the LGBTQIA+ banner. However, as Cheves writes:

> [T]here are, after all, many straight kinky folks. What, we think, would right-wing heterosexuals who enjoy handcuffs in the bedroom do if they realized their kink made them queer? Would they vote differently? Would they defend us? No. And they're not queer. We are a separate populace that shares kink with (some of) them as common ground. Straight kids with undiscovered fetishes don't have to "come out" once they find them.' (2018).

In this cogent statement, Cheves unequivocally rejects the idea that heterosexual individuals who partake in kink/fetish/S&M sexual activities can be deemed 'queer', and their use of the term queer relates more specifically to a sexual or gendered orientation, as opposed to the flexible and fluid nature of 'queer' being related to a whole manner of identities and practises. This is replicated in a 2017 article published in *Affinity Magazine* (online) named 'Kink Is Not Part of the LGBT+ Community'. The article states that a person's '[s]exual orientation does not include how you like to have sex', and that '[k]ink is not an orientation. Kink is just how you like to have sex … [f]etishes are not queer … [y]ou can be a queer person with fetishes, and your queerness is what lets you have space in the LGBT+ community, not the fact you have fetishes' (2017).

While there is a degree of pragmatism to these statements, as well as an apparent desire to push heterosexuality out of the banner of 'queer', we could ask again: what about when it is not the identities that are making the sex queer, but it is the transgressive acts themselves? My line of argument throughout this chapter is clear: I am not claiming that heterosexual individuals who take part in S/M or fetishistic sexual practises are queer or should be deemed queer in their sexual orientation. Instead, I am claiming that heterosexual people can partake in or indulge in *queer sexual practises*. This does not mean that fetishistic or sado-masochistic straight people are 'queer' in regard to their sexual orientation, instead they are involving themselves in activities that can be labelled queer, because they contradict or reject heteronormative ideals and standards. I will now discuss how *Crash* re-imagines what sex and sexual pleasure can entail, while simultaneously revealing the ways in which the film suggests

that fetishes are all-consuming desires that are *beyond sexuality*, which also adds to the 'queerness' of the film and fetishistic sexual practises.

As is probably clear from the above declarations around straight people partaking in queer sexual practises, the physicality of the sex acts in *Crash* are primarily heteronormative, with two moments of same-sex interaction, which are pivotal when I come to discussing how fetishes transcend sexuality later in this section. When physical sex acts occur, these typically happen between men and women, and penile-vaginal sex is the primary sexual dynamic. However, it is the car crash James is involved in that unleashes his fetishistic sexual desire and the masochistic desire of wanting to be involved in car crashes, or to have sex with people who have been in a car crash (and especially those who have been scarred by the crashes). This queer desire is unleashed, as aforementioned, when he has an accidental car crash on a freeway. The moment this happens, the man in the other car is thrown through James' window-screen and dies. The dead man's passenger, a woman named Helen (Holly Hunter), looks partially in shock, before she rips her seat belt away from her body, which pulls her suit jacket open to reveal her breast. James stares at Helen as this happens, looking somewhat bemused and also in shock, and then the film cuts to James in the hospital with Catherine by his side. The tone that is created by Cronenberg in these early moments, which is also indicative of the entire film, is cold and impersonal, crafting a haunting atmosphere which is both unrelenting but also continuously on the brink of surrealism. In the hospital, James has a wander around after Catherine advises him to do so (she says: "they want you to start walking again"). On his walk, he bumps in to Helen and greets her by saying "Dr. Helen Remmington?" Helen clutches her walking stick and James anticipates she will hit him with it. Instead, she shoots him a cold glance and walks away. James then meets a doctor named Vaughn (Elisa Koteas) in the hallway, who already knows James' name and proceeds to study his injuries and scars. Vaughn then walks away, looking back at James every so often, with a smile on his face. These set of events continue the cold and/or surreal atmosphere that was constructed in the early scenes of the film, but they also add an element of mystery that does not cease throughout the narrative, as it seems that everything that happens to James is a matter of strange fate. The initial car crash itself is presented as the catalyst that unleashes James' fetishistic and masochistic desires (this is overtly symbolised as Helen shows her breast immediately after the car crash), as it is only *after* the car crash that he develops these feelings. Not long after the crash he starts to realise that more and more cars seem to be on the road, which is visually symbolic of his desires intensifying as well as the temptation that *now* surrounds him.

Later in the film, James meets Helen again at a car pound, and begins to have an affair with her that continues throughout the film. She takes him to an exhibition involving the doctor Vaughn, who is also a specialist in recreating car crashes. The one they attend together is a recreation of the infamous crash that killed James Dean in 1955, when he had an accident in his Porsche 550 Spyder, nicknamed "Little Bastard". While James seems confused by the action he is witnessing, he is also deeply intrigued, and as his relationship with Helen and Vaughn intensifies, James (and at times Catherine) becomes more involved in the underground sub-culture of car-crash victims who share the same fetish and masochism for car crashes and scarred victims. This then leads to some extreme behaviour, with the finale of the film involving James aggressively following Catherine in her car, running her off the road, and then having sex with her (while she is severely injured) on the grass verge at the side of the freeway. This scene in the finale of the film is symbolic of how dangerous James and Catherine's relationship has become, as they partake in a sado-masochistic act that has deadly consequences, an act that involves James sadistically running Catherine off the road, and Catherine masochistically involving herself in this for the purposes of sexual pleasure.

It is evident from the narrative events in *Crash* that these characters (James, Helen, Vaughn, Catherine) are (sado)masochistic in their desire to either be involved in car crashes or to make others crash their car, and these acts are both hedonistic and life-threatening, which only adds to the masochism of their fetish even more. It is the fetish of cars and car crashes (or, more broadly, a fetish for danger) that also queers the sex the characters are involved in, because as I mentioned above, the physicality of the sex acts in the film adhere to dominant notions of sex as heteronormative, or in other words, penile-vaginal. However, there are four key scenes where the sex is rendered queer through its association with the characters' fetishes, masochism and queer desires.

The first sex scene in the film that is rendered queer is forty-two minutes in to the narrative when James and Catherine are having sex in bed, after Vaughn had followed Catherine in his car in a threatening and aggressive manner (which functioned to sexually arouse both Catherine *and* James, who had also been following in his car too). While they are having (normative) sex, the "dirty talk" that Catherine instigates renders the sex queer. While having sex, Catherine consistently asks James questions about Vaughn. She asks James, in succession (with the camera capturing her questions and the sex with a mixture of close-ups and mid-shots): "do you find him attractive?", "would you like to fuck him, in that car?", "have you seen his penis?", "is he circumcised?", "can you imagine what his anus looks like?

Describe it to me", "would you like to sodomise him?", "would you like to put your penis right in to his anus?", "describe how you'd lean over, unzip his greasy jeans, take out his penis … would you kiss him?", "have you every sucked a penis?", "do you know what semen tastes like?" Catherine also says "his [Vaughn's] car must smell like semen" and "some semen is saltier than others". While "dirty talk" itself is not particularly queer, it is the homoerotic and explicit nature of the questions that Catherine asks that renders the sex queer, or at least *queers* the sex they are having. Moreover, it is not overtly queer for a woman to be interested in men who have sex with men (it is also not overtly normal either), and as Lucy Neville notes in her timely work *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys: Women and Gay Male Pornography and Erotica* – 'it would appear that engaging with m/m content is not an unusual practice among women who consume erotic material—from hardcore visual pornography to erotic romance novels' (2018: 3). Regardless of how ordinary it is for women to be active consumers of M/M porn or erotica, it is queer, I would argue, for Catherine to ask such homoerotic questions while engaged in intercourse. It is also queer because the questions she asks help her to build towards orgasm, which suggests that this (queer) desire Catherine has is instrumental in unleashing sexual pleasure, as this is the first time in the narrative that we witness her have an orgasm. The homoerotic questions she poses to James while they are having sex function to fulfil sexual pleasure and desire, and the questions themselves queer the normative sex they are engaged in.

The second scene where sex acts are rendered queer is forty-six minutes in to the film, when Helen, James, Vaughn, Vaughn's partner Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) and a few other fetishists are gathered at Vaughn and Gabrielle's home. They are all sat together in the lounge watching a German car-crash demonstration video while some of them touch themselves (one man is wearing a bra over his t-shirt, while touching himself) and others watch the video intensely. After a few moments, the video freezes and a series of close-ups of Helen, James and Vaughn reveals their slight (sexual) frustration that the video has stopped. Helen, in particular, is visibly annoyed that the video has stopped working, and after Vaughn speaks about other (car crash demonstration) films he has "brought back", Helen jumps up from her seat and looks for the remote control. The others look at her with worried expressions, but after finally finding the remote, she rewinds the video. As she does this, the nuance in her facial expressions are reminiscent of a drug addict who needs their "fix", particularly when she grabs the remote, rubs her nose with her finger (as if she had just snorted cocaine) and then rewinds the video. Proceeding this, Helen finds the moment in the video she wants (when the car actually crashes in to a wall), sits down, grabs Gabrielle and James' hands, and they all begin

to sexually touch each other while watching the action on-screen.[39] James asks Helen if she is upset, and Helen responds with a grin on her face that she is "alright… now". Following this, a tracking shot moves across their laps to show their hands sexually pleasuring each other's genitals. Once again, the physicality of the sex acts is normative, even if two women are touching each other. Nevertheless, the fact they are being sexually aroused by a car-crash demonstration video renders the sex acts (the 'fondling') as queer, because not only is it unequivocally non-normative, but as Anthony McCosker also writes, it is pedagogical in the sense that it offers an understanding in to the practices associated with the transformation of physical pain into sexual pleasure (2008). This scene is also indicative of how the characters' queer desire and masochism is, at this stage, fulfilled by simply watching the action on-screen, as opposed to carrying out the acts in reality. As mentioned above, this restraint does not last for long, as James and Catherine sado-masochistically have a car crash in the film's finale.

The third instance of how sex is rendered queer in *Crash* is when one instance of same-sex interaction occurs between Vaughn and James, which functions not as a gay male erotic spectacle, but instead to suggest that fetishes are *beyond sexuality*, and that people are mere hosts for the fetishes, no matter their sex, gender, or sexuality. This moment of same-sex interaction is between James and Vaughn, and occurs one hour and fifteen minutes in to the film, after James gets a tattoo with Vaughn. The scene begins with Vaughn slowly taking off the large plaster on James' fresh tattoo. Vaughn proceeds to grab James by the collar and then starts licking the tattoo. After, a wide tracking shot acts as a bridge for the next part of the action, as James grabs Vaughn by the face and they start to passionately kiss. James then licks the scars on Vaughn's face and neck. Before the scene cuts away, James unbuttons Vaughn's jeans and Vaughn turns over (which suggests that penetrative sex is about to happen); proceeding this, we then see James alone in the car and Vaughn is in another car.

As Downing noted in her chapter in *Screening Sexual Perversion* regarding the film *Kissed*, the film is rendered 'queer' even though it belongs within a heterosexual context because the film presents gender transgression which is 'paradoxically both 'straight' and 'perverse' (2017: 21), as well as filling 'the familiar frame with subject matter that is deviant, disturbing and gender-unconventional' (2017: 29). Therefore, and following Downing's lead,

[39] It could be argued that the characters' reaction to the car crash demonstration video is metaphoric for pornography and pornographic viewing habits (with the people sat around needing to get their "fix"), which would support Ebert's reading that the film is 'a dissection of the mechanics of pornography' (1996). However, I would claim that it is not metaphorical of pornographic viewing habits but instead the scene functions to show how addictive their fetish and queer desire is, to an unhealthy level where they need to get their "fix" in *any* form.

this moment of same-sex interaction is queer because it disavows normative identity structures and disrupts both homonormative and heteronormative sexual and gendered dynamics. Moreover, the rather soft-core construction of this scene avoids explicit sexual action between the two men and fades out before anything else happens, which on one hand 'allows the viewer to project in the gap their own personally tailored fantasy' (Krzywinska 2006: 29) but on the other could be seen as a homophobic gesture that denies the scopophilic pleasure of looking at two men having (kinky) sex, especially when we consider the fact that in another instance the film depicts James fucking a scar (see below).[40] Furthermore, it would be both too easy and too tenuous to suggest that this moment of same-sex interaction is merely a set of 'gay' sex acts, or that these characters are simply bisexual. This is because the characters do not actively search for homosexual interaction within the film, instead it is interaction with people who have the most extreme desires regarding car crashes or, importantly, have scarred bodies which have been caused by car crashes.

My above declaration that James' and Vaughn's same-sex interaction disavows normative identity structures and disrupts both homonormative and heteronormative sexual dynamics because it suggests fetishes are *beyond sexuality*, is echoed in Linda Ruth Williams' writing on *Crash*, where she claims that although the film features an 'impressive lingerie-clad female cast', in *Crash*:

> [F]emale sexuality is not central to the erotic mechanics of *Crash* … [t]his may be because the film succeeds in in its attempt to be polymorphously perverse; as the character-pairings cross and counter-cross in in multiple sexual engagements, masculinity and femininity become less about defining categories and more performative possibilities. (1999: 43).

This notion of gender roles in *Crash* becoming 'less about defining categories and more performative possibilities', is one other way of saying that their fetishes and their polymorphous perversity is queer; these characters move beyond the confines of heterosexuality and heteronormativity to fulfil their fetishistic desires. The sex is rendered queer in the scene between James and Vaughn because of the fetishization of scars, injuries and cars in general, as the two men lick each other's wounds which intensifies their sexual

[40] There is another instance of same-sex interaction which occurs between Helen and Gabrielle. After Vaughn has a car crash which kills him, Helen and Gabrielle visit the car pound where the car Vaughn died in is being held. In an act that pays homage to Vaughn, they both get in the car and start kissing, intertwining their bodies as they do so. They hug for a while, and this makes it clear that this is less of a sexual act and is instead a mourning for the loss of Vaughn, which is why I did not include it within this discussion of fetishes being 'beyond sexuality'.

attraction to one another (like how Catherine's homoerotic "dirty talk" helped her to reach orgasm). McCosker also identifies this, writing that: '[r]ather than an abnormality, or *dis*figuration, the scar in this scene [between James and Vaughn] is experienced as an intensified source of erotic energy' (2005: 41). Therefore, erotic energy is not simply born from a homosexual attraction or a desire for another man's penis or anus, but instead their erotic energy is unleashed by the scars and marks that they *host* on their bodies.

Moreover, I do not want to veer towards a bi-phobic position by stating that these men are not simply fluid in their sexuality, however, I want to communicate the idea that the men's desire for the scars and injuries transcends the limits of gender and sexuality as they are not solely gaining pleasure from the same-sex interaction itself. Instead, they are gaining pleasure from being able to lick, touch and interact with scars and injuries, which fulfils their queer, fetishistic desires. In this sense, then, *Crash* suggests that people who have extreme fetishistic and masochistic desires see other people as merely *hosts for the fetish*. This same-sex interaction in *Crash*, then, is queer (and not necessarily gay or even bisexual) precisely because it presents fetishistic desires as being fluid and flexible, as well as being sexual desires that transcend heteronormativity, even if the physicality of the sex acts adhere to dominant notions of sex as penetrative.

The final example of how *Crash* renders sex queer relates to the scene where James has sex with Gabrielle's scarred thigh. The scene also relates to ideas around queer penetration, but it also quite literally and graphically visualises, once again, the idea that extreme fetishes can be *beyond sexuality*. The scene begins when James and Gabrielle visit a car dealership to not only look at cars, but to be turned on by them too. After sitting in one of the cars and riskily touching each other (as there is a car salesman present), which essentially acts as foreplay, the two then drive to a nearby car parking lot to have sex. When James acknowledges the deep flesh wound on the back of Gabrielle's thigh, he excitedly rips her fishnet tights and begins to lick the wound, which is akin to cunnilingus. After this, James unzips his jeans and starts to fuck the wound. This is an incredibly visceral and uncomfortable moment within the film, as Gabrielle firstly moans in pain (but later in pleasure), and James becomes somewhat primal and aggressive in his actions, as if he has quite literally been taken over and possessed by his queer fetish.

Often referred to as the controversial "leg scene", this queer penetration points towards, as Linda Ruth Williams states, the idea that 'women have zones of abjection which are both

inside and outside, and that Cronenberg has given them to men: Gabrielle's scar-gash is, of course, the direct descendent of the pulsating vagina-gash which opens in Max Renn's stomach [in *Videodrome*]' (1999: 45). While it is undeniable that the wound on Gabrielle's leg is symbolic of the vagina-gash, mainly because it is a scar that is visually reminiscent of the (typical) oval vulva shape, this scene also reinforces my idea that *Crash* suggests that extreme, masochistic fetishes are often beyond sexuality and beyond normativity. It goes without saying that, like the stump-fucking scene in *Hustler White*, the scar-fucking scene is irrefutably queer because not only is it non-normative, but it is a representation of pleasure that is abject as well as being a literal visualisation of James *fucking his fetish*. This is perhaps the most radical statement and radical representation the film offers. Just as I stated that James and Vaughn's sexual interaction is about bodies hosting fetishes, the scar-fucking scene is not James fucking Gabrielle, instead he is fucking her scar and therefore is fulfilling the limits of his fetish. It is not about penile-vaginal pleasure, and I would argue it is not overtly relevant that the gash is vagina-shaped either, because the broader message it is trying to convey is that extreme fetishistic sexual desires may not always privilege vaginal sex or 'normative sex', because it is not about this. It is not about procreation; it is not about orgasmic imperatives; it is not about heteronormativity; but instead it is about the irrefutably queer nature(s) of taboo and abject sexual desires, where sexuality is irrelevant if the body hosts the fetish. *Crash*, then, offers a radical and queer re-imagining on the boundaries of gender, sexuality and sex acts.

4. Conclusion

Regarding *Crash*, McCosker writes that 'the questions the film poses relates directly to the body's capacity for experiencing pleasure and pain, and its capacity for sensual experience[s]' (2005: 45). This chapter has, through its examination of *Hustler White* and *Crash*, revealed how some queer sex acts directly challenge and re-imagine 'the body's capacity for experiencing pleasure and pain, and its capacity for sensual experience[s]' (Ibid). These two unique and radical films offer counter-discourses that oppose normative ideas surrounding sexual desire, intimacy, and physicality. These films, however, do not only challenge dominant ideas and ideals surrounding sex/pleasure, but they use the cinematic apparatus to re-imagine the body's potentials regarding sex and sexual pleasure, bringing in to the public imagination a radical re-envisaging of how S/M, fetishes and queer penetrations can construct a radical counter-discourse which unearths queer potentials beyond heteronormativity, especially in the case of *Crash*. These two films are not the only definitive examples of queer sex in cinema, but what particularly *Crash* highlights is the idea that queerness can be sometimes found in the

most unlikely of places (in this case in a hetero-centric, somewhat misogynistic film), and this chapter arguably reifies Alexander Doty's point that '"queer readings aren't 'alternative' readings, wishful or willful [sic] misreadings, or 'reading too much into things' readings … [t]hey result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along' (1993: 16).

This chapter has also brought in to light what queer sex acts may constitute or may be, and that these are most importantly detached from the now out-dated idea that, for instance, two men having anal sex is 'queer', or that two women performing cunnilingus on each other is 'queer'. In many ways, this chapter is also a defence of an older, more radical rendering of queerness that is being diluted in popular Western cultures, and particularly through films which are homonormative in some way or another. It is not until chapter four that this thesis explicitly brings homonormativity to the forefront, and the next two chapters switch focus to be solely and separately concerned with gay male sex acts and lesbian sex acts in recent, sexually explicit North American and French films.

Chapter Two:

Sex, Cultural Heritage and Realism in Recent Gay Male Cinema

This chapter will explore how contemporary gay male films such as *Stranger by the Lake* (*SBTL* for short) and *I Want Your Love* (*IWYL* for short) are honouring gay male cultural heritage through intertextuality that pulls together and blends stylistic strategies from 'cinema' and 'porn'. I begin, then, by firstly discussing the scholarly inspirations and foundations for my argument(s), which will also include a short consideration of how sex on-screen has played a part within 'gay male cultural heritage'. Proceeding this I will delineate the historical relationship between gay male cinema, gay male porn and the gay male community since the 1970s, and how this relationship has shifted and developed primarily alongside changes in the production, distribution and exhibition of hard-core porn and its eventual distinctions from the institution of 'cinema'. This chapter then offers a close reading of the sex scenes in *Stranger by the Lake* and *I Want Your Love* to reveal how these two films are blurring stylistic strategies from hard-core porn and cinema, creating inter-textual, erotic hybrids. Moreover, these films not only honour gay male cultural heritage but also return to older ideas of what 'gay cinema' was previously classed as (see below).

Secondly, I further this argument by stating that this intertextuality not only functions to honour gay male cultural heritage but it simultaneously functions to try and offer more 'realistic' representations of gay male sex and intimacy. In this section I replace *Stranger by the Lake* with *120 BPM* to exemplify my argument even further,[41] to demonstrate how more 'realistic' representations of sex can advance 'carnal knowledge' in the cinema, much like *Boys in the Sand*, *Last Tango in Paris* and *Deep Throat* did in the early 1970s, as Linda Williams (2008) identifies in *Screening Sex*. Here, I also curve around debates that are principally concerned with the relationship between increased explicitness and transgression in cinema (see, for example: Tulloch & Middleweek 2017, Frey 2016, Palmer 2011, Williams 2008, Krzywinska 2006 & 1999), to posit that not only do these films try to offer more realistic representations of gay male sex and intimacy, but they are also extending ideas around the diversity and mechanics of gay male sex.

[41] This is because *120 BPM* and *I Want Your Love* in particular represent sex as being awkward, clunky and uncoordinated, further delving in to the mechanics of gay male sex and how sex is malleable and fluid, and not perfectly synchronised or linear.

1. Gay Male Cultural Heritage: Cinema, Porn, Communities

1.1 Foundations and Building Blocks

There are three key pieces of literature that have provided a firm foundation for my overall argument in this chapter. The first of these is Andrew Moor's recent article 'New Gay Sincerity and Andrew Haigh's *Weekend* [2011]' (2018), which I referred to in the introduction. In the article Moor considers how American and British gay male films such as *Weekend*, *I Want Your Love* and *Keep the Lights On* use 'low-key naturalist' stylistic strategies, in the same vein as 'conservative genre-cinema in the late 1980s and early 1990s', to present an 'aura' of authenticity and realism, and these films oppose the post-modernist tendencies of New Queer Cinema, but are at the same time also highly aware of this. Moreover, in his quite short consideration of the sex scenes in the films, Moor writes: '[s]ince above-the-parapet gay cinema emerged from an underground context that was often hybridised with erotic and pornographic cinema, any film that trades in gay sex scenes should be read against this cinematic history' (2018).[42] In other words, the analysis of (particularly) explicit sex within any theatrically-released gay male film should not elude the historical relationship between gay male cinema and gay male porn, because doing this would suggest that contemporary, explicit representations of gay male sex are historically and culturally isolated. This is certainly not the case, and I explore this in more detail below.

Furthermore, Stephen Maddison's article 'Comradeship of Cock? Gay Porn and the Entrepreneurial Voyeur' (2017) provided me with a springboard to further consider the relationship between the gay male community and gay male sex on-screen. In the abstract to his chapter, Maddison writes that: '[t]hirty years of scholarship on gay porn have produced one striking consensus, which is that gay cultures are especially 'pornified': porn has arguably offered gay men not only homoerotic visibility, but a *heritage culture* and a radical aesthetic' (2017: 139).[43] Maddison's simple use of the phrase 'heritage culture', alongside Moor's proclamation that 'any film that trades in gay sex scenes should be read against [gay] cinematic history', is what led me to seriously consider how this heritage and history, one of which is deeply invested in erotic visions of gay men on-screen, informs and inspires contemporary gay male films which feature explicit representations of sex. Moreover, heritage, simply, means something that has been passed down through generations often in the form of a tradition.

[42] Note here that Moor is using 'above-the-parapet' as synonymous with 'aboveground' filmmaking, which typically includes films that are theatrically-released or are produced for public consumption.
[43] Italics added for effect.

Although, as Constantine Sandis notes in the introduction to her edited collection *Cultural Heritage Ethics: Between Theory and Practice* (2014), 'heritage, cultural or otherwise, is not always good … it may be preserved in fundamentally different, indeed contradictory, ways' (2014: 1). Gay porn has played a significant part in many gay men's lives, and as Richard Dyer wrote in 1989, 'most gay men enjoy porn to some degree or other' as it quite simply asserts 'homosexual desire' (1989: 201). Tom Waugh, writing before Dyer (in 1985), also claimed that gay male porn 'subverts the patriarchal order by challenging masculinist values, providing a protected space for non-conformist, non-reproductive and non-familial sexuality, encouraging many sex-positive values and declaring the dignity of gay people' (1985: 5). Gay male porn, then, was (and to some degree still is) the site where gay men could 'see themselves', away from the highly problematic and often offensive portrayals of gay men that permeated other moving-image media up until the end of the twentieth-century (and some still endure today).

Furthermore, sex in general (as opposed to just porn) is also a crucial aspect of gay male cultural heritage but has not always been a 'good' thing. The HIV/AIDS pandemic which occurred in the latter stages of the twentieth-century, for example, is one of the most devastating periods in mainly gay male history (but also for others in the LGBTQ+ community too), whereby sex shifted from a leisure activity and a 'non-productive expenditure' (Champagne 1995: 30), to a distinct marker of ailment and death. Sex, then, moved from a pleasurable activity to one that was perilous, especially if the proper safety precautions were not taken (such as wearing a condom). AIDS is, on the other hand, an imperative part of gay male heritage, but its (deadly) effect of the LGBTQ+ community reiterates the fact that heritage does not always have to be made up of 'positive' traditions, as Sandis noted.

Additionally, and continuing my discussion of the scholarly inspirations for this chapter, in December 2018 I carried out archival research at the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries in L.A, where the world's largest collection of LGBTQ+ materials are held (and as noted in the methodology). Here, I discovered an unpublished doctoral thesis from 1975, entitled 'The Beginnings of Gay Cinema in Los Angeles: The Industry and the Audience', by Paul Alcuin Siebenand. Siebenand's thesis offers an oral history of how 'gay cinema' began and proliferated in L.A more specifically, and he conducts interviews (as opposed to any textual or performance analysis) with gay male filmmakers (Bob Mizer, Pat Rocco, Tom DeSimone), performers (Jimmy Hughes, Cal Culver, Jim Cassidy) and critics (Jim Kepner, Harold Fairbanks). If Moor and Maddison's articles provided me with

inspiration for thinking about the historical relationship between gay male cinema, gay male porn, and the gay male community, Siebenand's thesis was instrumental in the formation of my argument for this chapter, mainly because of what Siebenand classed as being 'gay cinema'. Siebenand, in the introduction to his thesis, states that:

> Gay Cinema is understood to include those filmmakers and exhibitors who deal with a product that (a) is made specifically to appeal to the erotic tastes of homosexuals, (b) is shown in public theatres, and (c) is usually, but not necessarily, hard core. We are not, therefore, concerned with films made for the general audience which may have gay themes or characters, nor are we concerned with gay films made only for through-the-mail sale. (1975: 5).[44]

What we can take from this quote is not that Siebenand's definition is definitive, but that 'gay cinema' (films which were shown in public theatres) clearly began as being highly invested in erotic representations of gay men and their sexual activities, and this is (apparently) *why* it appealed to gay male audiences too. Siebenand delineation of 'gay cinema', then, is largely different to what we would consider to be 'gay cinema' today. Because of this, the history of how gay cinema and gay porn divided is imperative to consider, because it informs my argument that contemporary films like *SBTL* and *IWYL* honour gay male cultural heritage on-screen because they blend stylistic strategies from the two moving-image media forms, forms which once shared a kinship, but now endure a fraught relationship.

1.2 Cinema? Porn?

As clearly outlined from the Siebenand quote above, "gay cinema" began as gay porn – or, in other words, what has constituted *both* gay cinema and gay porn has changed over time, and I argue that it was the developments in regards to the distribution and exhibition of hard-core moving-image porn that was instrumental in solidifying what we today class as being 'gay cinema' and 'gay porn', but really 'cinema' and 'porn' in general.

Furthermore, I want to also begin by stating that in our contemporary age, the relationship between cinema and porn (not *just* gay cinema and gay porn) is nowhere near as intimate as it once was. In the UK, for instance, there are now around four cities that still have adult movie theatres in operation, which are: Birmingham, Bolton, Huddersfield, and

[44] About the only thing that we could compare to today's collective idea of 'gay cinema' is that these are films which primarily appeal to gay men.

London.[45] Across the world, according to cinematreasures.org, there are only one hundred and thirty one adult movie theatres still in operation, across countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Portugal, Sweden, and the USA (see Fig. 5). This is in comparison to the seven hundred porn theatres that operated within just the USA in the 1970s, according to xyclopedia.net.[46] Hard-core porn then went on to endure a lengthy association with home video entertainment systems in the 1980s and because of this 'commercial porn cinema … retreated behind closed doors as the emergence of home video allowed private accessibility' (Stevenson 1997: 30). Then in the 1990s the rise of the Internet fostered a new home for explicit sexual material in our contemporary visual culture. Pornography, since then, has been a moving-image media form that is most often viewed privately, on private electronic devices, typically in the home or a 'private' space, as opposed to the public space of a cinema. In the second half of the twentieth century, particularly the 1970s, it was more commonplace for pornography to be exhibited in dedicated adult movie theatres (as the statistic I listed above immediately suggests), and this was an era when cinema and porn combined more pragmatically. In other words: porn was shown in cinemas, which denotes a more tangible relationship between the two. It was in this era too that '[h]ard-core gay films with diverse sensibilities began to emerge' (Stevenson 1997: 29).

Moreover, cinema and porn also combined more pragmatically because legal, hard-core, feature-length pornographic film itself was practically new in the early 1970s, and the decision to show hard-core porn in a public space was both daring and experimental. Wakefield Poole's *Boys in the Sand* (1971), as Williams delineates in *Screening Sex*, was one of the first (gay) commercial, legal, moving-image, feature-length hard-core porn to be shown in theatres, followed by *Deep Throat* in 1972.[47] Subsequently, then, hard-core porn in this format was 'new' and was daring. These films, particularly *Boys in the Sand*, also used cinematic conventions to represent sex, which included 'imaginative framing and creative camera work', as well as being driven by 'conventions of narrative cinema' (Mercer 2017: 52). However, as John Mercer also writes – 'a cinematic hardcore did not sustain itself because of a constellation

[45] This information was retrieved from simply Googling 'Porn Cinemas in UK', to which Google listed all adult movie theatres in operation (alongside their opening and closing times, and sometimes price of admission).
[46] I am aware that both cinematreasures.org and xyclopedia.net are not the most academic places to find this information and may be flawed, however, I struggled to find this information from any other source.
[47] I think the term 'commercial' is particularly apt when we discuss early hard-core porn films such as *Boys in the Sand*, as porn was in existence before the 1970s in the form of literature or stag films, yet commercial hard-core porn such as *Boys* or *Deep Throat* were legally shown in cinemas, which was a new and even more accessible way of consuming moving- images of sex. *Boys in the Sand* was also 'charted at #46 on Variety's list of 50 Top Grossing Films' (Chang 2015: 102), which pertains to the way in which hard-core images of gay sex were an interest to the wider general public, not only the gay community.

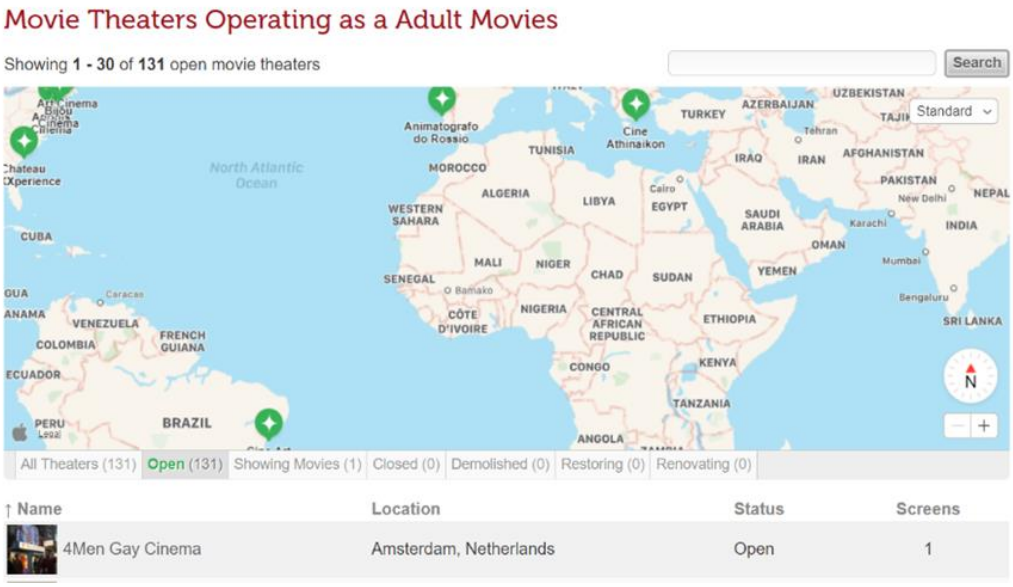


Fig. 5: Map of adult movies theatres still in operation

of factors and similarly the strong narrative focus and experimentation with camera work and editing were to be replaced, relatively quickly in subsequent years, with a more industrialised set of formal and narrative conventions' (52).

In Western visual cultures, then, porn is rarely thought of as being 'cinema' or as even being 'cinematic', and is a genre that is on the periphery of film culture altogether.[48] Hard-core porn, since the arrival of home video systems and now more particularly in the age of streaming, is hardly ever viewed collectively in a public space such as a cinema – it would be extremely rare nowadays for groups of people to flock to their local adult movie theatre to catch the new hard-core pornographic feature, as Linda Williams did in 1972 (2008: 124).[49] Before moving on to the close analysis of how *SBTL* and *IWYL* blur stylistic strategies familiar to porn and cinema, it is also worth exploring what stylistic and narrative elements typically divide the boundaries between representations of sex in cinema and porn.

1.3 "Pornographic sex" vs. "Cinematic sex"

While there is a degree of obviousness between what often separates representations of sex in theatrically released films ('cinema') from representations of sex in hard-core, moving-image

[48] And it is important to note that I am not saying it should be, but evidently it is.
[49] I take this instance from Williams' *Screening Sex*, where she explains she and her friends went to watch *Deep Throat* collectively in an adult movie theatre when it was first released in 1972.

porn, it is worth delineating these disparities because it, once again, feeds in to and informs the analysis that follows, and also takes in to account how the two forms have diverged over time.

As mentioned in the Mercer quote above, the porn industry, particularly since the late 1970s and early 1980s, replaced experimental camera work and cinematic narratives 'with a more industrialised set of formal and narrative conventions' (2017: 52), and these industrialised techniques came forth so producers could simply make more porn in shorter periods of time, and under a simple capitalist model, the more they could make the faster the profits could be reaped in. Pornography, since then, has relied on a specific set of stylistic strategies (or, in other words, 'formal conventions') that often strives to show maximum visibility to the spectator (Williams 1989). Most of the literature that is concerned with what defines hard-core porn *as being* hard-core porn, centre on this idea of maximum visibility, as well as debates around what Linda Williams articulately called the 'hydraulics' of sex (2008: 6), and what Richard Dyer wittily called the 'plumbing' of sex (1994). What both of these terms connote is the idea that hard-core porn is only really concerned with showing the exact mechanics of sexual activities, meaning it is interested in explicitly showing, often using a (tight) close-up, a penis penetrating a mouth, a vagina, an anus, or graphically exhibiting oral sex, masturbation, and especially ejaculation (which is discussed more extensively within the textual analysis below). It is precisely because pornography strives to show everything that it is often thought to be 'totally explicit' (Williams 2014: 9).

Moreover, Jacob Held, somewhat polemically, also claims that narrative is the most important element in what often separates porn from cinema, or from any other visual media form that delves in to sex in some way. In a chapter entitled 'What is and is not Porn: Sex, Narrative and *Baise-Moi*', Held tries to offer a new way of thinking about how we can define porn through narrative instead of style. Held argues that 'it is not the presence of explicit sex that makes a film pornographic, it is not whether one sees the money shot, it is not about the visual presentation of sex, but instead it is about the role the sex plays in supporting or furthering the film narrative' (2016: 33). Where porn was often defined in the past by its open display of the 'hydraulics' of sex, Held re-visits these arguments to claim that it is cinema's specific use of sex within a film's narrative that defines it as *not* being pornographic, even if it does include real or unsimulated sex. While Held's ideas around narrative offers another angle on how we can think about defining pornography, it is also largely problematic, and Held's overall argument *over-emphasises* the role of narrative as being the primary element that separates cinema and porn (or as Held unhelpfully says, it separates 'porn' from 'non-porn').

In Held's paradigm, then, porn is defined as quite simply fucking on-screen (instead of, for example, 'love-making'), and alternatively cinema's sex acts are purposeful.

Considering Held's argument, it is startling that he ignores how a large majority of feature-length hard-core porn often have very loose narratives tying the sex scenes together. This is alongside an ignorance of previous academic work that has already invested itself in the relationship between hard-core porn and narrative strategies. As Richard Dyer writes:

> Even the simplest pornographic loops have narrative … [e]ven if all that is involved is a fuck between two men, there are the following establishing elements: the arrival on the scene of the fuck, establishing contact … undressing, exploring various parts of the body, coming, parting (1992: 142).

Therefore, hard-core pornographic films *can* have a distinct or clear narrative, even if they are just 'fuck films'. *Pirates* (dir. Joone, 2005) is an example of a high-budget porn (which parodies *Pirates of the Caribbean* [dir. Gore Verbinski, 2003]) that follows a clear narrative path from beginning to end. As I have also written elsewhere, 'the erotic setup and seduction in porn could also be seen as a narrative of some kind; however awful or cliché it may be, it leads the spectator, in narrative fashion, to sex' (Winterton 2017: 56). Porn, then, is often seen as being 'explicit' because of certain stylistic *and* narrative strategies – a marriage of the two, not just one or the other.

Furthermore, turning our hand to 'cinematic representations' of sex mainly (but not always) means to turn towards ideas of concealment as opposed to 'visibility'. To cut to the chase, theatrically-released films often go out of their way to carefully avoid maximum explicitness, sometimes for artistic reasons, or other times because of censorship and other industrial factors. In *Sex and the Cinema*, and as I outlined in the literature review, Tanya Krzywinska notes that cinema has its very own (typical) lexicon and grammar when it comes to the representation of sexual acts, just like hard-core pornography does. For example, regarding more conservative representations of sex in cinema, Krzywinska highlights the importance of the ellipsis, which 'allows the viewer to project in the gap their own personally tailored fantasy' (2006: 29), and this type of concealment (fade to black or cut-away) is featured most famously, for example, in *Casablanca* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1942), but also in a number

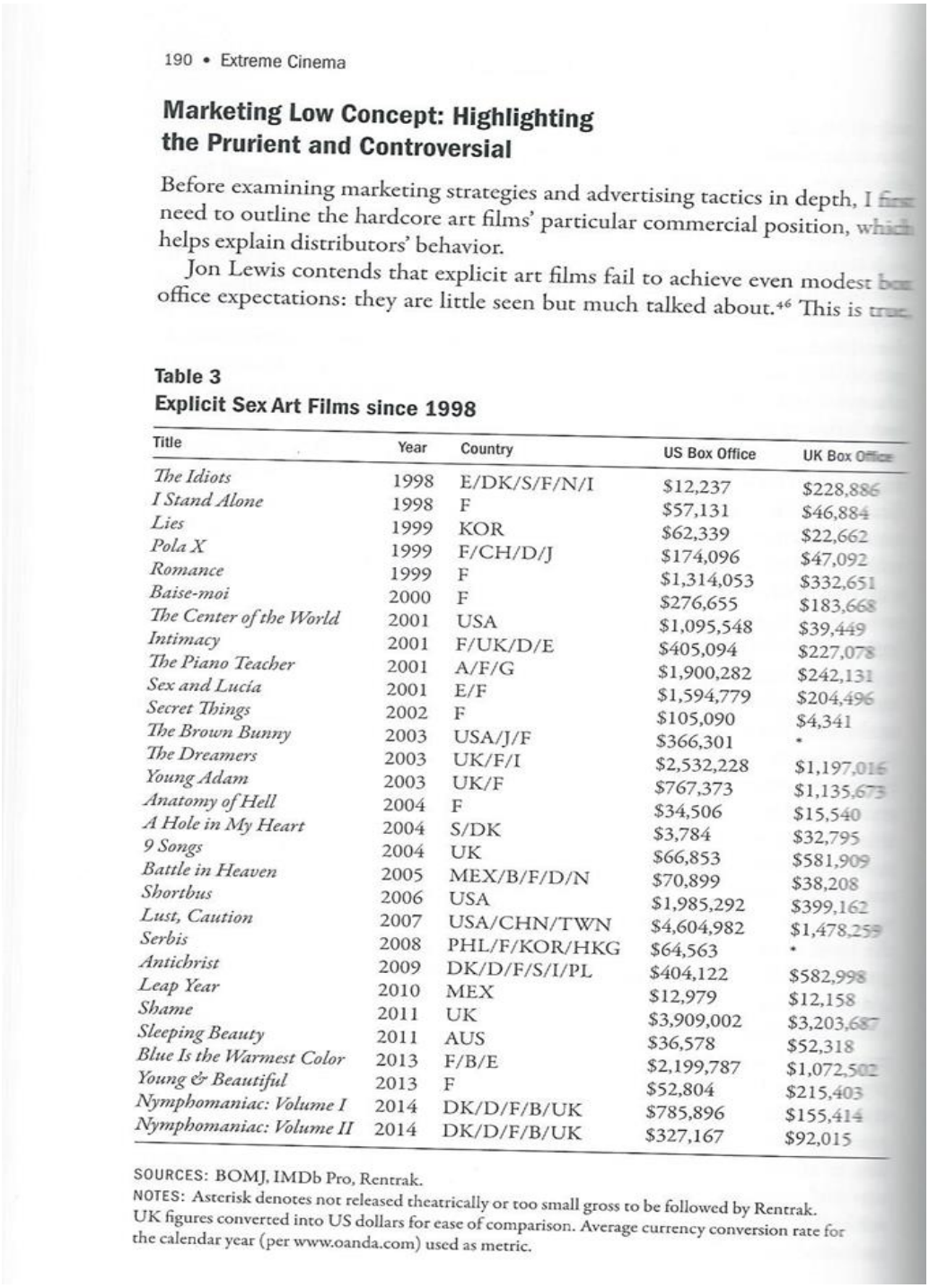
other types of films and genres too.[50] Krzywinska notes also how other depictions of sex in cinema commonly fit two frameworks: idealism and realism. Idealism can usually be discovered in films that represent soft-core sex that showcase 'idealised visual tones' or in the romance genre which provides 'ideological and normative' displays of 'ideal sex, desire and sexuality' (2006: 33 - 34). In contrast to the more idealised aesthetic found in romance films, Krzywinska claims that 'in many films that deploy realist aesthetics, love and romance are either absent… or they operate as unattainable ideals' (41) and this is typically prevalent in 'art films' that have 'intellectual or psychological dimensions' (45). Art-house cinema often uses 'realistic' techniques to also show that sex is a 'physical and problematic business', and that often the more 'realistic' representations of sex have been 'subject to closer censorship' (42), which is unarguably true. Realism, of course, is also a topic that is explored more extensively below.

Cinema, particularly since the 1990s (which Linda Williams identifies as being the period where explicit representations in cinema began to flourish) has also seen some more nuanced representations of sex that aid characterisation and serve to develop plot (Coleman 2016). This is as well as representations of sex in cinema that move in to the pornographic realm because of maximum or near-total explicitness. The films that have occupied or moved in to the 'pornographic realm' through the history of world cinema include (but are certainly not limited to): *In the Realm of the Senses, Romance, Intimacy, 9 Songs, Shortbus,* and now contemporary gay and lesbian films such as *Stranger by the Lake* and *I Want Your Love* (as well as other films included within this thesis such as *BIue Is the Warmest Colour*). The most obvious and striking thing about these films is that they are all independent films or could be classed as 'art cinema'. Since they are all independent films, this means that they are often driven less by commercial success and profit, but by the drive to produce something innovative, artistic or sometimes even transgressive. Independent films are the ones where more graphic representations of sex are apparent, also because most of these productions are not always deterred by 18 or NC-17 certificates, instead they are often embraced or seen as an inevitability. These films can also be broadly classed as what Linda Williams, Tanya Krzywinska and others have called 'Hard-Core Art'.

[50] The rom-com, for instance, typically utilises this strategy; in *27 Dresses* (dir. Anne Fletcher, 2008) there is a passionate kiss in a car before a fade to black. This, quite conservatively, leaves the rest for the spectator's imagination.

Hard-Core Art is a strand of cinema that is unequivocally concerned and interested in sex and sexual relations, yet these concerns and interests are manifested through conventional narratives, which naturally have sex scenes embedded in to them, and these films also make overt comments regarding sex, desire, intimacy, romance and love. Williams states that 'Hard-Core Art' films may be 'aggressive, violent, humiliating, desperate, alienating, tender, loving, playful, joyous, and even boring, but they are art films that emphatically do not shy away from explicit sexual content' (2008: 260). Moreover, Anthony Barker states that sexually explicit 'art films' tend to focus on 'a variety of [sex] acts', which are often dramatically executed, which makes the film 'exploratory rather than exploitative' (2013: 189). David Andrews also notes that art films 'embrace controversial ratings' and often reclaim 'lowbrow content from cult genres that include exploitation and porn' (2013: 89), which often leads to sexually explicit material being analysed and 'treated' differently because it is 'art', rather than an exploitative or erotic spectacle (like a lot of porn usually is).

However, as Mattias Frey identifies in *Extreme Cinema*, there is more to consider when we discuss divisions between Hard-Core Art and Hard-Core Porn. One of these is the fact that a large majority of hard-core art directors rarely have any intention of making the film pornographic, and Frey uses an interview with *9 Songs* director Michael Winterbottom to exemplify this, where Winterbottom states that the film 'isn't pornographic … [it] was an attempt to show two people in a relationship, to show to people making love' (2016: 179). Frey also utilises an interview with the director of *Intimacy*, Patrice Chéreau, who claimed that 'the awareness "of two actors doing their job" was what made the film "much different than pornography"' (2016: 180). In short, and as Frey writes, '[t]he emphasis on labour and preparations, especially common tropes in filmmakers' arguments, aim to distinguish their productions from pornography' (Ibid), as well as issues relating to style, aesthetic, and narrative. It is here I also wish to briefly focus on a table of Explicit Art Films since 1998 (and up until 2014) collated by Frey, which also steers us back on to the topic of gay male cinema and explicit representations of sex. If you study Fig. 6, you will see that there are twenty-nine



190 • Extreme Cinema

Marketing Low Concept: Highlighting the Prurient and Controversial

Before examining marketing strategies and advertising tactics in depth, I first need to outline the hardcore art films' particular commercial position, which helps explain distributors' behavior.

Jon Lewis contends that explicit art films fail to achieve even modest box office expectations: they are little seen but much talked about.[46] This is true.

Table 3
Explicit Sex Art Films since 1998

Title	Year	Country	US Box Office	UK Box Office
The Idiots	1998	E/DK/S/F/N/I	$12,237	$228,886
I Stand Alone	1998	F	$57,131	$46,884
Lies	1999	KOR	$62,339	$22,662
Pola X	1999	F/CH/D/J	$174,096	$47,092
Romance	1999	F	$1,314,053	$332,651
Baise-moi	2000	F	$276,655	$183,668
The Center of the World	2001	USA	$1,095,548	$39,449
Intimacy	2001	F/UK/D/E	$405,094	$227,078
The Piano Teacher	2001	A/F/G	$1,900,282	$242,131
Sex and Lucía	2001	E/F	$1,594,779	$204,496
Secret Things	2002	F	$105,090	$4,341
The Brown Bunny	2003	USA/J/F	$366,301	*
The Dreamers	2003	UK/F/I	$2,532,228	$1,197,016
Young Adam	2003	UK/F	$767,373	$1,135,673
Anatomy of Hell	2004	F	$34,506	$15,540
A Hole in My Heart	2004	S/DK	$3,784	$32,795
9 Songs	2004	UK	$66,853	$581,909
Battle in Heaven	2005	MEX/B/F/D/N	$70,899	$38,208
Shortbus	2006	USA	$1,985,292	$399,162
Lust, Caution	2007	USA/CHN/TWN	$4,604,982	$1,478,259
Serbis	2008	PHL/F/KOR/HKG	$64,563	*
Antichrist	2009	DK/D/F/S/I/PL	$404,122	$582,998
Leap Year	2010	MEX	$12,979	$12,158
Shame	2011	UK	$3,909,002	$3,203,687
Sleeping Beauty	2011	AUS	$36,578	$52,318
Blue Is the Warmest Color	2013	F/B/E	$2,199,787	$1,072,502
Young & Beautiful	2013	F	$52,804	$215,403
Nymphomaniac: Volume I	2014	DK/D/F/B/UK	$785,896	$155,414
Nymphomaniac: Volume II	2014	DK/D/F/B/UK	$327,167	$92,015

SOURCES: BOMJ, IMDb Pro, Rentrak.
NOTES: Asterisk denotes not released theatrically or too small gross to be followed by Rentrak. UK figures converted into US dollars for ease of comparison. Average currency conversion rate for the calendar year (per www.oanda.com) used as metric.

Fig. 6: Mattias Frey's list of 'Explicit Sex Art Films' since 1998

films which Frey identifies as belonging to the category of 'Hard-Core Art'.[51] In the sixteen-year period this table spans, nearly all these films are hetero-centric besides *Shortbus* and *Blue*

[51] He used BOMJ, IMDb Pro, and Rentrak to compile the table.

Is the Warmest Colour, and that most of these films were produced in Denmark, UK, USA, France or Mexico. However, it is remarkable that *IWYL* and *SBTL* are left out since they are films which unapologetically centre on the (sexual) lives and experiences of gay men. Is this because they are not 'art' films? Is it because they are not sexually explicit *enough*? I would argue they are to some extent art films, and they are also just as, if not more, explicit than the other films included within Frey's list.

Yet, while it is certainly important to considers debates around a film's status as being 'mainstream', 'independent', 'art-house', or 'avant-garde' and how these different strands represent sex, rigidly categorising sexually explicit films, and understanding these films through these rigid categories is conservative and reductive (and is something which we are all guilty of at one time or another, even here in this thesis). It is here, then, that I will freeze the debates around the divisions between 'cinema' and 'porn', as it is easy to fall further down the rabbit hole where numerous discourses intersect and contradict each other. This is not to say that I am ignoring certain voices in the field that are not mentioned here, but instead I wanted to consider some alternative viewpoints, while being principally concerned with, for the sake of this chapter, stylistic and narrative strategies that divide porn and cinema. However, what can be taken from all of these discussions is that there are a myriad of diverse elements and factors that separate theatrically-released films (whether they are broadly classed as being 'mainstream' and 'independent') from hard-core porn – and in hetero-centric sexually explicit cinema, the reasons as to why and how the films feature sexually explicit sex has been well charted (see literature review). Sexually explicit gay male sex has not, so it is now, then, that I will move on to fully evidence the first of my two dual arguments.

2. Intertextuality and the Creation of Erotic Hybrids

To demonstrate my argument in this section, I will focus more specifically on the representation of ejaculation in *SBTL* and representations of oral and anal sex in *IWYL*, which also builds upon the above discussion regarding disparities between sex in cinema and sex in hard-core porn. However, before moving on to my detailed analysis, I want to clearly state that I am not suggesting that the filmmakers were *consciously* honouring gay male cultural heritage, or even that it was an overt decision to honour cultural heritage when producing the films. I did not consider interviewing the filmmakers for the sake of this chapter, so therefore I have no solid evidence that the filmmakers presented explicit sex as a nod to the historical relationship between gay male cinema and gay male porn. Yet, even if the directors were not *consciously*

honouring gay male cultural heritage, it does not take away from the fact that these films are erotic hybrids which represent the merging of gay male cinema and gay male porn. These erotic hybrids, then, return to a 'cinematic hard-core' in the realm of gay filmmaking, but at the same time are perhaps not artistic products whose function was to achieve this.

2.1 The 'Cum-Shot' in Stranger by the Lake

Stranger by the Lake's narrative centres on Franck (Pierre Deladonchamps), who after visiting a peaceful and tranquil gay cruising spot almost every day in the summer, falls for the mysterious Michel (Christophe Paou). One day, Franck witnesses Michel drown and kill a man in the lake, yet he does nothing about it. Later on, a police investigator comes to the lake to search for clues surrounding the missing man. While there, he questions both Franck and Michel, to discover if they know anything. We witness Franck lie for Michel, and even though Franck knows Michel is a dangerous and homicidal man, he decides to live out his passions anyway, with the film ending's being firmly ambiguous.

On its release, *Stranger by the Lake* was critically praised as a 'significant contribution to contemporary gay cinema' (Lippe 2014: 70), a 'stunning psychological drama [that] takes place in an atmosphere of frank homoeroticism, utterly without inhibition' (Bradshaw 2014). B. Ruby Rich in 2013 also claimed that the film was 'fascinating' because it took on 'one of the last remaining taboos: full male nudity' and 'raise[d] lots of questions about sexuality and desire' (quoted in an interview, Alexander 2013). Not to disagree with Rich, but *Stranger by the Lake* not only raises a lot of questions about desire, which is somewhat of an understatement, but it explores the very notion of desire as a both an inexplicable feeling but also a force that can eschew ones moral and ethical compass, leading them in to danger.

Stranger by the Lake's narrative, which is based around repetition, tension, sex, danger and desire, closely follows other films within the landscape of contemporary, independent, Western gay and lesbian cinema, adopting an unhurried pace in the form of long takes, slow editing and measured narrative events which creates a sense of 'realism'. While *Stranger by the Lake* focuses on the gay male cruising scene in non-urban France, within a picturesque and peaceful setting, it is debatable as to whether it is a depiction of the modern gay male cruising scene, as time within the film is presented ambiguously, and it is hard to fully know what era this film definitely takes place in. Yet, issues such as time and place are ambiguous in *Stranger by the Lake* to arguably remove the story and the characters away from contemporary LGBTQIA+ politics. Instead, *SBTL* offers a setting that is far away from urban life, far away

from complicated and political issues, and far away from heterosexual norms (but ultimately never too far away from danger). Moreover, just because the film focuses on issues away from contemporary urban life, this does still make important and timely comments about: gay male cruising, gay male sexual activity, and how desires can be dangerous and deadly, but simultaneously over-powering and exciting. The film also presents a shot that is very rarely seen in theatrically-released films: the 'cum shot' (or the 'money shot'). In the analysis that follows it will become clear that because the cum shot is a *decidedly pornographic representation*, and is no longer 'cinematic', therefore its inclusion in *SBTL* affirms my point that the film honours gay male cultural heritage through the merging of conventions familiar to (gay) cinema and (gay) porn.

Within the first ten minutes of *SBTL*, the audience witness the protagonist Franck arriving at the lake, taking a swim, talking to a local visitor of the lake, before attempting to cruise for sex in the nearby woods. He strolls around for a while, attempting to find a man to whom he is sexually attracted to, rejecting a few along the way. After some time, Franck stumbles across Michel, who is involved in a '69' with another man. The camera lingers on both of their faces as they notice each other, and Michel gives Franck a smile before continuing to rim the man he is with. Franck turns around to walk away, and an anonymous middle-aged man stands watching the other two engaged in the '69', touching himself while he gazes. From these opening scenes, the audience have immediately observed an open and liberating gay (sexual) space, and these moments also affirm the fact that the camera does not 'shy away' from displaying flaccid or erect penises either (of all shapes and sizes). A little later on, and after a brief conversation between Franck and Michel, Franck returns to Henri for a chat about his feelings towards Michel, and then enters the woods once again in search for a suitable sexual partner. Franck finally finds a man to have sex with, and this is when the cum-shot is showcased.

The sex scene opens with a mid-shot of the two naked men kissing on the ground, and the sound of sexual moans and groans dominates the diegesis, and we can see Franck's legs being stroked sensually by the other man. The scene then cuts to a shot of the anonymous masturbating man from earlier in the film, this time watching Franck and his partner, and it is suggested that the mid-shot at the start of the scene could have been from his gaze (yet, this is ambiguous). Once they notice him, the men then tell him to go away as he is a distracting presence. Proceeding this, Franck attempts to perform oral sex on to the other man, before realising that neither of them have a condom (here we can feel the post-AIDS consciousness–

"not without a condom", the other man says), and they decide to masturbate each other instead. After the two men have decided this, the scene abruptly cuts to Franck lying on the ground, and instantly we realise he is being masturbated by the other man, and we know this through the sound of moans, groans, but also by Franck's shaking body. The film then cuts to a tight close-up of Franck's face while this happens, conveying the intense pleasure he is enduring through nuanced facial expressions.[52] Franck then utters "I'm coming", and tells the man to kiss him. Commonly, within the majority of theatrically-released films (whether gay or straight, mainstream or independent), the shot of Franck's intense facial expressions and the mere sounds of sexual activity would be explicit enough. Instead, *STBL* takes it up a gear, and just as Franck is about to ejaculate, the camera cuts to a static, close-up shot of his erect penis, ejaculating over his stomach for five seconds, before cutting back to his post-orgasm reaction.

In this mere ten second sequence, the boundaries between cinema and porn are blurred and merged, an extreme blurring of boundaries that is not often present in cinema, particularly within an aboveground gay or queer context.[53] Moreover, it is the cum-shot's place as a *decidedly pornographic representation* that offers a context as to how and why *SBTL* honours gay male cultural heritage, because the 'cum-shot' is one of the defining, archetypal, and phallo-centric elements in heterosexual and gay male porn. The cum-shot in porn also typically marks the end of the feature and the shot concludes the scene(s); sometimes viewers are treated to some cheesy dialogue once the sex is over, but usually once the man is finished, so is the scene. The cum-shot often functions, as Murat Aydemir notes, to make 'masculinity real', and 'visibility, narrativity, and masculinity join together felicitously in the cum-shot' (2004: 298), offering a sense of closure, and therefore it carries narrative purpose. The male cum-shot in porn, then, has very rigid and conventional purposes as it marks the end of the scene, it functions to make masculinity 'real', and it also offers an extremely visible orgasm, as opposed to female orgasm that is often contained inside of the body, which leads to questions surrounding 'authenticity' (see Frith 2015). The explicit and open representation of male ejaculation, then, is a staple and conventional element of hard-core porn, whereas it is firmly *not* a staple or conventional element of cinema. The 'cum shot' is *not* necessarily "cinematic" since it is very rarely displayed in theatrically-released films (probably due to censorship complications), and is instead, arguably, one *marker* of hard-core pornography. This is not to

[52] Typically, these facial close-up functions (within a cinematic framework) to effectively portray sexual pleasure without the need to show the 'hydraulics' of sex, as I also discuss in relation to lesbian sex in chapter three.
[53] This argument can be made for other films too such as *Shortbus* and *Theo & Hugo* as well as those in this case study.

say that explicit shots of ejaculation solely help to define hard-core porn *as being* hard-core porn, but it is to say that the cum shot is a foundational imprint of the film genre, a developed and familiar piece of iconography, just like 'low-key lighting and Gothic design' is in the horror film or 'visual excess' is in the conventional melodrama (Grant 2007: 12).

Furthermore, since the cum-shot has such distinct purposes in porn and is a foundational imprint of the genre, this also leads to some questions: what about when the cum-shot is shown in cinema? What is its role? In *SBTL*, the explicit representation of ejaculation is re-appropriated and is arguably given new meaning. It functions in the case of *SBTL* to blur the boundaries between cinema and porn, transgressively presenting a visible male orgasm but within a cinematic context. However, even though the cum-shot is now given new meaning and purpose insofar that it blurs the boundaries between cinema and porn which honours gay male cultural heritage, its purpose does not completely escape a pornographic context. In *Stranger by the Lake*, the cum-shot does not necessarily function to make masculinity real (it can do, but it does not do it in the same way as porn) but it does conclude the scene (giving it narrative purpose) and it gives a visible representation of orgasmic pleasure – the cum-shot here still acts as a marker of authenticity and performativity, just like it does in porn, as well as representing the deep sexual fulfilment Franck is searching for. Although, just because the representation of ejaculation in *SBTL* does not escape its pornographic context and conventions, this does not degrade the film's status in any way. The fact that *SBTL* not only presents ejaculation in the same vein as hard-core porn, but that it even shares a narrative purpose, furthers the blurring of boundaries.

Additionally, it is interesting to note where some sex scene falls within the narrative of *SBTL*, because there is only one visible cum-shot throughout the film. When Franck and Michel finally have sexual contact, the film shifts from a grapic representation of orgasm to a more artistic and romantic, or, we could day, 'cinematic' depiction. When Franck and Henri begin engaging in oral and masturbatory sex, the scene displays a montage of soothing images, which includes: shots of birds flying, the twilight sky, the calming lake, and while this is happening, we can only see the two men's shadows while they engage in the sexual acts, which creates a mysteriously erotic mood. Even when Franck once again utters "kiss me, I'm gonna come", this time we see nothing. Firstly, this relates to Krzywinska's theory that depending on the context of the sexual act, it is represented through an idealised *or* realistic lens. Before, with the unknown man, Franck was only looking for a "quick fix" and this more realistic portrayal of cruising was met with an explicit representation of orgasm. On the other hand, when Franck

is with Michel, the film instead takes an idealised and romantic approach, switching between quixotic shots of the location and the movements and sounds of the two men. This is also evident in the later, more extended sex scenes between Franck and Michel, where carefully placed cinematography only shows thrusting hips (anal sex), bobbing heads (oral sex), and the 'motions' of sex, much like most representations of sex in cinema.[54] Moreover, this shift away from explicitness to concealment also functions to symbolically suggest that certain sexual desires do not always have to be mediated through a representation of explicit sex, because not even explicit sex on-screen can always communicate the affective nature of utterly intense or taboo desires. However, the film does overtly sentimentalise the sex between Michel and Franck by avoiding the hydraulics of sex and by avoiding ejaculation, instead offering the idea that we cannot see sex between people in love because that would be too 'intrusive' – which is a concept that is explored and critiqued more extensively in chapter four.

Lastly, it is also worth briefly noting how *SBTL*, overall, connects to a national cinematic identity, particularly to what Tim Palmer references as the *cinéma du corps*, one of the defining cinematic movements in French film this century. As I also touch upon in Chapter Three in relation *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, the *cinéma du corps* is one that dissects relations between sex, the body, danger, desire, pleasure and sometimes violence, a trend that provides (and continues to provide) a 'confrontational' cinematic experience (Palmer 2006: 22). *SBTL* is a film that could undoubtedly join the ranks of the *cinéma du corps* due to its graphic portrayal of sex, its 'confrontational' and graphic presentation of ejaculation, and its exploration of the connections between sex, desire, danger and death too (much like other *cinéma du corps* films such as *Baise-Moi*, *Trouble Every Day* and *Irreversible*). Palmer notes that *BITWC* (as I mention in Chapter Three) is a definitive French film (because of its focus on corporeality), and I would apply that sentiment to *SBTL* as well, mainly because of its connection to the *cinéma du corps* and its, at times, confrontational and explicit nature.

This chapter will now move away from ejaculation in *SBTL* to discuss how *IWYL* also blurs the boundaries through shots of oral and anal sex. Proceeding this, I will shift away from this one side of my argument, to consider the extent to which these films offer more 'realistic' representations of gay male sex, which also, arguably, extends 'carnal knowledge' in the cinema.

[54] There is a shot of Michel fingering Franck's anus, but this only lasts a couple of seconds and the act is not fully shown.

2.2. Anal and Oral Sex in I Want Your Love

IWYL is like other films within the landscape of contemporary Western gay and lesbian filmmaking, but for different reasons than *SBTL*, as it is set in an urban space (San Francisco), and the film explores issues surrounding belonging, relationships, intimacy, sex, and the modern neoliberal world. The film centres on Jesse (Jesse Metzger), a thirty-something, gay male performance artist who is on the verge of moving back to Ohio as he cannot afford the big city life anymore. The night before Jesse leaves to return home, his room-mate and other friends throw him a party as a fond farewell gesture. Jesse does not attend the party, but his friends make the most of it and connect in various ways. Jesse's room-mate Wayne (Wayne Bumb) and his boyfriend Ferrin (Ferrin Solano) begin having a threesome with one of their friends, Jorge (Jorge Rodolfo), who is also at the party. This is then cancelled by Jorge, but Wayne and Ferrin decide to make the most of it and have sex with each other anyway (this is discussed in relation to the advancement of carnal knowledge below). At the same time, Jesse's ex-boyfriend Ben (Ben Jasper) has sex with the charming Brontez (Brontez Purnell), and a (romantic) connection begins to spark. While this is happening, Jesse is downstairs in his neighbours' apartment listening to classical music. When his neighbour comes home, they begin to have sex but Jesse stops because it does not feel "right". The film concludes with Ben taking Jesse to the airport, leaving the audience unsure about the fate of Jesse, or the fate of the new and old relationships witnessed throughout the film. *IWYL*, then, presents a somewhat simple narrative, but it is also rendered a self-reflexive mediation on the issues of not only being gay but also being an artist in an increasingly competitive, neo-liberal world, which the film implicitly critiques through its struggling protagonist Jesse.

Moreover, as Jose Arroyo notes in his blog, *IWYL* 'attempt[s] to reclaim feeling and intimacy from a commercial gay culture that teaches us that being gay is about having a particular look … and having sex in particular ways' (2012). *IWYL*, in an attempt to reject commercial gay culture, presents gay men of different races and ethnicities, who all have different jobs, and who all also have different body types. Therefore, as Arroyo states, *IWYL* discards commercial gay culture's promotion of ubiquitous gay male identities, performativities, or images, particularly when it comes to sex. This is because commercial hard-core gay porn promotes specific body types or identities, such as: the boy-next-door, the twink, the daddy, the jock and the beautiful boy (Mercer 2017).

Furthermore, and unlike *SBTL* which gained mass critical praise but grossed a respectable revenue for a foreign-language indie film, *IWYL* had an extremely limited release and its gross revenue is not even listed on Box Office Mojo or IMDb, two easily accessible (but also sometimes flawed) sites that usually hold information regarding both budget and revenue for theatrically released films. *IWYL*, however, has gained some popularity on the internet, or more specifically on porn websites such as PornHub. This is firstly due to the fact that it represents explicit gay sex, and secondly because it was produced by Naked Sword. Naked Sword, which promotes itself as "the Netflix of gay porn", produces and distributes hard-core gay porn, some of which are even listed on IMDb and are primarily directed by Mr. Pam, but its only theatrically-released feature to-date is Mathew's *IWYL*. Moreover, the fact that the film was produced by a porn company does not problematize the argument(s) made throughout this chapter, and in fact it reifies my points, as the film has an overt connection with porn in regard to its production and distribution. However, considering how the film is textually constructed, its narrative, and its distribution, the film is classified more broadly as a cinematic feature rather than a pornographic one, but it is without a doubt an erotic hybrid. This is also the case for other, preceding films such as *Shortbus*, which are filled with explicit representations of mainly heteronormative sex acts, but also gay and BDSM sex acts, yet the film was specifically marketed as a cinematic feature.

Furthermore, in *IWYL*, the explicit representation of sex is taken one step further than *SBTL*, as the film blurs the boundaries between cinema and porn even more considerably. Whereas Linda Williams noted that films such as *Nymph()maniac* and *SBTL* present 'relatively explicit' sex because the depictions sit in-between typical soft and hard core representations (essentially showing more than we usually see in the cinema but not quite as much as porn), *I Want Your Love* complicates Williams' theory with graphic gay male sex that is almost pornographic in nature, but featured within a 'cinematic' narrative. In the film, there are several explicit and/or relatively explicit sex scenes, but to demonstrate how the film *considerably* blurs the boundaries between cinema and porn, I will use a sex scene from the latter end of the film, when Ben and Brontez have sex for the first time.

The scene begins with Ben and Brontez at the party, and after some flirty banter, Ben and Brontez agree, on a whim, to have sex with each other. They then decide that Ben should be the bottom and Brontez should be the top – a conversation that we rarely see in films, or even in porn. The sex scene then opens with a static close-up of the two men kissing up against a wall, which is then followed by Brontez performing oral sex on/to Ben. The act is shown

explicitly as there are close-ups of Ben's flaccid penis in Brontez's mouth.[55] A little later, a friend barges in on the two of them but then quickly leaves; Brontez asks if the sudden distraction will "fuck up" Ben (or more specifically his sexual mood), but Ben continues nonetheless. They kiss some more, before the camera cuts away to a shot of Ben's glasses, and then back to the two of them on the bed, where Ben is now performing oral sex on/to Brontez. At first, the camera lingers on Brontez's reaction as he is enjoying the oral sex (similar to the masturbation scene in *SBTL*), but then cuts to shots that explicitly display the full act, this time in more of a pornographic manner as we can see Brontez's penis in Ben's mouth. This 'openness' continues throughout the scene as the camera, typically through mid-shots or close-ups, lingers on Ben rimming Brontez, Brontez rimming Ben, as well as explicit moments of anal sex, where even shots of the penis penetrating the anus are shown (however, these shots are not close-up like they would be in porn). The scene, interestingly, concludes with a shot of the two of them kissing and laughing, before cutting to Jesse in his neighbours' apartment.

Whereas *SBTL* only *fully* entered the hard-core pornographic realm through its open display of ejaculation, *IWYL* provocatively sits with one foot cemented in porn *and* one foot in cinema. Since the film uses intertextual shots familiar to cinema and hard-core porn, the style of the film does not provide any aesthetic clarification as to what it precisely is, and makes it harder to classify than a film such as *Stranger by the Lake*.[56] Much like Feona Atwood's argument regarding a controversial Opium advert in the year 2000, *I Want Your Love* is a difficult film to neatly categorise 'because of the difficulty of locating it decisively in relation to art, erotica, [or] pornography' (12). Earlier in this chapter I also discussed the notion of Hard-Core Art cinema – and this strand of cinema could arguably include *I Want Your Love*. Yet, as I explore below, *I Want Your Love* offers an aesthetic that strives for realism by capturing the everyday experiences of modern homosexual life, but it is in no way radical, queer or experimental in its aesthetic besides explicit representations of sex, so its place as an 'art' film is ambiguous and debatable. Hypothetically, then, the film could be classed as not being art cinema *or* porn, so *I Want Your Love* occupies a queer and liminal space in regard to

[55] Arguably, the soft cock on-screen has transgressive power since it counteracts heteronormative notions of masculinity as being 'hard' and 'impenetrable', which the hard penis unequivocally signifies. However, the flaccid penis is emblematic of a more vulnerable and softer masculinity, and as So Mayer writes, 'the softness of the soft cock detaches it from binary conceptions of masculinity, making it mobile and gender-fluid, just as the concept of inter-vulnerability and infectiousness renders it a permeable surface rather than a penetrative object' (2017).
[56] I am not trying to suggest that I think the film *should be* categorised, but that it is hard to categorise *in general*.

its representation of gay sex, an erotic hybrid that refuses to be categorised, and one of which honours gay male cultural heritage, perhaps even more so than *Stranger by the Lake*.

Furthermore, *I Want Your Love* is a film that also contradicts Held's argument (outlined above), regarding 'What is and What is not Porn' (2016). Held states that 'it is about the role the sex plays in supporting or furthering the film narrative' (33) that defines a film as 'porn' or 'non-porn', yet the sex in *I Want Your Love* does not particularly evolve the narrative in any substantial way. The sex is used as a catalyst to explore notions of intimacy, desire and love, but never acts a device that offers narrative progression, simply because the film has a very basic narrative anyway. When we witness Ben and Brontez having sex, they are only doing so for fun – the narrative is pushed forward by this scene, but it does not carry any *overwhelming* significance or contribute to any serious character development. Nor, arguably, does it want to. *I Want Your Love* presents a snap-shot of the intimate connections between gay men in modern metropolitan America, where the sex is used to explore notions of love and intimacy, as well as functioning as an erotic and even realistic spectacle. It is a film that consciously traverses boundaries, a cinematic representation of sex that is almost completely pornographic, and *I Want Your Love*'s representation of gay male sex frankly throws the rule book out of the window.

However, the classification of the film is not my principal concern. The mere fact it is difficult to categorise because of its intertextuality means that the film is a queer, erotic hybrid, which is also emblematic of how gay male cinema and gay male porn can not only merge, but how they can be blended so effectively that they return to Siebenand's conceptualisation of 'gay cinema' from the 1970s. The film, as well as *Stranger by the Lake*, honours gay male cultural heritage through the blending of strategies familiar to cinema and porn, but it defies Siebenand's conceptualisation because while they are erotic products, they are *not* films whose sole aim is to 'appeal to the erotic tastes' of homosexual men. Instead, these films organically embed explicit sex acts in to their narratives to not only be transgressive, or to honour cultural heritage, or to turn spectators 'on', but to also make comments about intimacy, desire, and that sex is a pleasurable, fulfilling act in various was. These types of sexually explicit gay male films, then, not only honour gay male cultural heritage but also forge a path for a strand of gay male cinema that takes sex seriously and does not shy away from it – an unapologetic set of films which are erotic hybrids, pushing gay cinema forward and beyond the stereotypical or problematic trappings that shroud representations in mainstream spheres (as explored more in chapter four). These films, through the use of naturalistic filmmaking strategies and increased

explicitness in the representation of sex and sex acts, are likewise striving to offer a more realistic vision of contemporary gay male lives and their sexual activities. This chapter will now move on to the issue of realism, where I will also consider the first sex scene in *120 BPM*, to further argue that these films extend and build on 'carnal knowledge' much like films ranging from *The Graduate* (dir. Mike Nichols, 1967) to *Last Tango in Paris* and *Deep Throat*, as well as gay-themed films such as *Boys in the Sand*, a film that now would be classed as a piece of 'cinematic hard-core' (Mercer 2017).

3. Sex, Realism and Carnal Knowledge

IWYL, as mentioned, uses realist filmmaking strategies (mainly unsteady cinematography and a slower narrative and editing pace) to try and capture modern gay male experiences and lives, as well as their culture(s) and sexual activities. *120 BPM* is not a realist film in the same vein as *I Want Your Love* but includes moments of realism. The film follows members of ACT UP in Paris, who start to defiantly request action by the government as well as pharmaceutical companies to fight the AIDS pandemic in the 1990s. While this is the central plot of the film, *120 BPM* also closely follows the sub-plot (which later becomes more of a central concern) of the characters Sean (Nahuel Pérez Biscayart) and Nathan (Arnaud Valois), who first meet at the ACT-UP assemblies but eventually fall in love, until Sean begins to deteriorate from HIV and eventually, and sadly, dies. Realism is specifically deployed in the ACT UP assembly meetings through an intense focus on discussion and debate, and realist strategies are also utilised in the sex scenes, which makes both instances dialectical and pedagogical. This is because in the ACT UP meetings the audience get to witness arguments, debates and issues being raised by a multitude of people surrounding both HIV medication and activism, which gives audiences the chance to *learn* about the struggles and issues that HIV-infected LGBTQ+ people faced in the past. Moreover, the sex scenes are disruptive and uncoordinated, as well as showing the mechanics of gay male sex. In this section, I will consider how realist strategies create an explicitness that extends carnal knowledge in the cinema, but before I do this, I will delineate Linda Williams' ideas around how cinema in the 1960s and 1970s extended carnal knowledge, to offer some context around the theoretical underpinning of the analysis and discussion below.

3.1 Screening Sex and Carnal Knowledge

In Williams' *Screening Sex*, she considers how 'carnal knowledge' was influenced by representations of sex in cinema throughout the twentieth century, as well as how cinema has

played a part in progressing the public imagination and consciousness regarding sexual desires. Moreover, Williams states that:

> [C]arnal knowledge came to American screens at the end of the Code in some of the same ways in which it comes to the child: in deferred, partial ways, never at the right time, and almost never as a clear revelation. It might seem that the history of screening sex would be one long progression toward a greater revelation of the naked facts of sex. In fact, however, this screening offers a complex dynamic of revelation and concealment. (2008: 72).

Essentially, Williams builds on her argument around the classical Hollywood period, which she labels 'the long adolescence of American cinema' (where the kiss was as explicit as cinema got), to claim that as films became more frank in their representation of sex, the more advanced carnal knowledge became in cinema (and also, arguably, public spheres). However, as the quote above also indicates, the revelation of sex acts are not the only ways in which carnal knowledge can be progressed, and that carnal knowledge in the cinema is complex and dynamic. Moreover, Williams states that 'new forms of carnal knowledge, beyond the kiss, were creeping on to American screens' in the 1960s (2008: 68), and she begins her analysis by focusing on "foreign films" that ushered in this new form of carnal knowledge (such as Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Springs* [1959]), and then turns to 'sex talk' (where words such as vagina, orgy, and virgin were used more often than before) and what she calls 'the Hollywood sexual musical interlude', a method of representing sex through a musical montage that are intercut with various shots that show the movements of sex but not the hydraulics. Williams also highlights sexual representations in the 'sexploitation' and 'blaxploitation' film movements in the last 1960s – 1970s, where films such as *Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song* (dir. Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) offered 'racialized sex and violence', that still never fully 'went all the way' (2008: 93).

Departing, then, from the films that frequently obscured sex acts while also progressing carnal knowledge in the cinema, Williams turns her analysis to those films that went (even) 'further' in the 1970s – *Last Tango in Paris*, *Deep Throat*, and *Boys in the Sand*. She groups these three films together as they all mark a shift in representations of sex on-screen (in cinema, in hetero-porn and in gay male porn) that 'showed more', or in other words, films which either delved more seriously in to sex (*Last Tango*), or films which showed, more graphically, the hydraulics of sexual activity. *Deep Throat*, in particular, was shocking because for the first

time in (some) cinemas there were 'twenty foot erect penises on screens' as well as visible cum shots (126). While *Deep Throat* was an 'aboveground' hard-core porn that brought to the screen cum shots, blow-jobs and large erect penises, a year before it was released *Boys in the Sand* was the first male gay porn to be shown in some 'mainstream' theatres, where such graphic representations of (gay) sex were actually celebrated. *Boys*, as Williams notes, 'anticipated the impact of *Deep Throat* for the narrower but trendsetting and influential emerging gay community', and she claims that '*Boys* had a much greater role in legitimising the graphic sexual imagination of the gay community than *Deep Throat* did in the larger heterosexual mainstream' (2008: 144).

In short, then, Williams posits that as films became more explicit particularly in the 1970s (and also delved more 'seriously' in to sex and the part it plays within the human experience), they had a role in maturing cinema, but also a role in advancing public knowledge around sexual practices and desires, by offering increased visibility of the hydraulics of certain sex acts as well as how sex can affect people's lives. This is alongside, as mentioned, the general maturation of cinema, an institution that was so conservative a kiss was as far as things could go for at least thirty years between the 1930s and 1960s, until '"adult sexual situations" would become the primary reason for watching a film from beginning to end' in the 1960s/1970s and after (2008: 111).

However, between the period when *Boys in the Sand* was released (1971), and the period when films such as *IWYL*, *SBTL* and *120 BPM* were released (2012 – 2017), there are, arguably, hardly any aboveground films that seriously advance carnal knowledge in the cinema regarding gay male sex, perhaps besides the works of Bruce LaBruce or a few other films such as *Taxi Zum Klo* or *Brokeback Mountain*.[57] However, even though I have included these examples, I would argue most of them do not advance carnal knowledge in the same way *120 BPM* or *IWYL* do. In *Brokeback*, a film which Williams claims advanced public acknowledgment of gay anal sex outside of 'the contained world of gay [male] pornography' (2008: 241), does not have any shots that explicitly depict anal sex, oral sex, or masturbation, and instead the representation of gay male sex is rendered somewhat animalistic and primal, as the two men have anal sex with each other with barely any preparation or lubricant. This refers once again to the Williams quote above regarding revelation and concealment, because I am

[57] Although I am not heavily concerned with placing LaBruce's work in co-ordination with categories such as 'mainstream film' or 'independent film' and so on, it could be argued that most of his works are not even aboveground, as most of his works are not even granted limited theatrical releases (and are typically shown at festivals instead).

suggesting that because we do not see any of the hydraulics of sex in *Brokeback*, this means the film's carnal knowledge is limiting. The fact I am suggesting this may seem reductive, however, in the case of more sexually explicit contemporary gay male films, increased explicitness has undoubtedly provided more visibility in to the mechanics and rituals surrounding gay male sex, which has seldom been explored elsewhere in an aboveground context. What I mean by this even more specifically is that these films do not only try to 'realistically' represent sex acts between men, but instead they advance carnal knowledge around the temporality of gay male sex (but also even sex in general), its often disruptive or un-coordinated nature, as well as showing sexual paraphernalia, such as lubricant, which is rarely seen in any aboveground gay-centred film which features sex.

3.2. 120 BPM and the Mechanics of Gay Male Sex

In this section, then, the 'mechanics of gay male sex' does not mean that I am going to be concerned with the hydraulics of anal or oral sex in *120 BPM*, but 'mechanics' instead means the processes that are involved in the preparation of gay male sex, as well as 'awkward' moments which are discarded from other films because they do not seem polished or co-ordinated.

120 BPM is, arguably, one of the most revered and celebrated independent, contemporary queer films. It is queer, and not simply gay, because its focus is not explicitly on gay males but people who identify on a broad scale of genders and sexualities, and this is as well as the fact that the film unapologetically showcases the struggles people endured through the AIDS crisis in Paris in the 1990s. A. O Scott, in his review of the film for *The New York Times*, wrote that 'the point of "*BPM*," and of the movement and moment it reconstructs, is that the personal and political passions can't be easily disentangled … [t]he erotic scenes are dialectical as well as hot; the meetings have a wanton, feverish energy' (2017). Firstly, through *120 BPM*'s focus on the political energies of ACT UP, as well as the personal and intimate relationship that develops between Sean and Nathan, the film unequivocally aligns the personal with the political, as Scott states. It does this to explicitly show how wider politics concerns, in this case the lack of medicine available for HIV/AIDS patients, can effect personal lives and relationships, suggesting that it is not as simple as saying that the AIDS crisis simply killed many innocent people, but instead that it also robbed them of the chance to be in love, or to have ordinary jobs, or to be respected citizens of society and so on. The personal is undoubtedly political in *120 BPM*, and the film comes at a time when gay and lesbian films (particularly

mainstream ones) are beginning to move away from this sentiment, to *only* explore 'personal' issues.

The first sex scene in *120 BPM*, which is between Sean and Nathan, occurs forty-four minutes in to the film, and follows on from a scene where the ACT UP group are partying and dancing in a nightclub. The film then blurs the two moments together to economically shift from the dance-floor to the bedroom, where we witness a five-minute scene which undoubtedly advances carnal knowledge in the cinema. It begins with Nathan and Sean kissing in a bedroom, to which they then both fall on the bed and begin to undo their belts and take off their jeans and underwear. Sean then lies down and Nathan climbs on top of him, where they passionately kiss before Nathan starts to move down Sean's body to give him oral sex. Sean stops him as he gets half-way though, stating that he "prefers it with a condom". Nathan then asks him "need or want?", and while Sean reaches for a condom, they proceed to shortly discuss the need for a condom in this moment (Sean says it is "too risky" without one). They then kiss some more, before Nathan places the condom on to Sean's penis (the camera is carefully positioned behind Nathan, so we do not see this actually happening), and then Nathan proceeds to perform oral sex. After a few seconds, Sean reaches over to grab a condom, rips the packet with his teeth and then places it on to Nathan's penis. Sean then begins to suck Nathan's penis, and they engage in a quite awkwardly positioned '69'. Sean then lies back to enjoy Nathan's blowjob, and the camera lingers on Sean until orgasm (and throughout these moments sucking noises are clear and audible, which adds to the realism of the scene). Not being selfish, Sean then reaches over to "return the favour" and carries on giving Nathan oral sex, until Nathan says "hold on, I can't", and then explains he cannot orgasm from oral sex while wearing a condom. Sean then kisses Nathan, and Nathan asks Sean who the picture of a woman on his wall is, to which Sean explains it is his mother. Sean then explains how he contracted HIV from his school maths teacher, and while talking about it some more, Nathan slowly moves down his body, and starts to kiss Sean's buttocks. The camera then lingers on a shot of Sean's slightly parted buttocks while he is in the doggy-style position, and then Nathan begins to penetrate him (we very quickly witness his penis entering Sean's anus, but the scene then cuts to a shot of Nathan's face). Sean's bed-side alarm then sirens, telling him it is 2:00am, and he proceeds to take some medication. The two then stop having sex and talk more about Sean's HIV status and how it was harder to know in the past about the dangers of STIs. Sean then climbs on top of Nathan to resume the sex, and they start by kissing again. Sean rips another condom packet open and places it on Nathan's penis, and then reaches over to grab some lubricant – he then

squirts some in to his hand and rubs it on himself and Nathan's penis (this is inferred, as the camera does not quite show everything). As Nathan's penis enters Sean, they both gently sigh in delight, and then the scene intercuts shots of Sean's back as well as close ups of the two kissing, while Sean takes control. The intensity then increases when Nathan flips Sean over to fuck him in the missionary position; Sean gently moans while this happens, and Nathan then becomes a bit gentler. The sex is then concluded with mainly close-up shots of the two men's faces while Nathan climaxes. The two then smile at each other and gaze in to each other's eyes, before Sean asks Nathan if he is his "first poz" sexual partner, to which Nathan laughs and says that Sean is "the first to tell him" of his sexual status. The scene then continues with Nathan explaining some of his sexual escapades to Sean, specifically one that involves an older man.

It is probably clear from this scene description that *120 BPM* includes moments of awkwardness, moments of tenderness, moments of un-coordination, and moments of intensity. It is not an 'economical' sex scene whereby the characters easily have anal sex with no protection or lubricant, or perform sex acts on to each other in a perfectly co-ordinated or polished manner.[58] Moreover, I label this more 'realistic' representation of gay male sex as un-economical because, typically, aboveground films essentially cut to the 'action' as quick as possible, with no conversation during the sex, no stopping and starting, and usually no sight of lubricant. Personally, I have always been frustrated at how gay-centred films which feature any kind of sex often avoid the nuances of the acts and their often-disruptive natures. Gay male sex is often equated to heterosexual, vaginal sex in cinema because anal sex in particular is commonly represented as something gay men can just 'do', without the need for preparation, douching or anal stretching. For example, in the British film *God's Own Country*, we witness one of the protagonists have sex near the beginning of the film, but this is simply represented as a quick sexual encounter where the two men spontaneously have anal sex with each other with no prep from the bottom. This is almost the same in *Brokeback Mountain* when Ennis penetrates Jack in a rough, aggressive manner in the "tent scene", and for a man who may never have had anal sex before, Jack takes it pretty well!

What I hope this brings to light is the idea that cinema a) often idealises gay male sex as something that is akin to heterosexual sex in terms of preparation or performativity, and b) often represents it as being spontaneous and easily achievable. In fact, and for most gay men, it is very different in real life. Gay male bottoms or gay men who identify as being sexually

[58] On my first viewing of the film, I audibly announced "finally, some actual lubricant in a gay sex scene!".

versatile should always clean their anuses before having penetrative sex (unless they are engaging in more transgressive acts, such as 'pig sex' which is predicated on dirt and uncleanliness); should probably "warm up" their anuses first with sex toys or rimming; it is highly advisable that lots of lubricant or saliva should be used for penetration; as well as the need for the top to wear a condom to protect any STIs being transmitted. These important acts, ones which relate closely to hygiene and protection, are as I mentioned briefly above, often quite disruptive and do not allow for wonderfully synchronised or even spontaneous sex. While there are no moments or shots, for instance, of Sean douching, to see characters using lubricant, using condoms, and speaking to each other about non-sexual things while engaged in sex, advances carnal knowledge in the cinema because very rarely has this ever been depicted, even though the majority of gay men know full well the practises and rituals surrounding anal sex. This scene offers a more realistic vision of gay male sex, as not something that is like vaginal sex, but as a sex act that has its very own rituals and practises, which are seldom given screen time.

Moreover, in Gary Needham's analysis of *Brokeback Mountain*, he writes about cruising as a mode of 'gay spectatorship', where he 'examines interrelationships between gay male cruising, spectatorship and editing, and presents an argument based around a shot/reverse shot structure', stating that 'these shots refer to Jack and Ennis's first encounter and the way they are presented may strike a chord of recognition with the gay spectator because it resembles cruising' (2010: 6). While Needham's analysis of this shot/reverse shot sequence is slightly subjective and takes for granted the idea that gay male spectators have themselves been cruising, the overall idea is that in gay-themed film, there may be extremely specific moments which 'strike a chord of recognition for gay male spectators' only. I would argue that *120 BPM*'s sex scene operates in a very similar manner. While the film presents a more realistic and nuanced sex scene which delves more closely in to the mechanics and rituals of gay male sex, this realism likewise presents gay male spectators with more 'recognisable' sexual practises, which have very rarely been explored and represented in such a frank and unapologetic manner within a theatrically-released film.

3.3. Extending Carnal Knowledge in I Want Your Love

Awkwardness and un-coordination, two themes I highlighted in my above analysis of *120 BPM*, are some of the central methods in which *IWYL* also advances carnal knowledge surrounding gay male sex in the cinema. Moreover, it could also be argued that by focusing on

awkwardness and un-coordination, this not only advances carnal knowledge surround gay male sex, but sex in general, as an act that is not often perfectly co-ordinated or synchronised in reality.

As quoted above, Jose Arroyo notes that *I Want Your Love* 'attempt[s] to reclaim feeling and intimacy from a commercial gay culture that teaches us that being gay is about having a particular look … and having sex in particular ways' (2012). The 'particular ways' of having sex that Arroyo identifies, would fit closely with my discussions above, as gay male sex in cinema, as well as in hard-core porn, is often framed and represented as perfectly co-ordinated and synchronised, and often without the need for douching, lubricant, anal stretching or anal preparation. This is as well as the fact that 'commercial gay culture' continues to circulate specific body types and images, so visions of gay male sex are mediated through a lens that prioritises beautiful faces, toned bodies, big penises, and idealised personalities and features, as well as prioritising white bodies and fetishizing people of colour (see Mercer 2017). This is countered in *IWYL* as the film features gay men who are slim, overweight, and 'average' built; men who have big penises, average penises and small penises; as well as men from a range of backgrounds, races and ethnicities. The inclusion of a variety of men who counter commercial gay culture's promotion of ubiquitous identities, could be seen as both advancing carnal knowledge in the cinema but also forging a path for more multi-faceted and nuanced depictions of gay men, their lives, and their sexual activities. Moreover, I will now focus on the sex scene between Ferrin and Wayne (an established gay couple in the film) to demonstrate just one of the ways *IWYL* frames sex as being un-coordinated and disruptive.

The sex scene between Ferrin and Wayne begins as a three-some with one of their friends, Jorge, with Ferrin saying that the proposed three-some "does not feel spontaneous", to which he then giggles awkwardly and drinks some of his beer. Jorge then suggests that Ferrin tells him and Wayne what he would like "done to him", to which Ferrin then asks Jorge to remove Wayne's t-shirt. After Jorge does this, Ferrin tells Jorge and Wayne not to kiss, but instead that Jorge should "eat" Wayne's armpits. Jorge then asks Ferrin if he can take his shirt off (to which he does), and then Wayne wipes his nose and proceeds to put his left arm in the air, ready for Jorge to "eat" his armpits. The camera then cuts to a close up of Jorge forcibly licking and kissing Wayne's armpit, while Ferrin watches. Wayne then suggests Jorge "try the other arm", and without any further prompt Jorge begins to "eat" Wayne's other armpit. Jorge then stops, and kisses Ferrin on the lips, but after a few seconds Ferrin laughs and says "all I can taste is B.O [body odour] on your lips". They then kiss some more while Wayne watches.

The scene then cuts-away to the party, and we return to the three-some two minutes later, where Jorge lays naked while Ferrin performs oral sex on him and Wayne lays next to him kissing his body. Ferrin then watches the two other men kiss, and a close-up tracking shot moves from his face down to explicitly show him masturbating his hard penis. Ferrin then leans over to kiss both men, but after him and Wayne kiss quite passionately, Jorge announces that he is going to go and dance, Wayne then asks him if he is sure, Jorge answers yes and kisses Wayne.

The film then cuts to Ben and Brontez dancing at the party and their sex scene, and we return to Ferrin and Wayne's sex scene three minutes later. We return in this scene to witness Wayne quite roughly fucking Ferrin, to which Ferrin is also masturbating his erect penis while this is happening. The scene then intercuts shots of Wayne's face while he is enjoying the sex, and Ferrin's too, before Wayne moves his body closer to Ferrin's. Ferrin then asks Wayne to go a bit slower, to which Wayne does, and then the scene cuts again to Ben and Brontez. When it cuts back again, Wayne tells Ferrin he loves him (and Ferrin replies "I love you too"), and then in an extremely visible and explicit manner, we witness Ferrin ejaculate over his stomach while Wayne continues to fuck him. They both then start giggling as some of the ejaculate had landed on Wayne, and the scene then cuts to show Wayne masturbating himself while Ferrin licks his nipples. Wayne then ejaculates, and as he does, both of them start to aggressively laugh again. The scene then ends with the two of them laughing and cuddling each other.

There are a few comments I would like to make about these sex sequences and how they advance carnal knowledge. Firstly, the fact that the scene cuts away on three occasions to show us what other characters are doing, is emblematic of how sex itself can be disruptive, non-linear, and disorderly. This editing technique serves to show the audience what else is happening at the party, but it also serves to advance the sex between the characters in the bedroom, as when we cut away and then cut back, new sexual activities are happening (which means this is also an economical way of representing sex, as it does not need to be one long sequence). The scene starts somewhat awkwardly as the characters are unsure what to do, and after no penetrative sex has occurred, Jorge decides to leave – which, again, is figurative of how sex is not an act that needs to end with an orgasm, but is one that is malleable and fluid, where people can come and go as they please without any orgasmic imperatives. This scene is also unafraid of showing the set-up of the threesome as something quite awkward and clunky, not as something that magically and naturally synchronies, as most idealistic representations of sex would have viewers believe.

The second comment is in relation to Ferrin's orgasm. In all the instances of explicit gay male sex I have researched and discovered, *IWYL* is about the only 'cinematic' film to ever graphically depict a bottom ejaculating while they are being fucked. The scene also takes the time to show Wayne achieving orgasm, and the inclusion of two separate instances of male orgasm demonstrates, once again, the diverse nature of gay male sex. It is diverse because the scene does *not* a) only show the 'top' orgasming, b) only shows the 'top' orgasming while fucking his partner, and c) that the bottom must be the one who gives the top an orgasm (since Wayne masturbates himself). By not doing these three things, the film shows, instead, the diversity of the orgasmic imperative, which in turn also shows how gay men enjoy orgasming in different scenarios. The dominant idea in hard-core porn is that men want to either ejaculate inside of a person (either in their mouth, anus or in hetero-porn their vagina) or they will ejaculate on their partner's body (as I discussed above in relation to *SBTL*). Instead, this scene shows, which I have not seen in any other aboveground film, a bottom ejaculating while receiving anal sex (which gay male viewers will probably know is not uncommon) and that the top, a figure who typically signifies dominance, makes himself orgasm. While John Mercer states that gay male hard-core porn has been defying the top = active, bottom = passive dichotomy for quite some time (2017: 67), this is not always the case in aboveground films. Therefore, these two separate representations of orgasm carry significance since they push knowledge outside of dominant notions of, for example, bottoms making tops cum, or of the selfishness of 'tops'.

Lastly, while I would argue that a film such as *IWYL* takes sex seriously due to its more nuanced and realistic representation of gay male sex, it also at the same time shows that sex itself does not always have to be *serious*. Most of the sex in both hard-core porn and (mainstream and independent) cinema sex is represented in a variety of ways, but the most common theme that threads the majority of representations of sex together is that they are almost always intensely pleasurable, passionate or romantic acts. While I am aware I am painting broad brush strokes with some of these remarks, it is evident through my literature survey (both in the review chapter but also here too) that sex is often framed as being serious – or as about achieving a certain level of pleasure – or as a physical manifestation of either (or all of) romance/desire/love. Instead, the scene between Ferrin and Wayne demonstrates that (not only gay male) sex can be fun, and it can contain moments of laughter and of silliness, which in turn does not detract from the erotic activities that the characters are enjoying. Much like the discussions in *120 BPM*'s sex scene, these moments and representations function to

show that sex is not linear, orderly, or co-ordinated, but instead it is diverse, non-linear and at times serious *and* silly.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, this chapter has highlighted and interrogated the nuances and functions of explicit gay male sex in two contemporary French films and one contemporary film from the USA. This chapter has demonstrated how films such as *SBTL* and *IWYL* honour gay male cultural heritage through intertextuality (namely explicit shots of ejaculation, oral sex and anal sex) which renders the films erotic hybrids, which in some ways returns to, but also counters, earlier ideas around what constituted 'gay cinema'. Moreover, the second part of this chapter demonstrated how increased explicitness contributes to the idea of 'realism' within the films *IWYL* and *120 BPM*, but more importantly this section established that more 'realistic' and explicit representations of the mechanics of gay male sex (as well as its fluid, awkward, and non-linear nature) extends carnal knowledge surrounding gay sex in the cinema. These films, overall (as well as *SBTL*), are emblematic of a shift within contemporary, independent French and North American cinemas that take gay male sex *seriously*. These films not only honour a cultural heritage and extend carnal knowledge in the cinema, but they arguably offer gay male (and of course other spectators) more nuanced and realistic visions of gay male sex than a lot of cinema previously provided, pushing the boundaries of expectation, taste, and acceptance all in the name of authenticity and even "progression".[59]

[59] Note here that I am not myself overtly stating that these films are 'authentic' but that their increased explicitness functions to *progress* representations of gay male sex *away* from previous depictions which were either coy, unrealistic or highly problematic.

Chapter Three:

'Aesthetically Problematic but Narratively Imperative': Heterosexualisation, Narrative and Character Development in Sexually Explicit Lesbian Films

This chapter is exclusively concerned with sexually explicit lesbian-themed films, more specifically *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* (*BITWC*) and *Below Her Mouth*. This chapter argues that, typically, (relatively) explicit sex in lesbian-themed French and North American films is *aesthetically problematic but narratively imperative*. This chapter, then, will be split in to two halves: the first half will delineate the contexts and controversies surrounding both films' representation of sex (which also includes some discussions around this topic from academics in the fields of Film and Porn Studies),[60] as well as analysing how *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* are *aesthetically problematic*, in relation to both formal film style but also corporeal and bodily aesthetic. While other scholars and critics have focused on objectification and fetishization in relation to the films (but lesbian sex on-screen more broadly), this chapter pushes these discourses forward to argue that the characters are also heterosexualised through corporeality (bodily aesthetic) and the positionality of the sex act 'scissoring', especially in *Below Her Mouth*. However, the exact role and function sex plays within narratives centred on the lesbian sexual experience is often ignored by other academics, so the second half of this chapter switches focus solely to the narratives of the films. Here, this section reveals how sex in both films is used as a rite of passage, and therefore sex is placed within both of the films' plots to suggest that sex is crucial for character development and for the formation of a non-heterosexual identity, as well as signifying 'growing up' (in *BITWC*), which makes the sex acts within the films *narratively imperative*. Alongside this, this section also considers to what extent the narrative imperative is sex-positive. Essentially, the chapter posits that while aesthetic, bodily, and stylistic issues are prevalent and certainly important to address, these lesbian-themed films are also more nuanced in their messages about sex than they perhaps seem at face-value.

1. Contexts and Controversies

[60] The politics of representation in relation to sex and lesbian cinema has always been bound to issues of the male gaze, authenticity and performative acts such as 'scissoring'.

BITWC and *Below Her Mouth* are films that, just like the sexually-explicit gay male films included in chapter two, recognise and challenge the boundaries between hard-core porn and cinema. This is because they both include sex scenes that are lengthier and more explicit than a large majority of theatrically-released films (*BITWC*'s seven-minute sex scene is particularly long, while there are a three four-to-five minute sex scenes in *Below Her Mouth*), and in the case of *BITWC*, it often places the spectator very close to the characters and the sex they are engaging, through certain stylistic strategies such as the close up (which is discussed more in detail below). The films, because of this, have been accused of being 'pornographic', and as Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti note in relation to *BITWC*, 'some critics argued that if it were not for the sex being simulated and significant to the plot, the scenes could be considered pornographic' (2016: 556).[61]

Moreover, in late 2012 – early 2013 *BITWC* was released world-wide and proceeded to win the FIPRESCI Prize and the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2013 and was also nominated as Best Foreign Language Film at both the 2014 Golden Globes and BAFTAs. This meant the film received a significant amount of attention, praise and criticism, perhaps the most out of all the films included in chapters two and three. As Clara Bradbury-Rance also notes, *BITWC*'s 'triumph at Cannes marked an international landmark in lesbian cinematic history … [it] also signalled a point of convergence between screen visibility and political progress; in the same week, gay marriage was legalised in France' (2019: 98). The film follows the story of Adèle (the French title of the film is actually *La Vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 &* 2) and charters her coming-of-age (from her encounters with a boy then to a woman), devoting a majority of the narrative to her love affair with Emma (Léa Seydoux) and eventually their break-up. The film then switches to show audiences Adèle's life as a primary school teacher post-Emma, concluding with a 'heart-stoppingly ambiguous' ending which sees the two of them part ways (Bradshaw 2013).

BITWC likewise achieved a decent world-wide gross at the box office ($2,199,787 world-wide), and garnered praise from critics across the globe. Peter Bradshaw labelled *BITWC* an 'outstanding film' (2013), Michael Phillips wrote that it was 'one of the necessary films of 2013' (2013),[62] and Jessica Kiang claimed it was 'a masterpiece of human warmth, empathy and generosity, because in a mere three hours, it gives you a whole new life to have lived' (2013). Besides praise and admiration, another feature of nearly all the reviews (as well as a

[61] Once again narrative plays an important part in the 'purpose' of sex in a film, as I have also outlined elsewhere.
[62] Phillips use of 'necessary' is somewhat ambiguous.

topic brought up whenever I have discussed the film with people) is the sex scenes in the film – not only did they cause controversy but also sparked a polarised debate around the objectification and fetishization of the female body. Tim Palmer also notes in his chapter 'Fine Arts and Ugly Arts*: Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and Abdellatif Kechiche's Corporeal State of the Nation' (2017),[63] that the film's 'final reckoning was schizophrenically divergent – two caps touting Kechiche as either a lyrical master or a leering monster' (4). Ian Freer, for example, (writing for *Empire* magazine) noted that the 'lengthy graphic bedroom scene…melts the barriers between love and sex [and] it is untethered, unembarrassed and joyful' (2013), while, on the other hand, Manohla Dargis forcibly stated that '"*BITWC*" isn't a blue movie; it's just a formally standard example of European art cinema that comes with the usual ambitions, pleasure and art included', and that the main character Adèle's '[sexual] hunger is contained, prettified, aestheticized' (2013). *BITWC*'s representation of sex, then, provoked a divided debate around the stylistic representation and framing of lesbian sexual practices, in aboveground cinema in general, alongside whether the sex acts were 'realistic' to spectators or not.[64]

Additionally, *BITWC* is also controversial not only because of the stylistic framing of the sex acts, but also because of the conditions under which the film was made. The director, Abdellatif Kechiche, was reported to make the two lead women Adèle Exarchopoulos and Léa Seydoux wear fake vaginas during the sex scenes, and he 'ranted and raved at them as he sought to achieve optimum realism during the production' which included a ten day shoot for the sex scenes, and in a later fight scene where Emma slaps Adèle, he 'refused to allow his stars to simulate blows' (Childs 2013). For Kechiche, this partially tainted the film to the point that he said it should not be released because it had been '"sullied" by controversy' (Romney 2013). Yet, some academics, such as Palmer, claim that Kechiche's effort for realism was 'uncompromising to the point of defiance' (2017: 5), but this defiance also borders on being both immoral and unethical. This para-textual information likewise led (particularly) feminist critics and scholars to consider the extent in which the two women in the film are sexualised, objectified and fetishized through the 'male gaze' (Mulvey 1975). One of these critics, who I mentioned above, was Manohla Dargis, but also the creator of the graphic novel which *BITWC* was adapted from, Julie Maroh. Maroh, in a piece written for her own website, stated that the sex scenes in *BITWC* were visually bias because of Kechiche's male gaze, and that the sex is a

[63] Which I will refer to and interrogate throughout this chapter.
[64] And whether or not they fit in to a wider trend of sexual explicitness which is conventional of, as Manohla Dargis points out, 'European art cinema' in general.

'brutal and surgical display' (2013). *BITWC*, then, both in and outside of the text itself, is a rich and interesting film to explore, one that is bound up in controversy and ambivalence, a film that presents several issues in relation to lesbian identity, sex and pleasure (Bradbury-Rance 2019).

Moreover, Tim Palmer also suggests that *BITWC* connects to a sense of a national cinema identity, much like the *cinéma du corps* has since the early 2000s (as referenced in the introduction). He writes that 'the social contexts Kechiche applies on-screen … are concomitantly afflicted by the institutional and cultural situations of France herself', and that the film is a 'decisively French case study, a poignant distillation of what France's cinema has to offer' (2017: 5). *BITWC* is a decisive French case study, in Palmer's view, mainly because of its intense focus on corporeality (in and out of the sex scenes), as contemporary French cinema is, again in Palmer's view, a graphically 'corporeal cinema' (2017: 4). *BITWC* is, somewhat obviously, 'graphically corporeal' due to its intense focus on sex acts and bodily movements, as well as close-ups of mouths and other body parts that permeate the film even outside of the sex. These bodily foci within the film explicitly connects them to a national cinematic identity where sex is not only represented as more explicit, but is also part of a filmic dissection of the relations between sex, pleasure, danger, violence and corporeality, as expressed in the earlier days of the *cinéma du corps*, and then extended and queered within films such as *BITWC*. While *BITWC* does not explore specific connections between sex, danger and violence (like *SBTL* does), its 'graphic corporeality' means it firmly fixes itself to a national and cinematic 'identity' where the body (and pleasure) is centralised, scrutinized, dissected, and, in some cases, celebrated.

Furthermore, *Below Her Mouth*, unlike *BITWC*, has not received as much critical or even informal reception, as it was only granted a very short theatrical release, and was circulated around festivals such as the Toronto International Film Festival, the Mar del Plata Film Festival (Argentina) and the Göteborg Film Festival (Sweden).[65] However, in 2017 *Below Her Mouth* was released on both US and UK Netflix, and this is where it gained more attention from critics and audiences. While still limited because of its indie status, this viewing platform allowed the film to be released and viewed by a wider, mixed audience (Netflix account holders), and Netflix proved to be a welcome home for the film, considering it could not gain

[65] As you may notice, these film festivals are not dedicated LGBTQ+ festivals, and instead the film was shown to mixed audiences at more general festivals, which could indicate gay, lesbian and queer cinema's continued ability to transcend the art house or dedicated queer festivals.

a wider theatrical release. The film is centred on fashion editor Jasmine (Natalie Krill), who seems to have everything she wants in her life with a nice home and a boyfriend. However, when Jasmine unexpectedly meets a female roofer, Dallas (Erika Linder), an infatuation soon leads to a passionate relationship. However, Jasmine must decide whether she wants to leave her 'normal' life for the unpredictable Dallas, because she would "throw away everything" if she did.

Unlike *BITWC* which was critically lauded, *Below Her Mouth* has received mainly poor reviews. For instance, Guy Lodge writing for *Variety* noted that the film is 'sexually frank but narratively flimsy' (2016) and Katie Walsh for the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that the film lacked 'character development… [and] is more X-rated, late-night cable skin flick than trenchant exploration of female sexuality' (2016).[66] However, while *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* received different levels of critical reception, what they do have in common is they were (or still are) criticised for the way in which they represent lesbian sex, particularly because the films are a) (relatively) explicit and b) depict what are thought of as 'inauthentic' sex acts such as scissoring. This half of the chapter will now shift to demonstrate, in more depth, how both films are *aesthetically problematic*. The main theme here will centre on corporeality and 'heterosexualisation', as well as how the films, especially *BITWC*, objectifies and fetishizes the female body.

2. Aesthetically Problematic: Heterosexualisation (and Objectification / Fetishization)[67]

As is clear from the discussions above, both *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* are particularly bound to (political) discourses around the representation of both the female body and the depiction of female and/or lesbian sex/pleasure/desire. This is alongside the issue that *BITWC* offers a 'male gaze' on both the female body and on lesbian sex. The use of 'male gaze' relates to Laura Mulvey's path-breaking essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). Mulvey's theory mainly posits that Classical Hollywood cinema framed women as 'objects'

[66] Walsh's comment is interesting that the film does not offer 'character development', because I will reveal later that it quite frankly does.

[67] Heterosexualisation is, I would argue, an active process whereby ideologies and ideals linked to heterosexuality are dispersed, preserved and proliferated through dominant discourses in society and culture. Heterosexualisation, then, is ultimately best understood as a verb, so therefore one can heterosexualise something or someone. This process often involves changing or altering something or someone to fit in to a more heterosexual ideal, image or form. Heterosexualisation can also be seen as the active process that creates heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, in essence, is about creating and making heterosexuality 'invisible' (much like whiteness – see Dyer 1997) and natural, and if we understand heteronormativity as an end product (normativity being defined as heterosexuality, and vice versa), heterosexualisation is the process that can aid the creation of such a product.

who are exposed to the sadistic, subjective male gaze (with male gaze meaning both the heterosexual male protagonist on-screen, and heterosexual male spectator). Mulvey writes that 'unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order' (1975: 8), and the objectification and fetishization of women was achieved through women's coded *to-be-looked-at-ness*, which often came in the form of film's freezing the narrative action, momentarily, to show the female form in all its glory. Therefore, the objectifying cinematography had no exact purpose within a film's plot besides showing the female body as an erotic site for the consumption of the male protagonist and spectator.

However, regarding notions of the 'gaze', *Below Her Mouth* offers a somewhat tricky interjection in to the debates surrounding lesbian sex, representation and authorship, primarily because it is directed by the female filmmaker April Mullen, and not only this, but according to IMDb, the film was produced by an all-female crew. While it would be too problematic to suggest that when women direct women they should produce more nuanced (or even "progressive") representations of gender and/or sexuality, what would be fair to say is that the criticism levelled at both *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*, two films directed and produced by men *and* women, is still based around issues such as the gaze, 'authenticity', objectification, and fetishization.

Moreover, this kind of criticism that *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* received is also often evident in feminist assessments of what some have called 'ersatz lesbian pornography', a sub-genre that is often produced for, and by, straight men (Morrison & Tallack 2005). Ersatz lesbian porn, or as Morrison & Tallack also call it 'Male-Created Pseudo-Lesbian Porn', often includes girl-girl action between women who more often than not do not identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer, and whose bodies are characteristic of the societal ideal for heterosexual women ("beautiful" and "feminine" faces, flat stomachs, large breasts, large buttocks). This is also alongside the idea that the sub-genre typically produces portrayals of (pseudo)lesbian sex that, according to Morrison & Tallack, 'lacks verisimilitude' and often fails to 'evince intimacy or emotion' (2005: 12 – 14). In a controlled study group, Morrison & Tallack screened an ersatz lesbian feature-length porn to seventeen lesbian and bisexual women, as well as a lesbian porn feature which is seen to be more 'authentic' - *Simply Sex: How to Find Pleasure without a Man* (2001).[68] One of the central aims of the research was to discover if the women found the ersatz lesbian porn 'offensive, erotic or boring' (2005: 8). Overall, the women were able to easily

[68] The ersatz lesbian porn was *Lesbian Cheerleader Squad 2* (2000).

differentiate between the two types of porn, and the women found that the ersatz lesbian porn was obsessed with penetration, depicted idealised bodies, and there was an absence of 'intimacy or sensuality' (22). This absence is furthered by the fact that these types of porn often offer artificial representations of sex that lacks diversity and authentic visibility, both through the sex acts themselves but also the bodies of the performers. Furthermore, depictions of 'lesbians' in ersatz lesbian porn are often constructed by heterosexual men who aim to simply fetishize the female body, for those images to then be consumed by those who do not identify with the bodies on screen (lesbian/bisexual/queer women), but those who want to sexualise and objectify such bodies instead (mainly straight men).[69]

Consequently, then, these types of representations tend to, as Cindy Jenefsky and Diane Helene Miller argue in relation to print porn, span a 'spectrum of heterosexualisation' (1999: 376). In their article, Jenefsky and Miller offer a clear and useful taxonomy for the 'spectrum of heterosexualization' evident in particularly print 'lesbian' porn made by, and for, straight men, and these representations include: 'female bisexual sex', 'lesbian sex as performance', 'lesbian sex as convenience or excursion', 'lesbian sex as imitation', and finally 'lesbian sex as deviant' (Ibid). In other words, these representations of 'lesbian' sex are either presented as inauthentic and/or not "real", an experimentation of desire, or are simply *for* (straight) men. Ultimately, Jenefsky and Miller's article argues that print porn centred on 'lesbian' sex preserves heterosexual imperatives largely because there is always some sort of 'phallic intrusion', whether that comes in the form of a male present in the diegesis or not. While Morrison & Tallack's and Jenefsky & Miller's theories relate to print and moving-image hard-core porn, I will cautiously re-appropriate some of their ideas in the following analysis of *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* and how the films heterosexualise/objectify/fetishize the female body.[70] Before this, I will also briefly outline, for the sake of clarity, what is meant by the term 'heterosexualisation'.

2.1. Heterosexualisation, the Body and Pleasure

[69] Lesbian women can still enjoy the images offered by ersatz lesbian porn, but instead the sub-genre is often explicitly aimed at heterosexual men.

[70] While the two articles' theories are based firmly in Porn Studies, and are somewhat dated now, they clearly offer thought-provoking ideas around the heterosexualised body and representation of 'lesbian sex' more broadly. While the articles do deal with a different film form, and have certain methodological concerns, *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*'s relationship to pornography through 'relatively explicit' sex scenes mean that the articles I use to contextualise my frameworks are both appropriate and beneficial. Moreover, the mere fact I am having to use academic discourse from Porn Studies shows the lack of scholarly work on lesbian sex in cinema too.

Returning to Morrison & Tallack's article, one of their conclusions relates to the idea that ersatz lesbian porn is seen to be artificial or inauthentic because of the idealised female bodies on-screen, as opposed to more 'realistic' or 'believable' corporeality. Morrison & Tallack noted, through a discourse analysis of the recorded transcripts, that the representation of the idealised female body seemed to be a concern for the participants and diluted the level of authenticity for them. The women also thought that the ersatz lesbian porn depicted female bodies that 'were characteristic of the societal ideal for heterosexual women' (2005: 12). Some of the comments made by the participants when discussing *Lesbian Cheerleader Squad 2* included: '[T]he bodies in the first clip where made more for men… the [performers] were really young… [and] they were both fem', 'the girls in the first [video clip] were really skinny too' and 'there [are] no real bodies in there' (2005: 13). While the participants of this study were watching clips from feature length hard-core porn films, as opposed to scenes from cinema or television, their comments on the performers' bodies reveals that for some spectators, a sense of identification is important for their enjoyment of the text – 'seeing themselves' on the screen ultimately adds to the visual pleasure(s). Corporeal presentation, as well as the representation of lesbian identity, is likewise an issue that transcends depictions in porn and is often an issue with other televisual or cinematic features that centre on lesbian characters. *The L Word* (2004 – 2009, Showtime), for instance, was a television show that was (and still is) continually criticised for its portrayal and presentation of 'lipstick lesbians' and femme figures. Criticism of the TV show, from the likes of Rebecca Beirne (2008) and Aviva Dove-Viebahn (2007), usually revolves around the middle-class status of the characters, race, gender, and also the representation of the femme lesbian, a figure who in the show is often hyper-visible but undermined by the series' narrative as not being 'real' lesbians (Beirne 2008).

The type of criticism the participants gave regarding the women's bodies, as well as criticism aimed at other moving-image forms that represent femme lesbians, could also be directed towards the actresses in *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*. If you study the collage of the women acting in their respective films (see Fig. 7), you can instantly notice that all the women fit in to a more 'femme' image of lesbianism, with Emma and Dallas being a bit more 'baby butch'. Even then, they both still have several 'femme' features too and they are very much a 'lite' representation of butch lesbianism. All of the women - Adèle Exarchopoulos, Léa Seydoux, Erika Linder and Natalie Krill – are beautiful in the typical (and therefore perhaps heterosexual) sense, and they all have ordinary or popular hair colours/styles (besides Léa Seydoux in the first half of *BITWC* perhaps), feminine facial features (Erika Linder is

Fig. 7: Main protagonists in *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*. Top left: Adèle Exarchopoulos, Bottom left: Léa Seydoux, Bottom right: Erika Linder, Top right: Natalie Krill

somewhat more androgynous), and slim, toned, (near) perfect bodies. The performers and therefore the characters in both films, then, are 'heterosexualised' due to a confluence of typical bodily and facial features, which have a close relationship with normative femininity. While in reality there are lesbian couples who both may identify as just 'femme' as opposed to 'butch' or butch/femme, it is often the butch figure who typically signals queerness (as more 'masculine' features are inscribed on to what 'should' be a 'feminine' body). As Heather Butler notes, the presence of the butch or dyke lesbian can help the viewer 'acknowledge a lesbian authenticity' and 'at the very least, viewers might feel assured that the hypervisible status of the butch, as well as the butch/femme dyad, effectively destabilize[s] any and all notions of heteronormativity' (2004: 169). The figure of the butch lesbian, then, (theoretically) aids the viewer to believe that the performers are 'authentic' lesbians, and at the same time, the butch/femme dynamic similarly deconstructs, to a certain extent, heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality.[71] While Butler's remarks relate again to pornography as opposed to cinematic films, both *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* offer a heterosexualised version of lesbianism through the prominence of femme/feminine/heterosexualised body image and corporeality, as opposed to more butch or dyke characteristics. However, this is not to say that the lesbians in both films are then definitively inauthentic or not 'realistic', but instead they are

[71] The femme lesbian can also offer, to an extent, a certain kind of disruption – that being the presence of typical and heterosexual bodily/personality traits that are queered through deviant sexuality and not visibility or performativity. In this sense, then, the femme lesbian or bisexual is one who still disrupts heteronormativity but does so in a less obvious or overt way than the butch lesbian.

heterosexualised through the representation of an 'idealised' and therefore heterosexualised female body; an image that is, at its core, a feminine spectacle that promotes typical gendered characteristics such as slim or toned bodies, pretty or beautiful faces, and soft or 'feminine' voices. Both films and their representations fit in to this mould, and therefore the characters are heterosexualised through bodily aesthetic. Additionally, the participants in Morrison & Tallack's study also noted that women in the ersatz lesbian porn were inauthentic and heterosexualised because the performances 'lacked verisimilitude' (as noted above), and a variety of the sexual acts the performers were enacting 'were factious' (2005: 3). This ultimately distracted the participants and diluted the level of authenticity as the women on-screen often 'didn't groan in time with the action', 'didn't engage in clitoral stimulation' and there was no 'rubbing or gripping at all' (2005: 13 – 14). In short, then, not only were the women's bodies idealistic, but the sexual action itself seemed artificial.

Moreover, the performances of lesbian sex in both *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* at times borders on the 'body out of control' stereotype which was first identified by Linda Williams (1989), however, the performances are also nuanced, too. In *BITWC*, close ups are utilised to confirm both protagonists' sexual and orgasmic pleasure throughout the sex scenes. In many instances, while Emma is performing oral and masturbatory sex on/to Adèle, close ups of her face express the emotional and physical intensity of the acts, and her facial expressions are key to communicating pleasure, or more precisely, they are key to communicating a 'believable' performance of pleasure. Eithne Johnson states that the female facial close up (in porn and cinema) is 'one of many stock images that…depict[s] the body as an erogenous zone' and that 'the close-up of the female face has special significance for dramatizing emotional expressions, especially extremes of pleasure and pain' (1993: 31 – 32). This stylistic strategy is also twinned with synchronised sounds of moaning and groaning, which functions to align the body with the voice to ultimately make the text 'sound and look orgasmic' (1993: 33), as well as fitting in with a broader trend in contemporary French cinema, the *cinéma du corps* , where 'facial tics, minute or expansive poses and gestural shifts, [and] non-vocal body language' (Palmer 2017: 8) are prioritised and constitute a visceral or transgressive representational mode.

Furthermore, the representation of female sexual pleasure and the female orgasm on-screen is a topic that has been debated within Porn Studies (see Williams 1989, Frith 2015, Fritz 2017) as well as some studies that focus on sex or sexual pleasure in cinema (see McPhee 2016). Some of these debates centre on how porn, or even cinema, can show or represent the

female orgasm, as it is often problematically seen that the 'invisibility of women's orgasm and the lack of a definitive symbol of female sexual climax equivalent to male ejaculation produces uncertainty about the authenticity of orgasm and the necessity for visual representation' (Frith 2015: 386). This suspicion and 'uncertainty' are born from the perennial and misogynistic assumption that women are always 'faking it' in one way or another. Moreover, as Ruth McPhee also notes, 'the female orgasm often bears no visible trace, in and of itself, rendering it a source of suspicion and anxiety within the male scopic economy' (2016: 104), mainly because of the natural contrast between visibility (male ejaculate) and invisibility (female orgasm).[72]

In *BITWC* orgasm is signified through writhing, moaning, close-ups of gaping mouths, and intense facial expressions which ultimately function to represent the pleasure Emma and Adèle are enduring. It would be too superficial to discuss how the film could or should have represented the girls' pleasure better or more realistically, as it must be remembered that these sex scenes are almost always *especially manipulated*, and to categorise women's orgasms and pleasure would be both difficult but more importantly too subjective.[73] In *Below Her Mouth* close ups are not utilised as frequently as they are in *BITWC* to communicate sexual pleasure, and the film, perhaps more pornographically, strives to show a full-bodied spectacle of pleasure, whereby close up facial expressions inter-sect with mid-shots of the women's bodies (and more frequently than in *BITWC*) to offer maximum visibility of both (sexual) *action* and *pleasure. Below Her Mouth* represents sexual pleasure as a spectacle for audiences where they can see the whole body and the face. In *BITWC*, close ups of facial expressions dominate the screen and literally bring the expressions closer to the spectator, an effective strategy that forces spectators to acknowledge the pleasure the characters are feeling, instead of gazing elsewhere. *Below Her Mouth*, on the other hand, strives to show the body in sexual action and in all its glory – spectators can gaze at a multitude of things all at once, from the face, to the breasts, to the genitals and elsewhere. This focus on the body in *Below Her Mouth* even further reiterates this process and act of heterosexualisation because in the film the 'idealised female body' is

[72] However, while male orgasm is almost always visible, some women can 'squirt', and since pornography particularly aims to visualise 'a climax that is see-able' (Frith 2015: 388), squirting can represent the 'ultimate' female orgasm, superior to those women who have to show a 'body out of control' experience.

[73] I use the term *especially manipulated* for films like *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* but also porn too (as well as others in this thesis) – both include performances and manipulations of pleasure. They are especially manipulated because they (mainstream film and porn) are representations of sexual pleasure that are acted, staged, and performed – we do not know if the actors are engaged in 'real' pleasure, but they are more than likely being directed on how to visually show a certain kind of pleasure. In this sense, then, the sexual representations are not completely 'natural', even if they are somewhat believable in both porn and cinema.

Fig. 8: Jasmine letting the tap run over her clitoris and vulva

presented as a spectacle which fills the frame, and therefore heavy emphasis is placed on the body simply because it dominates the diegesis. Moreover, and somewhat depressingly, the representation of the idealised female body in both films is also symptomatic of the cinema and porn industries in general, which have always favoured and depicted 'spectacular' male and female bodies. While this does not excuse both films' problematic representation of the heterosexualised body, we must be aware that these films were made within a largely heterosexualised industry that frequently promotes perfect or unbelievable bodies.

To return briefly to the depiction of sexual pleasure in *Below Her Mouth*, there is a scene that could be seen to oppose the heterosexualising impulses of the filmmakers. In one scene, before the two protagonists have had sex, Jasmine wakes up and watches Dallas working on the roof nearby, and it soon becomes clear to the audience that Jasmine desperately longs for Dallas as she begins pleasuring herself over the bath-tub tap. In this sequence, Jasmine runs the bath water at a fast pace and then straddles her legs over either side of the bath, letting the tap run over her clitoris and vulva (see Fig. 8). The sequence continues as Jasmine builds towards orgasm, and shots of Dallas working on the roof are inter-cut to suggest that Jasmine is thinking of her while in the throes of pleasure. Reflecting on this scene, I would argue that this depiction of sexual stimulation completely escapes phallo-centric models of pleasure and offers a more feminist depiction of pleasure instead. Not relying on her own or somebody else's penis, fingers, tongue or toys, Jasmine lets the water stimulate her clitoris until she orgasms. This representation is nuanced and offers a representation of female sexual agency that does rely on 'phallic intrusion' or phallic shaped objects (such as dildos or vibrators). It could also be argued that while the tap is running over Jasmine's clitoris, the inter-cut shots of Dallas

Fig. 9: Jasmine and Dallas 'scissoring'

suggests that Jasmine is using the tap to replicate oral sex, and particularly oral sex with Dallas. Nonetheless, this representation of female pleasure is, I would argue, the most nuanced depiction of sex acts in the entire film. I will now move away from the representation of the body and of sexual pleasure to argue that both films also heterosexualise the lesbian sex acts and characters through the presentation of 'scissoring', which also extends to ideas around objectification and fetishization.

2.2 Scissoring and Heterosexualisation/Objectification/Fetishization

Firstly, and for the sake of transparency, 'scissoring' is a sexual position whereby two women inter-mingle their bodies so their vaginas, vulvas or clitoris' touch and rub together, and therefore the meeting of the two bodies should create a scissor-like image.[74] Let me begin by stating that the representation of scissoring in 'ersatz lesbian porn' or films such as *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*, reinforces heterosexualisation not only through bodily aesthetic and form, but also the positionality of the scissoring act in both films. In other words, how the women's bodies are positioned in relation to each other is key to understanding how the women are heterosexualised through this act, as often the position of their bodies replicates heterosexual sex, which also relates to ideas around fetishization. To illustrate my point(s) about scissoring and positionality, I will now focus more specifically on *Below Her Mouth*, which represents scissoring more interestingly and even more problematically than *BITWC* does.

[74] However, scissoring is also often the go-to term for any act whereby the women rub and grind their vaginas against each other, even if it does always create the perfect scissor-like image.

The act of scissoring in *Below Her Mouth* does not occur until the penultimate sex scene, which begins with Dallas performing oral sex on Jasmine, before Jasmine sits on Dallas' face. After this, Jasmine moves down Dallas' body and then begins rubbing her clitoris against Dallas'. Dallas lies on her back while this happens, and Jasmine sits on top of her as they rub their pelvic regions together. If you consult Fig. 9, you can see that the logistics of this sex act does not seem practical or pragmatic. The way in which Jasmine straddles Dallas also looks less like typical scissoring and more like the cowgirl position popular in mainstream, straight and gay male porn, whereby the woman or man 'rides' the man's penis while on top of him. This position is important when we consider to what extent the women are heterosexualised through this act, as there is a close relationship, I would argue, to heterosexual sex. Moreover, in Karen Lynch's article 'The Heterosexualisation of Sadism and Masochism' (2003), she states that 'our notions of heterosexuality have a sedimented association with the

binary of the beater and the beaten' and that traditional concepts of heterosexuality often involve 'the roles of domination and submission', even *outside* of specific S/M sexual practises (2003: 34). While Lynch's thoughts relate more to the idea of female masochism in feminist literature, the idea that the heterosexual couple often revolves around 'the roles of domination and submission' is interesting. This role of domination and submission can relate to a wide variety of practises in reality – sex, domestic life, and social life are just a few examples of where roles of domination and submission are actualised. The dominant position in heterosexual relationships is often associated with masculine tendencies and therefore is linked with the man, and the submissive role is often associated with the woman, gendered notions that are essentialist, heteronormative and deeply problematic. This idea of domination and submission is also interesting when we think about Jasmine and Dallas: in all the sex scenes, Jasmine never actually pleasures Dallas, and Dallas is the one whom always stimulates Jasmine in one way or another.[75] This is also a stereotypical dynamic where, as Walker *et al* note, the stereotype is that 'femmes are only lovers to butches' and they 'are always passive and receptive in regard to sexual behaviours' (2012: 92).

[75] We could attribute this dynamic to the pillow queen and stone butch lesbian figures.

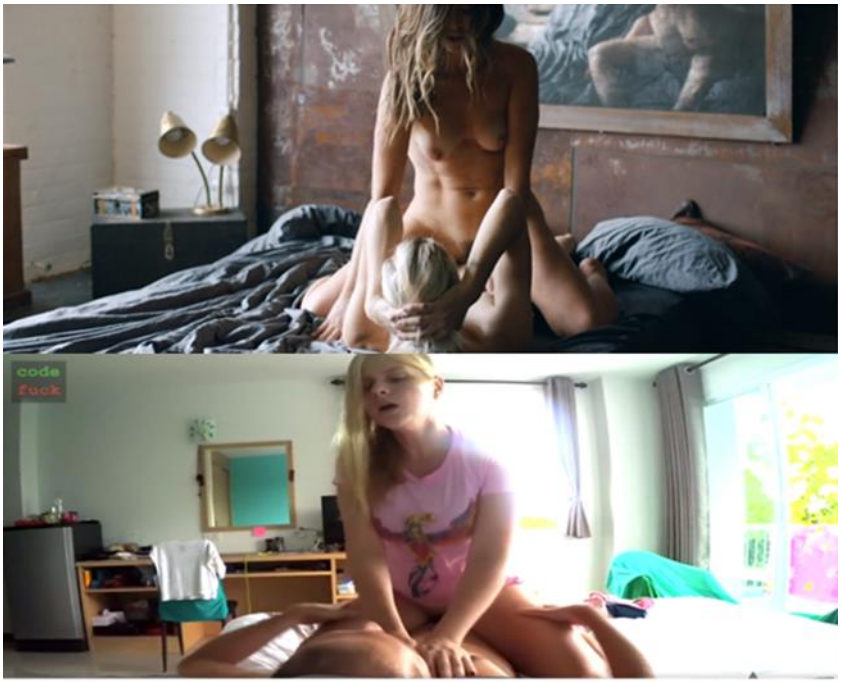


Fig. 10: Scissoring in *Below Her Mouth* replicates the heterosexual 'cowgirl' position

However, returning to Fig. 9, an obvious counter point to this idea of domination and submission could be subverted as the femme, Jasmine, is on top of the 'butch', Dallas, therefore taking on a more 'dominant' and assertive role within the scissoring act. However, the positionality of the women strongly connotes, as mentioned, the cowgirl position popularised in heterosexual porn. Fig. 10 (above), which is comprised of a screen-shot from *Below Her Mouth* and one from an amateur video extracted from PornHub, shows how the 'scissoring' act in *Below Her Mouth* vividly replicates heterosexual sex in an unpractical manner. The cowgirl position in straight porn offers maximum visibility (particularly when filmed facing the woman's anus and vulva/vagina), and it also provides variety in the number of ways the man can penetrate the woman, and the notion of variety is of upmost importance to most hard-core hetero-porn. The woman often 'rides' the man's penis when performing the cowgirl position, offering, like most straight sex, simultaneous pleasure for both individuals involved. However, the cowgirl-style scissoring in *Below Her Mouth* is, quite frankly, implausible and impractical. The sex act offers no chance for orgasm in the most part since their pelvic regions are barely seen to touch, therefore offering almost no chance for much or any stimulation at all. This, then, brings me on to the second way in which scissoring is an act that heterosexualises the lesbian characters.

Heterosexualisation is evident through the idea that 'scissoring' is an imaginative sex act that is a product of the heterosexual man's mind, and this also reinforces and relates to

Jenefsky and Miller's theory delineated above. Jenefsky and Miller's theories of heterosexualisation and phallic intrusion relates to certain pornographic images in the 'International Magazine for Men' *Penthouse* that follow on from each other to make a narrative – a narrative revolving around two women engaged in 'lesbian' sex while a heterosexual man either: gets involved, watches closely, watches from afar, or is not within the diegesis at all (so the male reader would be the subject in that paradigm – the women being the objects). While Jenefsky and Helene's theory is related to print pornography, the idea of phallic intrusion, whether in the diegesis of the text or not, is interesting in relation to *Below Her Mouth* and *BITWC*. In *BITWC*'s case, it would be easier to suggest there is a 'phallic intrusion' within the sex scenes because it is directed by a heterosexual man. However, Mullen's *Below Her Mouth*, a film written, produced and directed by women, still falls under the same issues as *BITWC*, even when there is not a heterosexual man constructing the camera gaze. It is often the mere presence of a male filmmaker that alights debates around the representation of lesbian sex and the male/fetishizing gaze, and this para-textual information often dominates others' analysis (see Dargis as a good example of this), and almost pushes critics or scholars into an ideological position, without regards to the textual construction of the sex scenes. These issues are still rampant in *Below Her Mouth*, and the film, somewhat paradoxically, also conjures a sense of phallic or patriarchal intrusion merely by representing lesbian scissoring, the supposed 'imaginative act' of porn and cinema.

Moreover, in *BITWC* the women are seen to be objectified and fetishized through the intense focus on their body parts, mainly through the close up. Earlier I noted that close ups of facial expressions function to communicate sexual pleasure, yet the close up of other body parts in the film, such as breasts, buttocks and vulvas, is seen to contribute towards a highly problematic set of images. The buttocks, in particular, has a notable presence in and out of the sex scenes, and Dargis writes:

> It was her derrière that first caught my eye. Specifically, it was the way the camera captured the pretty teenager's rear end in "*Blue Is the Warmest Color*" so that it was centered and foregrounded in the frame. It is a lovely derrière, no question, round, compact and firm … The director, Abdellatif Kechiche, I realized fairly quickly, likes a tight end. (2013).

Dargis' claims here are arguably undeniable, and her comment around the buttocks being 'centred and foregrounded in the frame' is apparent both in and out of the sex scenes, as

Fig. 11: Adèle sleeping in a sexualised position

evidenced in Fig. 11, which shows a shot of Adèle sleeping. It is clear, within the shot, that Adèle's back is slightly arched which forces the position to be somewhat unnatural and, I would argue, sexualised. These kinds of shots reoccur throughout the sex scene too, as at different points Adèle and Emma fondle with each other's buttocks and the camera lingers to make sure the spectator sees this. The consistent cinematography which focuses on the girls' buttocks means that Kechiche, arguably, is (sadistically) fetishizing these women's bodies through his male, heterosexual gaze.

Moreover, fetishism in film, as Louise Kaplan notes, are usually 'transactions…that occupy the centre or foreground of the visual field and thereby preoccupy the conscious attention of the audience, to the detriment of some other less conscious or unconscious theme' (2016: 53). In other words, fetishism in film is an 'obsession' – it is typically represented or signified through an object, person or body part that preoccupies 'the conscious attention of the audience' (Ibid). The shots of the two girls' buttocks (which appear several times) certainly do take over the screen as they are typically captured in a mid-shot or a close-up, and therefore they preoccupy the spectator's attention, while also subscribing to ideas around cinematography being linked to the 'male gaze'. Overall, in *BITWC*, it does appear that through quick edits and close-up shots that Kechiche is over-emphasising, fetishizing, and fragmenting the protagonists' bodies, which could be viewed as a purposeful objectification of their bodies. Furthermore, in the later sex scene, the two girls engage in 'scissoring', which continues and reinforces ideas around the male gaze, objectification and sexualisation. In one instance when the two girls are 'scissoring' each other, there is a shot of Emma holding Adèle's hands, but this action forces Emma's breasts to be pushed together in a strange and highly sexualised,

Fig. 12: ‘Unnatural’, decorous poses in *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*

arguably unnatural, position (see Fig. 12). It is these kinds of shots that appear to over-emphasise the women’s corporeality and create a distinctive (and/or sadistic) male gaze.

To round off this section, I also want to briefly consider a point that Tim Palmer makes in his chapter regarding *BITWC*. Palmer, in his considerations of the controversies surrounding Kechiche’s style and the film’s sex scenes, cogently states that:

> Just because sexual behaviour on-screen depicts (inherently?) aroused, oftentimes incandescent physical states, these filmmakers [in this case Kechiche] are not shrill hysterics, demented attention-seekers incapable of rational thought or careful design … [o]n the contrary, they are calm, reflective, considered. (2017: 9).

Firstly, this statement lacks academic rigor as it completely takes for granted the artistic procedures around the filmmaking process, without drawing upon archival work or quantative/qualitative research methods (such as interviews with directors), and it also feels as if Palmer is trying to offer a ‘pragmatic’ solution and counter-point to why Kechiche shot the sex scenes the way he did, which also has implicit, sexist undertones. Whether or not Kechiche is a ‘calm, reflective, considered’ individual, we can never use this hypothetical statement to neutralise the issues surrounding heterosexualisation/objectification/fetishization that are clearly evident in *BITWC*, but also in *Below Her Mouth*. This is because the way in which both films are stylistically constructed significantly contributes towards a problematic aesthetic, whether that was the aim of the filmmaker or not. In other words, and as academics, we cannot attempt to neutralise or ‘complicate’ discourses and debates through hypothetical declarations which, in fact, do not detract from the issues that are *still* prevalent *within* the films.

Moving on now from the aesthetic 'problems' with *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*, the second half of this chapter will now examine the narrative of both films, and how sex acts appear at key moments of plot that contribute, in the case of *BITWC*, to the characterisation of Adèle and her coming-of-age, as well as acting as a rite of passage, which could be seen as being sex-positive.[76] *Below Her Mouth*, in comparison to *BITWC*, also uses sex as a rite of passage, and it will also become clear in the assessment that follows that *Below Her Mouth* suggests that lesbian identity can only ever fully be realised through sex, which therefore places overwhelming significance on sex in the formation of a lesbian identity. This idea will be explored through Jasmine's narrative arch, a character who, throughout the film, realises her alternative sexuality through her experiences with Dallas. Lastly, and to round off this chapter, I would also like to make comments about the presence of 'normativity' in both films.

3. Narratively Imperative: Rites of Passage and Character Development in *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth*

3.1 Sex as a Rite of Passage in BITWC

BITWC's first and most intimate sex scene, which appears early in the second hour of the film (at 1hr 11mins), follows on from a scene where Emma and Adèle go on a date to a museum and then have a picnic in the park. The scene subtly foreshadows the sex scene that commences afterwards, beginning with Adèle who asks Emma while she is eating cured meat, "throwing away the skin… don't you like it?", before expressing that she "eats all of the skins… I eat everything" (an implicit and playful hint at her lesbianism, perhaps). The scene then involves the two girls talking about when Emma first "tasted a girl", and the conversation ends when Adèle lies down and the camera closely studies the back of Emma's arm, from Adèle's gaze.[77] This studying of Emma's arms also tells us about the notion of 'wanting' someone – the idea that we absorb the person we are (sexually and emotionally) interested in is articulated through this kind of shot, whereby the camera's gaze tells us that Adèle appreciates every little characteristic of Emma. The two of them then lie next to each other, smiling and exchanging glances while the camera slowly roves across their faces, lips and eyes, and then ends with a kiss. This scene foreshadows the sex that follows mainly because it begins with euphemistic talks of eating and then ends with a sensual kiss. The cinematography subtly teases what is to come next by intimately examining the girls' skin, as well as closely watching them kiss –

[76] I also consider how BITWC's framing of sex as a rite of passage aligns with American teen films.
[77] It is important that we note that this shot is *from Adèle's gaze*, otherwise these techniques could be seen as Kechiche perpetuating his male gaze once again.

everything from the cinematography to the setting and *mise en scène* creates a sense of romanticism, but also a sense of anticipation.

Following an abrupt cut from Emma and Adèle in the park, the film then shows the audience both characters naked and kissing in a bedroom. There are no moments of teasing or undressing either; the film sharply cuts from the park to the sex. As discussed, the sex scene is lengthy, visceral, and features the girls having sex in a variety of positions; however, and most importantly, this first sex scene is wedged between two very key moments within the narrative, and the sex in the middle of these scenes acts a form of 'passing' or 'growing' for Adèle. In the film's usual stylistic fashion, it abruptly cuts away from the first sex scene to a gay pride festival that Emma and Adèle are attending. There are various establishing shots of the festival to begin with that showcase LGBTQ+ individuals dancing, kissing and having fun. At first, Adèle seems very awkward at such a public place and she seems reluctant to even kiss Emma. Although, as the scene goes on, she becomes more comfortable and begins to dance and kiss Emma more. The film then cuts away to the two sat in a park where they first met (the time-scale is ambiguous), and the camera stays close to their faces while they kiss intimately and unembarrassed. This is then followed by a scene at Emma's parents, where Adèle meets them for the first time and they have dinner together. In the matter of sixteen minutes (1hr 11 – 1hr 27), then, the narrative has taken us on a journey from Emma and Adèle at the park on a date, to a very intimate and explicit scene of them having sex, to public displays of affection at a pride festival and the park, to Emma's parent's home. As these events are linear, the sex in the middle symbolises more than just a spectacle of idealised bodies and 'imaginary' sex acts, as I delineated in the first half of this chapter. At first Adèle is very shy and innocently playful with Emma in the park – cut to the two of them having passionate sex in a variety of positions and there is a sense that the sex is, as Ian Freer noted, 'untethered, unembarrassed and joyful' (2013). We then have scenes of very public displays of affection that now show the two are comfortable with each other, and more importantly, Adèle is more comfortable with her sexuality. The sex scene is wedged between moments where Adèle is shy but then after the sex she is confident and more comfortable with herself and Emma. While these scenes push the narrative forward to show the growth of their relationship as nearly all genre or narrative films would, the sex scene is the ultimate moment of Adèle's growth in to an adult. Sex in *BITWC*, then, is *not only* used for purposes of spectacle or spectator titillation but it is also symbolic of Adèle's growing up as a sexual human being. Therefore, sex in *BITWC* is a typical rite of passage, and rites of passage can come in all sorts of shapes, forms and variations, are often

seen by many as a kind of 'second birth', a process whereby one enters a 'new stage' of their lives, leaving behind their old identities and replacing them with a partially, or completely, new one (Grof 1996). Classic rites of passage include the movement from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood, and others include birth, pregnancy, death, marriage, initiation rites (when entering a new social group, for example) and also 'personal' rites-of-passage, which are bound more to a sense of subjectivity (Gennep 1960).

Moreover, sex as a rite of passage is one that is very familiar to, and has been well explored in, American film culture, especially in the teen film and the teen sex comedy. North American popular culture, particularly since the 1980s (when the teen sex comedy blossomed), has presented sex as the definitive rite of passage, particularly for teenagers and young adults. Timothy Shary notes that 'the loss of virginity continues to be represented as a daunting conquest en-route to adulthood' in American film (2010: 54), and often 'pacts' are formed between boys to aid them in their journey to lose their virginity. Films like *Porky's* (dir. Bob Clark, 1981), *American Pie* (dir. Paul & Chris Weitz, 1999) and *Superbad* (dir. Greg Mottola, 2007) are just a few examples of North American teen sex comedies, all of which feature narratives revolving particularly around teens trying to lose their virginity. The sub-genre often explores issues such as masculinity, homosociality and/or female sociality, friendship, rites of passage, sex, and teen anxiety, in often humorous and hyperbolic ways. The role of virginity-loss in *American Pie,* for example, highlights a direct connection between sex and gender. Catherine Driscoll writes – 'the sexual pact in *American Pie* is explicitly about achieving masculinity' – and the pressure the boys place on themselves and others to have sex for the first time is the boys essentially questioning 'whether sex will make a difference to who you are' (2011: 74). In these teen films, then, sex is crucial narrative device that acts both as a rite of passage but also a way of reifying adolescent identity, gender and (often heterosexual) sexuality. Moreover, the 1980s male sex quest narrative likewise shaped the sex comedies that followed in the 1990s and after. The films of the early-mid 1980s began the trend where, for example, 'sex permeates the [school or college] campus in the form of incessant talk and boys and men ogling girls and women' (Pennington: 81). However, in more modern examples of the sub-genre the pressures that surround sex, particularly for teenage girls, are explored in reflexive ways, and the sub-genre has also moved away from patriarchal or masculine expressions of teenage sex and sexuality, in films such as *Easy A* (dir. Will Gluck, 2010) or *G.B.F* (dir. Darren Stein, 2013).

Furthermore, in Carol Siegel's *Sex Radical Cinema*, she has a chapter dedicated to 'America's Virginity Fetish', where she compares the political and radical nature of American and French films which centre on the loss of virginity, a narrative trope which Siegel claims 'reveals much about current constructions of female sexuality and their often surprisingly close relation to concepts of the sexuality of children' (2015: 33). She uses the films *Thirteen* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2003) and *Fat Girl* to exemplify the idea that French cinema's articulation of female and/or teenage sexuality is (usually) more nuanced than that of America's, which is often bound to moral conservatism, 'moral purity', and the idea that the loss of virginity, and especially white girls who lose their virginity, is an 'attack on or affirmation of bourgeois family values' (2015: 27).

So, while American teen films or teen sex comedies differ in terms of location, culture, genre and style to *BITWC* (and therefore a direct link would be overly superficial), they do share common ground by the way in which they *use* sex within a narrative, and also for character development. The first sex scene in *BITWC*, as stated, ultimately shows a 'passing' of some kind – Adèle's passing from a teenager to an adult, from a heterosexual female to a non-heterosexual female, from a shy girl to a more confident individual. This is also conventional of American teen sex comedies where sex typically signifies a passing from adolescence to adulthood, but also a way of realising 'whether sex will make a difference to who you are' (Driscoll 2011: 74). In the case of *BITWC*, it certainly does. It is no coincidence that the sex is carefully placed in-between moments within a linear narrative that shows Adèle as shy and unsure, then confident and more outgoing. However, and like Siegel notes in relation to how French and American film cultures represent teenage sexuality and sex, *BITWC* is also, arguably, more nuanced in its messages around sex than a lot of American teen films or sex comedies. The film offers the idea that sex can be crucial in the formation of a non-heterosexual identity, of an 'adult' identity, but most importantly a catalyst which can unleash a sense of personal identity and confidence in an increasingly scary, neo-liberal, modern world.

This narrative purpose of sex, then, could also be read as sex-positive, and sex-positivity, as a concept and a performative attitude, advocates for the importance of safe sex, for the crucial importance of consent, for the acceptance of alternative sexual practices outside of the heteronorm of penile-vaginal sex, as well as dismantling the 'shame' that surrounds and limits the possibilities of sex. John Mercer writes that "shame" 'is a powerful (and negative) emotion often associated with sex and sexuality', and that 'shaming is a mechanism for social and personal control … [s]hame is internalized, pervasive and pacifying, we both feel shame

and are subjected to shame' (2018: 1304). Shame, then, is something a large majority of specifically LGBTQ+ individuals face, especially when their sexual practices are at odds with or defy (hetero)normative notions of what typically constitutes sex and sexual desire. Furthermore, the term sex-positivity was born from the "sex wars" of the 1980s, when feminist critics and scholars fiercely debated over the nature of heterosexual sex and also hard-core pornography and, as Siegel writes, '[c]ultural feminists, who often called themselves "radical feminists," opposed all sexual relations they deemed hierarchical and thus derived from the patriarchal model, including in some instances heterosexuality of all kinds' (2015: 12). Sex-positive queer and feminist scholars countered this idea with the notion of sex radicalism and sex-positivity, and as Melissa E. Sanchez elucidates, sex radical feminists oppose 'policing or pathologizing desires that do not readily conform to ideals of mutuality, cooperation, and egalitarianism' (2012: 497). This is as well as acknowledging sex as a crucial part of many people's expression of their (gendered or sexual) identity, and as Queen and Comella note, sex-positivity is a 'cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a potentially positive force in one's life [which] allows for and in fact celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationship structures and individual choices based on consent' (2008: 278). Therefore, *BITWC* could be seen as presenting sex-positive messages and ideals through narrative positioning of sex that acts as a rite of passage that helps Adèle grow as a person, as well as moving from adolescence to adulthood. Sex carries huge symbolic weight within the film, and also acts a neat narrative tool to depict Adèle's development as a person and as a character.

However, as Manohla Dargis states, sex for Adèle *also* leads to 'despair, desperation, and isolation', as once Emma and Adèle have sex their relationship begins to normalise, which sees the downfall of their bond (Dargis 2013). Therefore, while sex may be a (sex-positive) rite of passage in one way for Adèle, an act that has made her 'grow', it also 'fails' her because it eventually leads to 'despair and desperation' in the form of her break-up with Emma. Yet, it is not really the sex that leads to this 'despair, desperation, and isolation', but more so the nature of Emma and Adèle's relationship, which is arguably normative, and *BITWC* seems to warn against entering a (homo)normative relationship. At the beginning of film there is a sense that both Emma and Adèle's relationship is typically care-free and playful. After the two have had sex, however, their relationship starts to 'normalise' – they live together and have 'normal' occupations. This change is also signposted when Emma changes her hair colour from blue to blonde, a more conservative or 'normal' colour. Emma's blue hair represented her liberalism, her 'care-free' personality. However, Emma's blonde hair signifies an embrace of traditional

beauty and normalisation. Emma and Adèle's relationship becomes normative because they begin to conform to heterosexual culture and its ideologies, which has a close connection to homonormativity (see chapter four). Their relationship begins to go down-hill when they slip from playful and care-free in to normative, and the film seems to warn of the dangers of heteronormalisation in a queer/lesbian relationship. Emma and Adèle do actually break up because Adèle 'cheats' on Emma with another man, and as soon as their commitment to each other is broken, so is their relationship. Whether you are straight or LGBTQ+, being cheated on is seen, by many, as a devastating act that breaks trust and intimacy. However, this is also a heteronormative construction which stems from (some) religious beliefs (that a man and woman who share a life together should be forever faithful to each other), as well as conservative ideologies that pervade Western society. As Mimi Schippers states, 'in order to live a "good life" of sexual and emotional intimacy, we must turn away from other lovers…[p]erhaps then a queer life would mean reorienting oneself towards other lovers, and non-monogamy would constitute a queer life' (2016: 3). Schipper also notes that when cases of 'cheating' occur, it usually ends in 'relationship destruction and emotional trauma *or* restoring the couple through monogamy' (2016: 2). In *BITWC* the relationship ends with 'emotional trauma' (in a raw and heart-breaking scene), and the idea of infidelity or polyamory is completely cast aside, and Emma cannot, for a while, forgive Adele. While this is understandable, it also fits in with wider ideologies of faithfulness and hetero/homo-normativity in western cultures.

Lastly, throughout both of *BITWC*'s central sex scenes between Emma and Adèle the audience is devoid of a sense of space or time, particularly due to the film's employment of abrupt and rushed editing techniques (as discussed above). Before or during the sex scenes, no establishing shots of the bedroom are shown, or shots of the two leading up to this moment (apart from the park, but that could have been anything from that day to several weeks or months ago). Although, there is a sense, much like in *Stranger by the Lake*, that time and place does not matter, and here in *BITWC* it is the act of love-making that takes centre-stage, which therefore means that time and space are redundant. The abrupt cutaways that bridge sequences together throughout the entire film also, I argue, purposefully functions to blur the boundaries of space and time; often the cuts in *BITWC* signify a passing of time that is ambiguous and only through other visual or aural clues can the spectator have a sense of where the characters are or what time of year/month/day it is. This ambiguity, arguably, allows the sex scenes in particular to stand out as solo and important moments – it does not matter what time of year it

is, or what day it is, or even where they are, all that matters is the moment of passion. This is not completely unfamiliar to narratives involving love and romance, although romance films that take place in a historically and culturally specific era often must rely on a sense of space and time. The story of *Brokeback Mountain*, for instance, takes place in the 1960s when homosexuality was outlawed, especially in the 'American heartland' (Williams 2008), where the film is set. The audience, throughout, are made fully aware that this film is set in a specific time and a specific place (Wyoming, 1960s) through shots of landscapes, regional accents, dialogue and costuming (and even paratextual features such as promotional posters), and the love shared between the two protagonists is made even more poignant and sad because it is 'forbidden', and only so 'forbidden' because of the time the story is set. Other, hetero-centric romances like *Titanic* (dir. James Cameron, 1997) and *Moulin Rouge* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 2001) likewise make sure that space and place is specific, often heightening the emotional intensity of the film as spectators are already aware of where the film's narratives are socially, culturally and historically situated (for example, they know the Titanic will sink eventually so the protagonists' love is doomed). A romantic drama like *BITWC*, however, is presumably set in the 'modern day' and this can be inferred through costuming, dialogue, or even the 'modern sensibilities' of the characters. The settings/cities where *BITWC* takes place are also unclear - the love story is not a typical Parisian one and is more of a suburban story, and most of the narrative takes place in Lille (France) as this is where it was filmed (Palmer 2017). *BITWC*, then, is queer in regards to its ambiguous use of space and time, but this simultaneously functions to, on one hand, sentimentalise the sex as love-making that does not need to be bound to any normative notions of filmic space and time, but on the other, as an imperative act that has helps Adèle 'grow' as a person.

Similar to the arguments I have made so far, in Clara Bradbury-Rance's timely *Lesbian Cinema after Queer Theory*, she reads *BITWC* as a paradox in relation to lesbian representation, a film which juggles sexual realism, emotional realism, and social realism to try and capture the modern 'lesbian experience', as well as being a film that is ideologically paradoxical in its sexual explicitness (2019).[78] Moreover, while Bradbury-Rance argues that the film presents (explicit) sex as a way of *expressing* sexuality (my argument is similar just framed differently), she sees the 'temporal disorientation' (which I discussed above) as being a crucial stylistic strategy that 'boldly conveys sexuality's complexity' (2019: 100). In other words, filmic

[78] This is because the sex scenes are either celebrated as being affective, or alternatively as 'not real' due to the relationship with hard-core porn and the objectifying cinematography.

disorientation can help to portray the 'complexity' of sexuality, as something that does not, under a queer paradigm, need to be oriented, fixed, or orderly. For Bradbury-Rance, disorientation is one of the most affective strategy's within the film, one that also 'withholds the essential markers of chronology that emphasise the coming-of-age genre's themes of progression' (2019: 119), which, I would argue, allows the film to eschew a sense of normality, but this also connects to a politics of sentimentality in regards to the sex scenes, as they 'stand out' as moments of love-making where space and time are redundant.

3.2 Sex as a Rite of Passage in Below Her Mouth

In *Below Her Mouth*, the (narrative) significance of sex for the protagonist Jasmine can be read, depending what ideological position you take, as problematic and complex, or alternatively, as also being sex-positive. Like *BITWC*, then, the sex in *Below Her Mouth* acts, arguably, as a rite of passage for Jasmine that allows her to move from heterosexuality to homosexuality, and this rite of passage has challenging ramifications regarding how lesbians 'realise' their sexuality too. While I argue that *BITWC* presents a rite of passage similar to American teen films (sex acting as signifier for the movement between adolescence and adulthood as well as reifying a sense of personal 'identity'), in *Below Her Mouth* sex signifies a movement between sexualities, a powerful and affective experience that re-shapes and re-aligns Jasmine's life as she moves from (hetero)normative to non-normative.

However, while conducting some contextual research around the film, I found a 'user review' on *Below Her Mouth*'s IMDb page, which stated that:

> This movie [*Below Her Mouth*] depicts first and foremost from my point of view that lesbian "love" is primarily motivated by sexual impulses or instincts, and [is] thus primarily lust-oriented.[79]

This user review on the IMDb page points towards one problem with *Below Her Mouth* and the significance of sex as a rite of passage, namely that the sexual impulses of the characters are primarily lust-orientated, which then places overwhelming significance on sex as a tool in the formation of a lesbian or non-heterosexual identity. Several other user reviews on the page also note that Dallas as a character is underdeveloped and egotistical, and that Jasmine and Dallas' relationship is ultimately 'about two self-centred characters getting off on each other's ability to feed their respective egos' (IMDb). I will now extend my point that sex is a

[79] User reviews on IMDb can be found here: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5073620/reviews?start=0 [accessed 26/10/2017]

problematic rite of passage for Jasmine by taking on the issue that the depiction of lesbian love in *Below Her Mouth* is 'primarily motivated by sexual impulses or instincts', and to do so I will use the first sex scene in the film. Proceeding this, I will also argue that if the sex scenes are read through a more sex-positive lens, then the significance of sex in the narrative is imperative as opposed to problematic.

The beginning of *Below Her Mouth* sets the scene quite quickly for the audience: the film opens with Dallas having sex with her ex-girlfriend before leaving hastily to get to her job on time as a roofer; alternatively, Jasmine is introduced as an engaged, middle-class straight woman, who lives a 'ordinary' life. The film also plays on the butch-femme binary to a certain degree within the opening ten minutes, as well as class differences. Dallas, who we first meet as bare-chested and engaged in sex, comes across as working class due to her attitude, clothing and then later her job. Jasmine, on the other hand, is a conventional 'femme' middle-class woman as she is pretty, typically feminine, and almost heteronormative in her attitude and manner.[80] Jasmine's life changes, however, when she sets eyes on Dallas, who just so happens to be fixing a roof next door to her home. The film, similar to most of the films in this chapter, halts the narrative momentarily when Jasmine and Dallas see each other for the first time, and their exchanged glances, along with a close up of each of the women's faces as they gaze, immediately communicates to the audience that something has awoken in both of the women, something more than a friendly exchange.[81] They then meet, by 'coincidence', at a gay bar that Jasmine is attending with her friend. Here, Jasmine and Dallas speak to each other for the first time and Jasmine tries to avoid Dallas, to also avoid the queer or homosexual feelings arising inside of her. However, later in the film Dallas asks Jasmine out on a date and she agrees, and this is prior to the characters first full sexual encounter in Dallas' apartment. Outside after their date (which goes well), Jasmine and Dallas passionately kiss up against a wall, before somebody comes along, and they stop. This spontaneous lust towards each other continues as they kiss unembarrassed on the back of Dallas' truck outside of her apartment. Here, Dallas even begins to masturbate Jasmine, before they continue their affair at Dallas' place. When they enter the apartment, Dallas begins by taking Jasmine's underwear off and, in a dominant manner, she guides Jasmine to the kitchen table where she then performs oral and masturbatory sex. In a 'relatively explicit' fashion, the film lingers on Jasmine as her facial and oral

[80] Later in the film we find out Jasmine is this way because of her relationship with her mother when she was a child.

[81] And once again suggests, similarly to *Stranger by the Lake* or *BITWC*, that intimate connections are almost always formed by an initial meeting of the eyes, or in other words, the initial glance signals 'love at first sight'.

expressions become more dramatic, and switches between shots of Jasmine's face, and Dallas performing the sex, where no close ups of the acts are shown. After this, Dallas continues to masturbate Jasmine up against a refrigerator, and finally they take the action to the bed, where Dallas continues to stimulate Jasmine and then the sex ends.[82]

In *BITWC*, it is more than evident, as demonstrated above, that after her first sexual encounter with Emma, Adèle has a shift in her attitude because she moves from being shy before the sex, to more confident and assertive afterwards, and sex has a similar effect on Jasmine. Before her and Dallas have sex, Jasmine is uptight, boring and sexually repressed. Afterwards, her relationship with Dallas begins to intensify and they go on more dates together, they joke around, and they have fun. Like *BITWC*, then, sex holds substantial narrative significance as it is the catalyst for Jasmine's change – a change from boredom to happiness, and from heterosexuality to homosexuality. In more specific regards to sex as a rite of passage, for Jasmine lesbian sex is a 'personal' rite of passage, an act that confirms her lesbian identity. Sex could be seen as the 'initiation rite' that fully allows Jasmine to know what she wants in terms of her life and her sexual identity, yet as mentioned, this suggests that lesbian identity and love are formed and motivated primarily by sexual impulses or instincts. Jasmine lived a comfortable, if not boring heterosexual life with her partner Rile (Sebastian Pigott), but once she set eyes on Dallas, homosexual and/or queer 'feelings' were ignited.

Yet, Jasmine only ever *fully* realises what she wants after she has had sex with Dallas. Sex, then, is both a rite of passage and a signifier for Jasmine's 'change'. However, this could be seen as being problematic because this change is 'primarily motivated by sexual impulses or instincts', which suggests that sex is firstly a gateway to cross from heterosexuality to homosexuality, and secondly that lesbians are oversexed individuals. This 'oversexed' representation of Dallas and Jasmine is likewise reinforced through three other sex scenes, all of which last around four to five minutes, which is, as I have already delineated in this chapter, longer than most mainstream or theatrically-released films. In these scenes, Dallas is almost always the 'giver' (the top) of sexual pleasure, and Jasmine is the 'taker' (the bottom), a dynamic often stereotypically (but not always actually) linked with the butch-femme binary (Walker *et al*, 2012). An argument could also be made that suggests Jasmine was bisexual all along, however, near the film's conclusion, Jasmine does return to her fiancée, afraid she cannot leave him for Dallas. Her fiancée, in the penultimate scene of the film, tries to initiate

[82] Note throughout that passage not once was there an instance where Jasmine performs any sex act to Dallas.

sex in the bathroom, but Jasmine cries and cannot go through with it. Jasmine's complete rejection of her fiancée suggests, then, that Jasmine has left behind her heterosexual identity for a homosexual one. Jasmine, in an emotionally intimate part of the film, also discusses how her relationship with her mother deterred her from experimenting with her queer/lesbian feelings, and that she was forced in to heterosexuality. Furthermore, and on the other hand, sex as the 'initiation rite' which acts as a catalyst that allows Jasmine to change is sex-positive. While the film may feature more sex than the average theatrically-released film, sex is once again symbolises an act that can generate or unleash change, an idea that advances ideas around sex-for-reproduction or sex-for-pleasure discourses because, as both *Below Her Mouth* and *BITWC* suggest, sex can mean and be so much more than this.

To round off discussions of narrative, it is also worth mentioning that, arguably, the sex scenes in both films are used to 'show' the emotional relationship the characters share with each other; the sex is also a physical manifestation of their love. As I explore more thoroughly in chapter four, the idea of sex being a physical manifestation of love is not an unfamiliar trope adopted in heteronormative (or homonormative) romance films, and sex acting as a physical manifestation of their love is a heteronormative construction. Russel Vannoy states that sex is not 'necessary to express things like trust, tenderness, generosity, and intimacy' (1997: 249), yet it could be argued that 'all lovers ought to regard their sexual acts as expressions of love since sex, unlike tennis or taking out the garbage [together], resides in a cultural context that holds that sex between lovers is an expression of their love' (1997: 250). Vannoy uses the term 'culture' here, and maybe what he really means is 'heteronormative culture', since 'sex as an act of love' could arguably translate to 'sex in a consensual, heterosexual, faithful relationship' that displays a version of 'love'. Often in (contemporary) romance films, they show that sex is an 'expression of love', and the sex scenes in this sense are justified as they are often romantic, idealised and meaningful, as Krzywinska also writes (2006). As Sarah Hentges likewise notes, 'the mainstream market is saturated by a particular version of love' which is usually romantic (2005: 42), and to show love that is not romanticised is deviant or queer. Often films like *Secretary*, for example, represent more 'deviant' practises (BDSM) or sexualities through a romantic lens, to make them 'palatable, if not more accepted' (Hentges, 2005: 42). Representing a normative relationship on-screen may also have the same purpose of making gender deviance more 'palatable', particularly for heterosexual spectators. It would be too superficial to suggest that the filmmakers or the producers wanted to make Emma and Adèle's relationship or Natalie and Dallas' relationship 'palatable' for audiences, yet the normative

nature of their relationships seems to conform to some heterosexual standards (as well as hetero-centric genres).

4. Conclusion

As I have thoroughly demonstrated throughout this chapter, in *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* the tensions between the stylistic framing of sex (as well as the framing and presentation of the idealised female body) and the narrative purpose of sex is stark. The explicit representation of lesbian sex in *Below Her Mouth* and *BITWC* is bound to issues such as heterosexualisation, objectification and fetishization, which ultimately means that because of this, the representation of lesbian sex and sexual desire is limited and, in the worst case, offensive and sexist/misogynistic. However, on the level of narrative, in both films sex carries large (symbolic and literal) significance as a rite of passage which helps to reify desires and identities, as well as acting as the catalyst which allows characters to 'grow' and 'change'. This tension between style and narrative in sexually explicit lesbian films also means that they represent a site of ideological tension too – a tension which sees aesthetic and narrative play off against each other. It was (and is) my hope that this chapter adds an academically rigorous interjection in to debates around (explicit) lesbian sex in cinema, to offer the idea that while aesthetic and stylistic issues are prevalent and very important, we must not discredit these films entirely, and through my investigation of both films' narratives, I have revealed that these films are more nuanced in their messages about sex and the role it can have within the 'human experience', but more specifically, within the 'lesbian experience'.

Chapter Four:

Sex and Homonormativity in Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Films

The presence of homonormativity has been somewhat implicit throughout this thesis so far. Chapter one focused on films released before 2010 which queered dominant ideas and notions surrounding sex, sexual pleasure and sexual desire; chapter two drew attention to the ways in which some contemporary gay male films have been using stylistic elements from porn and cinema as a way of honouring cultural heritage and as a way to try achieve 'realism' which extends carnal knowledge in the cinema; while chapter three highlighted that explicit lesbian sex in cinema is often *aesthetically problematic but narratively imperative*, where sex is represented problematically in regards to the (male) gaze and film style, but on the level of narrative, sex is an integral part of character development and acts as a rite of passage. This chapter, however, shifts the focus more intensely on to the intersection between homonormative politics and representations of gay and lesbian sex in contemporary French and North American cinemas, in line my third and final research aim.

As I have explored at different stages in this thesis, some contemporary gay and lesbian filmmaking intersects with, and continues, the radical politics set out by the New Queer Cinema of the 1990s (see introduction for more of a discussion of this), but on the flip side, some strands are also entrenched in homonormative ideologies whereby homosexual identities are represented as being akin to heterosexual identities, or as preserving heteronormative ideals through narratives that centre on love, romance, marriage, domestic life and personal (as opposed to political) issues. This is alongside sex being represented as a physical manifestation of romance and love, as well as sex being sentimentalised as not a physical act for pleasure, but a physical act that creates romantic relationships in a heteronormative, and homonormative, manner. To explore these issues, this chapter is divided in to three case studies that highlight some of the most prominent ways in which some contemporary gay-and-lesbian themed films, both independent and mainstream, have rendered sex homonormative, or have offered a homonormative way of expressing or representing (gay or lesbian) sexual acts. The reason I have chosen both mainstream and independent films is to highlight the fact that although mainstream films are often less sexually explicit, this does not then mean sexually explicit independent films are not also bound to more limiting or normative ideologies, ideals or messages surrounding sex/sexual pleasure/sexual desire. Therefore, my inclusion of an

independent film functions to unearth the presence of homonormativity outside of the mainstream, where it is typically seen to dominate.

Subsequently, then, the first two case studies examine what I call 'homonormative gestures' in the form of panning away from sex as exemplified in *Call Me by Your Name*, and the uses of blocking devices and the fade-to-black editing technique as exemplified in *Carol*. My analysis of these films also connects to Duggan's ideas around homonormativity connecting to a politics of privatisation. The third case study then looks at how sex is presented as a physical act that creates or confirms love (and therefore creates/confirms a romantic relationship in a heteronormative manner) in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo*. Moreover, having a chapter dedicated to homonormativity is important not only because it relates to my third research aim, but precisely because cinema has a part to play in manifesting a particular version of gay and lesbian romance, love and intimacy within the public sphere, and the ways in which this has been done in recent years has closely related to the politics of homonormativity. Furthermore, a sub-question that looms over this chapter is: 'how do some contemporary gay and lesbian films sustain and uphold heteronormative values and ideologies surrounding sex and intimacy'? The idea of the upholding of heteronormative values, institutions and ideologies is a key element in the conceptualisation of homonormativity, and this is outlined in my analysis below.

This chapter, then, begins with some historical context as to how mainly mainstream cinema since 2000 has shifted its focus on to homonormative ways of representing gay and lesbian identities. Here, I will also introduce some of Duggan's ideas around homonormativity. Proceeding these discussions, this chapter will move on to the specific case studies which function to uncover and highlight how some strands of contemporary gay and lesbian cinemas have detached themselves from a queer radical politics in favour of a focus that explicitly puts homonormative ideologies front and centre, not only in their overall narrative focus, but even in their representations of sex and intimacy.

1. Homonormativity (and Cinema) since the Turn of the Century

The term 'homonormativity' first gained currency when it was used by Lisa Duggan in a 2002 (edited) book chapter entitled 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism'. However, pre-dating Duggan's conceptualisation of homonormativity, Michael Warner in his 1999 monograph *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* commented on the rise of gay partnerships that were happening in the 1990s,

which, for him, depoliticised gay men and lesbian women, who he says were more concerned with integrating in to the (heterosexual) mainstream than resisting 'any attempt to make the norms of straight life in to the standards by which queer life should be measured' (88). Warner's *The Trouble with Normal* came at a time when homosexuality was either being decriminalised or becoming more acceptable in Western liberal countries, and gay-and-lesbian romantic relationships were becoming more prominently like heterosexual unions, where monogamy and parenthood were becoming 'normal' for homosexuals. This assimilation in to the hetero-mainstream was also fuelled by several injustices, but the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s led to the need for more legal protection for gay men and lesbian women, which was, arguably, the central reasons for the increasing prevalence of homosexual assimilation. While the AIDS crisis fuelled a radical queer politics in some strands of LGBTQIA+ communities, it also made it clear that gay men were being failed and oppressed by the juridical system. This was because if their partner had AIDS they could be denied visitation rights, and once their partner had died of AIDS, they would risk losing their home (particularly if their name was not on the home lease), had hardly any access to therapy and/or mental health treatments, and would have difficulties inheriting their partner's possessions and assets. In the 1980s there was also a "lesbian baby boom", and this in correlation with the AIDS crisis meant that homosexuals were, as George Chauncey writes, compelled to 'deal with powerful institutions – family and probate courts, hospitals, adoption agencies and funeral homes' (2013). The need for legal recognition and legal protection, ultimately, was a considerable factor that fuelled the 'homonormative movement', so to speak. When delineated in this way, homonormativity can be thought of as a 'positive' move for homosexuals as they began to gain legal protection and wider recognition in (particularly) Western societies.

However, in Duggan's conceptualisation of homonormativity she essentially highlights the negative or regressive ramifications of homosexual assimilation, and at its core, homonormativity (for Duggan) is best labelled as 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but *upholds them and sustains them*' (Duggan 2002: 179).[83] Homonormative relationships, for instance, typically includes two (maybe white or middle-class) gay men or lesbian women who are committed to a monogamous marriage and/or relationship (sometimes with children too), which is seen as 'a compliance with heteronormative normalization' (Santos 2013: 58). Essentially, instead of contrasting the ubiquity of heterosexuality and its ideologies, homonormative individuals obey them and, as

[83] Italics are added for effect.

Duggan identifies, they also 'sustain them' too, which is one of the most pertinent aspects within the criticism and critical discussion of homonormativity. It is important because it highlights the ways in which some homosexual individuals have been interpellated in to an ideological system that makes them believe they are equal within a certain society, when in reality, they are pawns in the game of heteronormativity as they sustain those very ideologies that, historically, oppressed homosexual and queer people. This also means that, as Andrew Gorman-Murray notes, 'homonormativity is not simply read as the neoliberal and assimilative dimension of lesbian and gay rights, but it is an apolitical outcome firmly situated – 'anchored', as Duggan puts it – in the domestic sphere' (2017: 152). This means that homonormativity takes the onus away from political concerns that effect entire communities, to put the focus explicitly on the private and domestic lives of homosexuals, which also leads to apathetic and apolitical strands of gay male and lesbian cultures.

Moreover, in Duggan's conceptualisation of homonormativity in *The Twilight of Equality?*, she writes that homonormativity promises 'the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2004: 50), and more cogently, that:

> [H]omonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: "equality" becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, "freedom" becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the "right to privacy" becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. (2004: 67-68)

In other words, homonormativity favours the domestic sphere as the ultimate 'private space', only certain individuals have the right to 'freedom' under homonormative ideals, and 'equality' fundamentally means that only *some* homosexuals can have access to certain conservative institutions, such as marriage. It is here that I also wish to specifically highlight the idea that '"equality" becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions', as this is an important idea to relate to how particularly mainstream American cinema has tried to offer a sense of equality for homosexuals by only allowing 'certain individuals narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions', those individuals being white, partnered, normative couples, and the conservatizing institution being Hollywood. Furthermore, in Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal*, he also makes various comments that can be transferred

to film cultures, particularly American film culture post-2000. While discussing political groups that mediate power, Warner states - '[t]he more you are willing to articulate political issues in a way that plays to a normal audience, the more success you are likely to have' (1999: 44). This quote, which ultimately relates to the concept of palatability, is especially pertinent when we relate it to the mainstream gay and lesbian narratives that occurred more dominantly in American cinema between 1999 and 2010 (and after).

As I delineated in the introduction, films such as *Transamerica, Brokeback Mountain, I Love You, Phillip Morris, Milk, A Single Man* and *The Kids Are All Right* began to offer 'lite' versions of LGBTQ+ identities, issues and relationships in the first decade of the twenty-first century, around the same time some homosexuals were being interpellated in to the hetero-mainstream. This is alongside a narrative and thematic focus that shifted away from more radical politics evident in New Queer Cinema, to an explicit focus on personal relationships, love, and domestic life. Moreover, the fact all of these gay and lesbian films had 'star' actors or actresses playing roles within them, were produced with medium-range budgets, and were nominated for or won Academy Awards, means that the films were given a broader release world-wide and therefore gained more audience attention. These films, however (besides *Milk* to some extent), preserved and sustained normative ideals by focusing more narrowly on personal issues instead of political issues, and moved from aesthetic and narrative innovation to films that closely followed conventional filmmaking techniques, furthering the point that these films assimilated in to the 'mainstream'.

In many ways, *The Kids Are All Right* is one of the best examples of how mainstream American cinema has shifted (and continues to shift) towards a homonormative focus post-2000. *The Kids Are All Right* centres on the family life of Nic (Annette Bening) and Jules (Julianne Moore), who are a couple with a daughter, Joni (Mia Wasikowska), who is 18, and a son, Laser (Josh Hutcherson), who is 15. Without firstly telling their moms, Laser and Joni decide to track down their biological father, Paul (Mark Ruffalo). When they meet him, they discover he is a "cool" guy who owns a motorcycle, a restaurant, and an organic garden. When Laser and Joni tell their moms about their contact with Paul, Nic does not like the idea, but with some persuasion the five of them get together and the parents meet Paul. Later, Paul hires Jules to landscape his back garden, and they (surprisingly) begin a sexual affair. After an argument with Jules, Nic who dislikes Paul, actually proposes they all have dinner at Paul's home. Paul agrees, and things begin to improve at the dinner party because Nic relaxes and also makes a connection with Paul over their shared liking of Joni Mitchell. However, Nic is

horrified when she finds traces of Jules's hair in Paul's bathroom and his bedroom, and when they get home, Nic challenges Jules. To begin with, Jules refutes the affair but then admits to it after some interrogation. While Nic is clearly upset, Jules reaffirms the fact that she does not even love with Paul and is not now heterosexual, but instead she just wanted to be "appreciated" by another person. Later in the film, and the night before Joni leaves for college, Paul shows up at their home. Nic challenges him and states that if he wants a family then he should make one of his own. Proceeding this, Jules addresses her family about the recent issues, and she says that marriage is hard, and finally admits her errors and begs for their compassion. The following morning, the family take Joni to college. As Nic and Jules hug Joni goodbye, they also show some affection towards one another. During the drive back to home, Laser says to both Jules and Nic that they "shouldn't break up" due to the fact they are "too old". Jules and Nic both laugh at Laser's comment, and the film concludes with them grinning towards one another and holding each other's hands.

This narrative description makes it clear that *The Kids Are All Right* is a film that tries to capture the (minute) details of contemporary, domestic lesbian life. *The Kids Are All Right* is distinctly homonormative because of its thematic and narrative concerns, those being the problems of marriage, children, and domestic life, as opposed to wider political concerns that effect LGBTQIA+ and other marginal identities in everyday life. Furthermore, within *The Kids Are All Right*, butch/femme lesbian identities are also placed within a domestic space, which promotes homonormative ideals over queer sexuality, as the butch/femme lesbian dynamic that Nic and Jules have enabled the film to connect with heteronormative values. It enables this connection because Nic is the 'breadwinner' and the 'butch' of the two, whereas Jules is the 'femme' (and the 'homemaker'), who is between jobs and attempts to establish her own landscaping business – Nic is 'like' the father and Jules is 'like' the mother when read through a homonormative lens. This issue is further reified by the fact that 'writer and director Lisa Cholodenko asserted that one of her primary intentions for the film was to make it popular and ''viewable'' to mainstream audiences … [therefore] characters fit into stereotypical, normative roles' (Fine and Whitlock 2012: 180). On one hand, then, Cholodenko tried to offer a palatable and perhaps 'positive' representation of modern lesbian life to mainstream (heterosexual) audiences, audiences who may have a limited knowledge surrounding homosexual domestic life. On the other hand, the film normalises the characters, asserting heteronormative ideologies, framing the representation of domestic lesbian life to be *like* that of heterosexual domestic life. *The Kids Are All Right*, by framing the lesbians in this way, they 'strongly

resemble heterosexuals [and] they too perform all of the familiar tasks that constitute everyday life in a family: doing the dishes, making breakfast, going to the grocery store, doing homework' (Fox 2015). Moreover, *The Kids Are All Right* is emblematic of a political paradox that looms over contemporary LGBTQIA+ politics, that paradox being between 'writers, directors, and producers [who aim] to provide a venue to educate the dominant culture about the normalness (for lack of a better word) of lesbian-headed [or homosexual-headed] families' (Reed and Green 2012: 170), and the apolitical nature of 'normative' portrayals of homosexual domestic life, which eludes larger LGBTQIA+ concerns. Overall, then, *The Kids Are All Right* portrays a stereotypical (mainly due to the butch/femme dynamic between Nic and Jules) and homonormative version of contemporary lesbian life. This then ties to larger socio-cultural issues also anchored to homonormativity, as Fine and Whitlock note - 'this rhetoric of normalcy ties to the exaggerated standards that are reinforced by neo-national discourse that dictates that normalcy is accomplished by utilizing national ideals' (2012: 183). With Cholodenko choosing (as the above quote from Fine and Whitlock indicates) to normalise and stereotype lesbian relationships, it suggests that homosexual individuals *can* be 'stable', yet they must obey normative and 'neo-national' (American) ideals to achieve this.

Consequently, then, the move towards a more explicit focus on homosexual life in mainstream American cinema could be seen, under a conservative or neoliberal rubric, as a move towards acceptance and equality, in cinema more specifically, and in society more broadly. Yet, this 'move' supports Duggan's idea that, under homonormative ideals, 'equality becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions' (2003: 65), which in this case, would be the conservative institution of Hollywood, as I have discussed. Moreover, the very fact that the focus in this era was on homonormative lives and ideals (whether that be the exploration of domestic life or personal relationships), also functions to preserve heteronormative values and ideologies. However, the focus on homonormativity in American (and French) cinema did not magically stop at 2010, and particularly after 2011, gay-or-lesbian oriented cinema predominantly split in to two identifiable strands: the first was that of films which upheld homonormative ideals and the second strand are those films that challenged homonormative ideals. This post-2011 era of gay and lesbian filmmaking, as outlined in the introduction, has been labelled a 'New Queer Cinema Renaissance' (2016) by Stuart Richards, 'Neo-Queer Cinema' (2017) by myself, and as discussed in chapter two, 'New Gay Sincerity' by Andrew Moor (2018), and this cycle of films has seen a variety of films which mainly sustain heteronormative ideologies, with some exceptions.

Now I have further contextualised the intersection of homonormativity and mainly American cinema since 2000, this chapter moves on to the central case studies to reveal the ways in which some gay and lesbian oriented films have offered homonormative ways of representing and mediating sex, intimacy, and romance, essentially upholding and preserving heteronormative values and ideologies, a key element in the conceptualisation of homonormativity.

2. Panning Away as 'Homonormative Gesture' in *Call Me by Your Name*

Of all the films that are examined within this thesis, *Call Me by Your Name* is two things: it is the least sexually explicit of all the films, yet it is arguably the most successful and popular. These two things are not mutually exclusive, and it is no surprise that this is the case. As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, mainstream gay and lesbian films are often defined as being 'mainstream' through several complementary factors, with one of those also being a lack of sexual explicitness. Independent gay and lesbian cinema, as this thesis has so far been concerned with, has offered audiences some of the most graphic (re)presentations of sex in 'above-the-parapet' cinema, whereby cum shots and penetration have been openly displayed, as well as lengthy sex scenes that are sometimes triple or quadruple the length of sex scenes that are seen in mainstream cinema more broadly.

Released in November 2017, *Call Me by Your Name* centres on the relationship between Elio and Oliver, which is set "somewhere in the North of Italy" in the summer of 1983, and the story is adapted from André Aciman's novel of the same name. The film begins when Oliver (a 24-year-old American university graduate student working on his PhD) arrives at the Perlman's 17th century villa, where he acts as the annual summer intern who helps Elio's father Mr. Perlman (Michael Stuhlbarg), a professor of Greco-Roman history. Over the course of six weeks, a close, sexual and romantic relationship between Elio and Oliver grows, a relationship that changes both men. However, the relationship can only ever be momentary, leading to a heart-wrenching ending which sees the two of them part ways (and Oliver getting engaged to a woman in America).

The film's mainstream status was reified through its critical and commercial attention and acclaim. The film gained a wide theatrical release which has given it a worldwide profit of $40,353,565 (IMDb), the most of any films that are analysed in this thesis (just ahead of *Carol*), and it received outstanding reviews (it has a 93 out of 100 Metascore, which is made up of an accumulation of fitty-one critical reviews), as well as winning an Academy Award and a

BAFTA for Best Adapted Screenplay (which was awarded to James Ivory). Even though in the past there were prolific films that centred on gay or lesbian identities or relationships, the most notable of all being *Brokeback Mountain*, *Call Me by Your Name* (and perhaps *Love, Simon* [dir. Greg Berlanti, 2018]) is indicative of how much cultural currency gay male films can now carry in our contemporary era. As Guy Lodge writes in an article for *The Guardian*, *Call Me by Your Name* is 'the kind of handsome European delicacy that would once have been deemed a niche item, but is now an object of obsessive youth fandom, memed and gif-ed and quoted to within an inch of its life across social media' (2018). Not only this, but as Simon Chilvers reports (also for *The Guardian*), *Call Me by Your Name* had inspired menswear for the 2018 Spring/Summer season, with the standout trend 'easily [being] short-shorts', which was worn by Armie Hammer's character Oliver in the film, as well as 'loose oxford shirts' and 'logo tees', worn by Timothée Chalamet's character Elio (2018). Subsequently, the attention surrounding *Call me By Your Name,* as well as its cultural currency, pertains more broadly to the way in which gay male images are now (even) more accepted in mainstream culture, but as I discuss below, it once again relates to issues such as homonormativity, gay assimilation and the "selling out" of (gay, lesbian or queer) filmmakers for mainstream status and success.

Moreover, *Call Me by Your Name*, in terms of its generic positioning, sits firmly inside the boundaries of the romantic drama, and I would argue that its generic position as a romantic drama arguably helped the film to be so popular, as the 'universal' nature of love that is explored in the film allowed it to appeal to not *only* gay males, but to a wide (and/or heterosexual) audience. This element of palatability feeds in to the larger discourse of homonormativity and contemporary cinema that I delineated above, as the film not only focuses on issues of love, romance and intimacy, but it features typically attractive, white, middle-class men as the central protagonists – men that, quite frankly, complement the 'body politic'. Another element of homonormativity, besides the preservation of heteronormative values, institutions and ideologies, relates to ideas around corporeality, as I hinted towards in chapter three. As Paul France notes, the second definition of homonormativity encompasses 'an elite microcultural definition of the ideal and supreme gay man, the one who stays fit and beautiful' (2015). France also notes that: 'it's disconcerting to witness a group of people — a group of people that I once understood (and still understand) to be so marginalized — to be just as elitist as their discriminators some twenty years or more prior' (2015). This idea of the 'the ideal and supreme gay man' is once again seen as a form of assimilation – some gay men construct their image and identity to look *like* heterosexual men, adopting or enacting traits of

hegemonic or toxic masculinity, creating the "straight acting" male homosexual. As Mariano Croce states – 'the production of new anomalous, marginalized sexualities is achieved by means of the rights discourse, by which states recognize as equal, and are inclined to integrate, what they themselves determine as qualified members of the body politic' (2015: 4). The issue of the 'body politic' is especially pertinent here, as the 'body politic' (or the 'national body'), in Western societies, is typically heterosexualised through certain gendered enactments (as discussed in chapter three) which also serve to complement heterosexuality. This also relates to the concept of homonationalism. Homonationalism, as concisely delineated by Tsafi and Ben-Ari, 'refers to nationalist homonormativity, in whose framework 'domesticated' LGBT's communities serve as ammunition for nationalism … [t]he discussion on homonationalism highlights a process by which the LGBT community is no longer perceived as a threat to the state, but as a marker of Westernized state's tolerance and pluralism' (2018: 2). Moreover, for scholars such as Puar (2013), homonationalism is the 'historical convergence of state practices, transnational circuits of queer commodity culture and human rights paradigms' (2013: 337). Essentially, homonationalism is a concept and critique that expands on the notion of homonormativity to identify the ways in which homosexual individuals in Western societies complement and sustain nationalist (and usually conservative or neoliberal) ideologies, as well as serving as markers of, as Tsafi and Ben-Ari state, 'Westernized state's tolerance and pluralism' (2). Subsequently, then, the "straight acting" gay or bisexual man or the (highly) "femme" lesbian or bisexual woman, would complement the 'body politic' and therefore would be seen as more (but not always definitely) 'equal' in that society. Croce also writes that 'Western liberal societies seem more and more willing to grant equal rights and equal opportunities to homosexuals who distance themselves from the subversive model of promiscuous, flaunting, militant queer, and take on the character of the 'good homosexual' (Ibid).

Moreover, this case study will now shift to pay closer attention to the central sex scene in *Call Me by Your Name*, and I will further argue that the film offers a homonormative way of expressing gay male sex through the specific act of panning away, because this gesture, overall, it connects sex with love and romance in a (overly) sentimental manner. Firstly, however, I want to briefly explain more concisely what I mean by 'homonormative gesture', before carrying on with the formal analysis. A homonormative gesture in cinema, I would argue, is one that allows a connection between the stylistic and narrative elements of a film, and the messages and ideals the film is portraying and promoting. I use 'gesture' because acts

such as panning away or fading to black, point towards an intricate connection between what the camera shows and what the film is communicating, and the below analysis will bring this to light even more cogently.

Furthermore, the panning away from sex (in cinema) never seemed to be such a pressing issue before *Call Me by Your Name* came along. In the *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, the last paragraph in a letter to the editor, regarding *Call Me by Your Name*, reads:

> One last point: in the novel, Oliver eats the peach; Elio doesn't stop him. Why would he? Likewise, the camera pans away, as Holleran remarks, just when it should reveal the sexual consummation that Elio and Oliver enjoy. I found this to be the worst moment of the film, reminiscent of movies under the Hays Code in the 1950s. Some of us laughed out loud. It was a ridiculous step backward from the hot tent scene in *Brokeback Mountain*. (2017)

Firstly, the writer of this letter is referring to a scene in *Call Me by Your Name* where Elio rips out the core of a peach and uses it as a masturbatory tool (to which he also ejaculates inside of it too), and secondly, to the now infamous 'sex scene' which begins one hour and twenty-two minutes in to the film, when the camera pans away to avoid any sexual contact beyond kissing or caressing.[84] The writer of this letter, who sees the panning away as both a 'step back in time' and a laughable gesture, also compares in to the 'tent scene' in *Brokeback Mountain*, where the two protagonists have rough, aggressive sex, which I also discussed more in chapter two. However, it is no surprise that *Call Me by Your Name* is compared to *Brokeback Mountain* in this way. It is no surprise specifically because *Brokeback Mountain* 'entered the mainstream consciousness like no other widely distributed gay- themed independent film before it'[85] and not only this, but it was the first mainstream gay-themed film that, as Gary Needham identifies: queered the Western genre; 'was a key production in the short history of Universal's specialty division, Focus Features'; the film comments on and alludes to 'the closet'; as well as using a shot/reverse shot structure that 'may strike a chord of recognition with the gay spectator because it resembles cruising' (Needham 2010: 1- 8). Even though *Brokeback Mountain*'s 'tent scene' is not overly graphic unlike a (sizeable) proportion of independent gay male themed films since 2011, it was seen as a "positive" step forward in the representation of gay

[84] I have placed the phrase sex scene in inverted commas because no sex is actually depicted, so it is less a sex scene, and more of a 'sex scene' (inverted commas adding emphasis).
[85] And a strong case could be made to identify *Call Me by Your Name* as the second or third major film to enter the 'mainstream consciousness', especially since *Brokeback Mountain* and *Moonlight*.

male sexual desire at the time of its release, as was *Brokeback Mountain* as a film more broadly. *Call Me by Your Name*, however, when situated within a contemporary cinematic landscape where cum shots are shown or sex scenes are much longer and graphic, *Call Me by Your Name* is coy, tame and perhaps even laughable, as the above excerpt from the letter to the editor indicates. But why is panning away from the sex not only coy or laughable, but why is it a 'homonormative gesture'? How and why does the panning away also sentimentalise the sex, therefore connecting it to homonormative ideologies?

The central sex scene begins in *Call Me by Your Name* when Elio sees Oliver having a cigarette on the balcony that extends from Oliver's bedroom. Elio steps out on the balcony and Oliver softly states: "I'm glad you came". Proceeding this, Elio puts his hand on the balcony rail where they both stand, and Oliver places his hand on top of his. For seven seconds, the camera exhibits a close up of the touching hands, as well as Oliver gently stroking his thumb on the back of Elio's hand, which is symbolic of both the dynamic of their sexual relationship (Oliver's hand being on top suggests he is, sexually, the 'top') but also that the sex that is about to commence will be romantic or intimate, as the stroking also indicates. This is reified through the length of the close-up too, which functions to communicate the same idea that the sex is going to be romantic and/or intimate by focusing more intensely on the touching of the hands (and the stroking). Elio then declares that he is "nervous" and when Oliver goes to caress Elio's face, he slowly walks away and in to Oliver's bedroom. Once again, this is symbolic of their dynamic, as the sex takes place in Oliver's 'space' (his bedroom) and not Elio's. Elio then says "I like what you've done to the place [Oliver's bedroom]… it's nice" and then they both awkwardly stand by each other at the foot of the bed, before Elio starts to jokingly gnaw at Oliver's shoulder (to which Oliver laughs). Oliver then asks if Elio is OK, and after a short pause, Elio playfully answers "me okay".[86] Elio then walks away a little, before draping himself over Oliver, once again in a playful manner. Oliver then asks Elio "can I kiss you?", Elio responds quickly with a "yes please", and while holding Elio's head in his hands, Oliver pushes him away a little and then pulls Elio towards him, intimately kissing his cheek and forehead. The subtle and nuanced way in which Oliver pushes Elio away and then towards him functions (once again) to suggest that Oliver is the one in control, the one who governs the sex, to some degree. Reifying this point, Oliver then quickly kisses Elio on the cheek and jokingly goes to walk away (as if to suggest that nothing is going to happen now), but Elio shows his

[86] This is also said in a childish manner, which consciously and playfully nods to their age gap as well as Elio's (sexual) immaturity.

vulnerability and/or desperation (and perhaps his age) by throwing his arms around Oliver and then trying to mount him. Oliver then turns around and shuts the door, which slams loudly, making them both cringe and Elio somewhat distressed as the slamming may make others pay attention to the bedroom antics that will ensue. The scene then cuts to a shot of the corridor outside of the bedroom, and then cuts back to Elio and Oliver in the bedroom, where they are sat on the bed (but we can only see their feet and them taking off their shoes). Elio slowly moves his foot and places it on top of Oliver's (this time showing some sexual initiative), and after some flirting, Elio puts his legs across Oliver's lap and sits on him, Oliver caressing his back and feeling his buttocks while he does so. They then start to passionately kiss while Elio continues to straddle Oliver, to which they then start to hurriedly undress each other. Elio then lays on the bed, Oliver straddles Elio this time, whipping his belt off as he does so – Elio lays back and watches Oliver take his cargo shorts off. This is the moment when the camera begins to pan away, just when Oliver takes off his shorts, overtly suggesting that sex is now about to happen. As the camera pans away, it shows the audience a drawing on the wall with '1981' underneath it, before panning away further, to the window, showing the still image of a tree for twelve seconds. In the background, Elio moans "Oliver" before the diegetic sound is dominated by kissing (and some quiet moaning) and the scene then cuts to the morning after, where their sleepy bodies are intermingled post-coitus.

It is clear from this narrative description that Oliver is consistently framed as being the dominant partner within Elio's and his sexual dynamic, but it is perhaps even clearer that the film priorities a romantic representation of sex and/or romantic intimacy through close-ups of hand-holding, feet-touching and medium-shots of passionate kissing and caressing, before the camera pans away to show no more sexual contact than the kissing and caressing. Furthermore, these physical acts themselves are representative of romance and passion – they are nuanced gestures that function to convey the intimacy shared between Elio and Oliver, as well as offering a romantic (and at times playful) build-up to the sex. Krzywinska writes that 'the onscreen kiss is often acceptable as indicator of love or passion; perhaps the kiss invokes romance more effectively and provides just enough information to spark viewer-generated fantasy' (30). In *Call Me by Your Name*, kissing and caressing are the only moments of sexual interaction that the audience are allowed to witness, therefore it is the only explicit 'indicator of love or passion'. However, it does leave the action to the viewer's imagination, which sounds exciting and stimulating on the surface, but really it is a deeply conservative move that also denies a cultural heritage, in favour of privatisation and sentimentality.

Moreover, the letter-to-the-editor above indicates that this romantic depiction is somewhat coy, tame, and as he says 'laughable'. However, this 'coyness' was worsened because while the audience witnesses Oliver and Elio's relationship develop, the film does also show the two men's encounters with women, and in one instance, the film shows Elio having sex with a girl for the first time (and this scene is also longer than the gay sex scene). Not only this, but the film lets the scene play out until Elio orgasms. In stark contrast, the first sex scene between Elio and Oliver finishes, as I have outlined, when the camera pans away to rustling leaves on a tree outside the bedroom window, 'leaving the young lovers' first intimate embraces to the imagination' (Dry 2017). In response to accusations of being coy, and for eluding explicit gay sex when heterosexual sex was given more screen time, the film's director Luca Guadagnino defended his decision, stating:

> '"To put our gaze upon their lovemaking would have been a sort of unkind intrusion," […] "I think that their love is in all things, so when we gaze towards the window and we see the trees, there is a sense of witnessing that. I refuse with strong firmness that I was coy in not showing that, because I think that Oliver and Elio and Armie and Timothée, the four of them displayed a very strong intimacy and closeness in so many ways and it was enough."' (Dry 2017).

What this information tells us is one striking thing: that *Call Me by Your Name*, through the evasion of (explicit) gay male sex, sentimentalises sex and renders it the ultimate private act. Additionally, the idea that 'to put our gaze upon their lovemaking would have been a sort of unkind intrusion' reifies this idea of privatisation precisely because the sex scene is rendered as "lovemaking", but the heterosexual sex scene is not. What this suggests is that we can watch two people who do not love each other have sex, but it is too "intrusive" to watch lovers having sex (see also chapter two for a discussion of this in relation to *Stranger by the Lake*), which, quite definitively, connects the representation to heteronormative notions of sex, as an act/ acts that are private and sentimental, acts that should only be witnessed and enjoyed by those partaking. The panning away in *Call Me by Your Name*, then, sentimentalises sex as an act that is too private, too intimate, too loving for the prying eyes of the audience to see – it would be, as Luca Guadagnino states, an 'unkind intrusion' to visually and openly see the physicality of the sex. Moreover, this closely relates to Duggan's idea that contemporary homonormativity promises 'a privatized, depoliticized gay culture' – a culture that is anchored to a politics of privatisation and domesticity, one that preserves the conservative sanctions that shroud sex in Western societies and cultures, sanctions which dictate that sex should be in the home or a

private space. While this broader idea of a privatised culture dictates sex should be private or in the home, a line can be drawn between this privatised culture and the evasion of gay male sex acts. Above, I briefly indicated that a homonormative gesture in cinema refers to stylistic or narrative strategies that intricately connect with homonormativity or its normalising impulses. The very notion that sex is denied in the film through the camera moving away from the sex, anchors and ties the film to a broader politics surrounding the privatisation of both gay male lives and of gay male sex, reinforcing the homonormative ideal that the homosexual experience, in our contemporary era, is depoliticised and favours private practises.

The panning away from sex in *Call Me by Your Name* is a homonormative gesture, then, precisely because it eludes and denies an explicit representation of gay male sex, but in doing this, it also closely connects it to hetero-and-homo-normative ideologies of sex being both a private act, and also an act that is sentimental and closely connected to normative ideologies that also dictates sex is a physical manifestation of love, romance and intimacy, and anything else beyond that is hedonistic lust. The panning away, as a homonormative gesture, is a representational strategy that functions to uphold and sustain heteronormative values surrounding sex and intimacy – it is a visual tactic that leaves 'the young lovers' first intimate embraces to the imagination' (Dry 2017), denying the vision and pleasures of gay male sex that have been so integral to the gay male community for decades (see chapter two). This also feeds in to the larger point that the film, and its depiction of sex, is homonormative. Where (independent) gay male films such as *Stranger by the Lake* and *I Want Your Love* offered totally explicit presentations of gay male sexual practises (mainly oral sex, anal sex and ejaculation) which, as I identified in chapter two, honoured gay cultural heritage and its connection to sex – a 'coy' film such as *Call Me by Your Name* denies a cultural heritage and anchors itself to heteronormative ideals and values – a core aspect of homonormativity or 'the homonormative'.

Continuing the discussion of homonormative gestures, this chapter now moves on to analyse *Carol*'s main sex scene, which similarly to *Call Me by Your Name* sentimentalises sex, connecting it to normative notions of love and romance, anchoring its messages about lesbian sexual intimacy to the privatised culture of homonormativity (which is also complicated when we take in to account the politics surrounding explicit lesbian sex in cinema).

3. Blocking Devices and Fade-to-Black as 'Homonormative Gestures' in *Carol*

Carol is one of the most prolific lesbian-oriented films in the history of mainstream Western cinema, and this is primarily because of two elements. The first element relates to the film's

'star' performers, Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara (and perhaps Sarah Paulson, too), who arguably enabled the film to appeal to a broader audience, as they are both well-known and respected actresses, especially Cate Blanchett, who had won two Academy Awards by the time *Carol* was released.[87] Secondly, the film was produced by the Weinstein Company and therefore was given a wide theatrical release – in fact, *Carol* was released in 790 cinemas (Box Office Mojo), a respectable number for any film with an overt focus on non-heterosexual individuals. Moreover, as Patricia Hill identifies, *Carol*'s 'shrewd release plan earned it a spot at the top of the specialty box office during the season of "quality" films marketed for Oscar consideration'.[88] Furthermore, *Carol* was directed by Todd Haynes, an accomplished gay male filmmaker who rose to prominence through the New Queer Cinema. Todd Haynes has directed (mainstream) features such as *Far From Heaven* (2002), *I'm Not There* (2007), the TV series *Mildred Pierce* (2011), *Carol*, and *Wonderstruck* (2017), and his auteur touch is evident throughout *Carol*, with Tim Grierson stating that Todd Haynes displays 'stately, evocative, confident filmmaking' (2015) in *Carol*. In addition, Eric Kohn also wrote that *Carol* shows 'a filmmaker and cast operating at the height of their powers' (2015). Moreover, *Carol* received outstanding critical reviews on its initial release, and it still maintains a 95 out of 100 Metascore (comprised of 44 critical reviews), the highest of any film included within this entire thesis. Surveying the critical reviews sourced by Metascore, most of their positive criticism centres on the film's 'handsomely detailed and furnished' aesthetic design and *mise en scène* (Bradshaw 2015), the central theme of love (and the difficulties surrounding it), as well as the two lead actresses' performances – as Justin Chang notes, *Carol* is a: 'deeply felt love story that teases out every shadow and nuance of its characters' inner lives with supreme intelligence, breathtaking [sic] poise and filmmaking craft of the most sophisticated yet accessible order' (2015).

Additionally, *Carol* is another adaptation, as the film was based on Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt* (1952), and is another film set in the past, this time in 1950s New York. *Carol* follows Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), a young woman who is a clerk in a Manhattan department store, where she meets Carol (Cate Blanchett), an older but enthralling woman confined in a loveless marriage. Something sparks between them and their connection

[87] This is as well as being considered a gay/lesbian/queer 'icon'. This is detailed in an article by Buzzfeed which reported that: 'The Trifecta of Lesbian Icons Sat Front Row at the [2017] Givenchy Show' (2017), one of those being Cate Blanchett (the other two being Rooney Mara and Julianne Moore).

[88] This 'shrewd plan' comprised of it firstly being shown at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival, followed by 'a November opening in just four theaters in New York and Los Angeles' (White 2015), before being distributed further.

strengthens, but while Carol breaks free from the confines of her marriage, her husband (Kyle Chandler) begins to interrogate her proficiency as a mother due to her involvement with Therese and relationship with her close friend Abby (Sarah Paulson). Later, Therese and Carol decide to hit the road, leaving their partners behind, in need of some refuge and escape. However, a confrontation emerges at a later point and tests Carol's and Theresa's commitment and love towards one another, and Carol ends things with Therese by letter (to which Therese throws up at the side of the road from the devastating news). The film ends, however, with Therese entering a restaurant where Carol is, standing for a few moments while fixing her gaze on Carol. Therese then slowly steps forward and walks towards Carol, bypassing waiters and other people in the restaurant, making sure her gaze is always fixed on Carol. The film then ends with Carol catching Therese's eye, and finishes with the two exchanging glances, and when the camera slowly starts to zoom in to Carol's face, the film then ends with a fade to black.

Furthermore, *Carol* is considered an important lesbian film because, as Patricia Hill states in her online article 'A Lesbian "Carol" For Christmas', '*Carol* does not offer lesbianism as a pretext for sexual display for a male gaze, as did the recent Cannes Palme d'Or winner *Blue Is the Warmest Color* (2013) … [r]ather, its drama of calculating and longing gazes is all about a lesbian point of view' (2015), which is evidenced in the film's finale.[89] White continues to note that *Carol*'s 'consciousness of itself as a representation is a crucial antidote to the politics of inclusion, visibility, and positive images that drive mainstream discourses of tolerance' (2015). It is clear, then, that *Carol* is a film that negotiates the politics of visibility, representation, and lesbian identity and desire with nuance and care, and this is particularly evident as Patricia White identifies the film as one that 'captures "a same-sex point of view" on the seductions of cinema as no other film quite has' (2015). Moreover, Bradbury-Rance writes that the film is a 'narrative of looking' which 'teases us' by prioritising the 'endless anticipation of touch' (2019: 120 – 123), instead of graphically displaying sexual interactions. However, like the panning away of sex in *Call Me by Your Name*, the fragmentation of the body and the fade-to-black editing technique in *Carol*'s sex scene are 'homonormative gestures'. But unlike *Call Me by Your Name*, *Carol*'s connection to the history and heritage of lesbian cinema, and lesbian cinema's long-standing tension with the politics of representation, can complicate my argument or my analysis. As I identified in chapter three, explicit lesbian

[89] It is debatable as to whether lesbian sexuality in *BITWC* is *simply* present as a 'pretext for sexual display for a male gaze' – I find this to be a reductive statement regarding the film.

sex in cinema is often *aesthetically problematic but narratively imperative*, and this conceptual rubric can be somewhat complicated by *Carol*.[90] However, unlike the other films analysed in chapter three, *Carol* is much softer and hence less explicit – kissing is shown, breasts are shown, but nothing else. Using Tanya Krzywinska's theories surrounding 'ideal sex' and the fade-to-black editing technique, I will now demonstrate how sex is rendered sentimental and homonormative in *Carol*.

The sex scene in *Carol* begins three-quarters of the way through the film, and is set in a dingy hotel room, which was a choice made by Haynes that was later admired by the film's screenwriter, Phyllis Nagy, who told Patricia White that 'her confidence in Haynes's sympathetic sensibility was clinched by the dinginess of the hotel room in which the sex scene was set … [s]he didn't want it to be glamorized' (2015). The sex scene is set when Carol and Therese are taking refuge on 'the road' around the Christmas period. The scene begins when Carol approaches Therese, who is sat at a dressing room table looking in the mirror. Carol places her hand on Therese's shoulder, and Therese reciprocates by holding her hand. Carol then leans down and passionately kisses Therese, and their hands start to slowly roam, touching and caressing each other's arms. The sex scene is initiated in *Carol* the same way as in *Call me By Your Name*, through gentle touching and caressing, which again functions to set a romantic and 'loving' tone, suggesting that the sex is going to be, for the characters, an expression and manifestation of their love for each other.

Therese then lies down on the bed, and Carol unties her dressing gown, revealing Therese's bare breasts. Carol carefully caresses Therese's torso, then leans in to kiss her. After some kissing, they both then fully take their dressing gowns off – Carol then touches Therese's breasts, while Therese strokes her back. Carol then begins to kiss down from Therese's neck, to her breasts and torso, and then finally down to Theresa's vagina and vulva. As Carol performs cunnilingus on to Therese, close up shots of Therese's face function to display that she is in the throes of pleasure. Proceeding this, an overhead shot then shows Carol moving back up to the head of the bed, and she begins to kiss Therese again. In a series of close ups, the two of then continue to kiss, before Carol stops, stroking Therese's face while her eyes are closed, which suggests she is digesting the moment and taking it (or Therese's beauty) all in. They kiss again on the lips, with Carol then moving down to kiss Therese's neck. The camera

[90] It can be complicated by *Carol* but my conceptual framing of lesbian sex in cinema as *aesthetically problematic but narratively imperative* applies more specifically to lesbian cinema that presents explicit or 'relatively explicit' sex.

then begins to zoom closer and closer to the two of them and their bodies, and as the image starts to become blurry, a fade-to-black ends the scene.

It is clear from this delineation of the sex scene that Carol and Therese's sexual interaction is rendered romantic, intimate and loving, and like *Call Me by Your Name*, it is rendered this way through shots that show the two women touching, kissing and caressing each other. The pacing of the sex scene, which is quite slow, also contributes to the romanticisation of the scene and of the sex. However, this romantic and intimate portrayal of lesbian sex is juxtaposed with the 'dingy' motel room the sex takes place in – as the quote from White points out, this was a choice that pleased the film's scriptwriter, who 'didn't want [the sex scene] to be glamorized' (2015). While the setting for the sex may not be glamorous, the use of orchestral music (particularly the sounds of violins and harps), slow pacing, and close up shots of kissing and/or caressing, contributes to a highly-stylised representation of sex and sexual intimacy that could be read as somewhat beautiful or plush. Additionally, close-up shots often fragment the two women's bodies, which, at times, carefully blocks the spectators' view, so they cannot see any more than the 'movements' of the sex acts, or more specifically, any more than Carol's head moving as she performs cunnilingus. This choice to 'block' the sex, as to not show any more than soft-core features would allow, is a homonormative gesture because, once again, the act is sentimentalised and connects to heteronormative notions of sex or sex acts as performative for the sake of love and romance, as well as being anchored to a politics of privacy. Although, as Krzywinska identifies, 'blocking' devices (which are strategies to deny the audience a total view of the sex) 'work the rules of the regulation system to maximise their potential market' (2006: 30), essentially abiding by the laws of the mainstream sphere, where gratuitousness sex is not allowed, due to censor restraints but also because explicit sex may degrade a film and align it with (hard-core) pornography (Barker 2013). This means that the sex scene abides by the laws of the mainstream film market, simultaneously offering a romantic, plush representation of lesbian sex that is less exploitative than other films such as *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* or *Below Her Mouth* and is rendered more erotic and intimate.

However, the visual framing of the sex in *Carol* could be read as idealistic, despite the 'dingy' setting (which really functions to add realism to the scene, so it is not totally idealistic and perhaps unbelievable). As Richard Dyer writes, mainstream entertainment (which of course encapsulates mainstream cinema) 'offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide … [a]lternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other

than what is can be imagined and maybe realized' (1992: 20). *Carol*'s sex scene and its idealised visual and aural construction is arguably done this way to offer a romantic and intimate depiction of lesbian sexual desire which is perhaps 'better' than in reality. Yet, this idealised depiction of lesbian sexual desire is also used to communicate the love the two women have for each other. Similar to *Call Me by Your Name*, *Carol*'s sex scene is about expressing love – and the fact that we see no more than kissing, caressing and brief moments where the movements of cunnilingus are displayed, implies that the sex is not sex, but "love-making", so to show the details or the physical element of the sex would be to 'intrude' on the lover's sexual intimacy. This also means that the sex is connected to the notion of sex being private, a heteronormative ideal that has endured for decades and one of which I have discussed throughout this chapter. Krzywinska also notes that portrayals of idealised sex in cinema 'may support insidious and harmful ideologies' (40), as opposed to providing audiences with visions of romantic sex that function to offer them 'plenitude and richness missing in real life' (41). While it is debatable whether homonormative ideologies are always exactly 'insidious', *Carol*'s portrayal of idealised sex serves to complement heteronormative and homonormative ideals where sex is a private practice, and a physical act that is interwoven with normative notions of love, romance and desire.

Furthermore, the fade-to-black editing technique utilised at the end of the scene also serves to complement heteronormative and homonormative ideals. This editing technique also has a long history within mainstream cinema, not only as a tactic that appeases censors, but again functions to romanticise and sentimentalise sex. While discussing the conventional methods in which cinema typically *suggests* sexual activity rather than explicitly *showing* it, Krzywinska writes: '[o]ne such device that has widespread use, to the extent that is has become something of a cliché, is the ellipsis … [a] typical scenario is to build towards a sexual event and then, at the point it becomes fairly obvious what will occur, the scene fades to black' (29). This technique is evident in a whole host of films and film genres, particularly, as Krzywinska identifies, melodramas and film noirs produced by Hollywood in the 1940s (29). The fade-to-black edit also forces audiences to read 'cinematic signs', as Krzywinska notes: 'the viewer is invited by those signs to infer intense sexual passion and imagine what it is that might be going on in the off-screen room … [a]s such, one of the strengths of the ellipse is that it allows the viewer to project into the gap their own personally tailored fantasy' (29). The notion that the fade-to-black allows audiences to 'project into the gap their own personally tailored fantasy' is somewhat idealistic. While the ellipsis or fade-to-black may force spectators to use their

imagination to picture the sex in their heads (effectively allowing them to render the sex in any way they like, and as kinky or hard-core as they like), it also denies an explicit vision of the sex, which relates more broadly to the politics of representation and the denial of sex, but more concerning, it complements national, sex-negative ideologies whereby sex is too intimate, passionate and romantic to be openly displayed or to be displayed publicly. The fade-to-black, like panning away and the fragmentation of the body, sentimentalises sex and connects it to hetero-and-homo-normative ideologies, that dictates that sexual activity should be private (and is anchored to a politics of privatisation), and are acts that physically express love, romance and passion, very similarly to *Call Me by Your Name*.

Moving away from 'homonormative gestures' that are anchored to a politics of privatisation as well as functioning to sentimentalise sex, the final case study reveals how sex is represented in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* as a catalyst that can generate or confirm romance and love, as well rendering it 'magical', which also connects to normative notions of romance and sentimentality.

4. "Magic is in the air, there ain't no science here" – Sex and the creation of love in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo*

The first part of title of this case study is taken from a chart-topping song released in 2018 entitled 'Promises' by Calvin Harris and the gay male singer –songwriter Sam Smith, so therefore it is not a quote from *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo.* Yet, I cannot help but think of the first twenty minutes of *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* whenever I hear the line "magic is in the air, there ain't no science here" in 'Promises'. 'Magic', in the context of the song, is a pseudonym for love, and when love (or 'magic') is in the air, then science is rendered useless. Or in other words: nothing can explain the magical feelings that are associated or connected to romantic love. Rendering or representing love as 'magical' is sentimental and heteronormative, yet on the other hand, it arguably captures the inexplicable feelings associated with love, romance and intimacy too. This idea of love being 'magical' (and therefore romantic and sentimental) is explored within the first twenty minutes of *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo,* where the action takes place in a Parisian sex club. The first twenty minutes is when Théo (Geoffrey Couët) and Hugo (François Nambot) first meet, when they have sex for the first time, and when they fall in love with each other for the first time too. The analysis that follows explores how, within the first twenty minutes of *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo,* sex is rendered homonormative by visually framing the sex as a 'magical' moment, and will also explore how this feeds in to

a wider, hetero-and-homo-normative discourse whereby sex is framed as a physical enactment that *creates* or *confirms* love.[91]

Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo plays out in real time over the course of ninety-seven minutes, starting in a Parisian sex club where the two protagonists Théo and Hugo first meet. The film then follows the two as they go to the hospital together to get emergency treatment for HIV, and proceeding this they cycle, walk and talk together through Paris; this is when they get to know each other more as people and begin to fall in love even more (I say 'even more' because they first fall in love in the sex club, which I delineate in more depth below). Of the three films in this chapter, *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* is the only independent, French film and therefore was granted a limited theatrical release in 2016. Yet, the film still had an impact within the realm of gay-and-lesbian film culture(s) due to the fact it offers: an explicit and celebratory vision of gay male sex, an exploration of gay love, but it is also somewhat pedagogical through the way in which it shows the protagonists dealing with the potential dangers of unsafe sex and HIV transmission. This is showcased in a scene where a hospital nurse describes to Théo the procedures surrounding HIV treatment and medication. The film was likewise praised by critics for its portrayal of young gay love, as well as its representation of sex. Jeannette Catsoulis for *The New York Times* wrote that 'Théo and Hugo have eyes only for each other … [a]t once hopeful and pragmatic, their love has been sparked by sex; which will outlive the other remains to be seen' (2017). Leslie Felperin also wrote in *The Guardian* that '[c]ineastes will see parallels with Andrew Haigh's *Weekend* and Richard Linklater's *Before Sunset* among other films … but the film has its own specific vibe, thanks in part to the writer-directors' unique, immersive sense of the milieu and the leads' tender chemistry' (2016).

Moreover, reading through several reviews for the film also lead to me discover that its exploration of sex, intimacy, romance and love is at the heart of the mainly 'positive' reception of the film. While this could always be seen to be the case since the film's generic positioning would best be placed as a romantic drama/comedy, this also pertains to the way in which *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* connects to homonormativity because it explores the creation (or confirmation) of love, to which sex is the main catalyst for this. The first twenty minutes of the film are almost totally explicit in regard to the portrayal of gay male sexual activity, since the film graphically showcases hard penises and penises in mouths (similar to *I Want Your Love*). However, this increased explicitness does not neutralise the issue of how the film constructs

[91] It is worth briefly stating too that the sentiments around the *cinema du corps* and national cinema identity I made in Chapters Two and Three regarding *BITWC*/*SBTL* could also definitely be applied to *Theo and Hugo*.

gay love and its creation. Jose Arroyo notes, in his academic blog 'notesonfilm1', that '[i]n spite of the explicitness, sex here [in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo*], as rapturously exciting as it is shown to be, is also only what sparks something deeper and more meaningful [for the protagonists]' (2017). Although I cannot disagree that the sex in the film does spark something 'deeper and more meaningful' for the two men (because, obviously, it does) this misses the larger point that sex is presented in the film as the catalyst that unleashes the two men's love for each; sex literally creates love in this film, which is hetero/homo normative precisely because it: sentimentalises sex, directly connects sex with love and intimacy, and also offers sex as a 'magical' act that has the ability to generate or confirm romantic partnership – three elements that would allow it to subscribe, within a contemporary context, to Rubin's list of 'good sex' (or at least would be categorised in her middle section, see Fig. 2). I will now focus closer on the first twenty-minutes of *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* to explore how the film visually frames the sex, as well as how it portrays the sex as being 'magical', which ultimately serves to suggest that sex is a physical enactment that creates love, as opposed to being an act solely for pleasure.

As mentioned, *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* begins in a gay male sex club in Paris. The first shot shows the audience the time, 04:47, and a naked, older man putting his mobile phone in his sock (the mobile phone functions as a marker of time for the audience, placing the film in a contemporary era, rather than being set in, for example, the 1980s). The camera slowly pans from left to right, as the older naked man approaches others to greet them, and this panning also shows the relaxed atmosphere within the club and that all of the men are also naked. The camera then follows the man as he makes his way down some stairs in to a lower floor. In this space, men are taking part in a variety of sexual activities: anal sex, oral sex, kissing, nipple licking, and so on, and some are taking part in these sexual activities in pairs or in threes. The older man continues to watch the action, before catching the eye of Theo. He then walks away, turning a corner, where people are also engaged in sexual activity. He stands and watches Théo from another angle, and it is clear, through a medium shot, that Théo is not taking part in any sex and that he is also seems overwhelmed and/or distracted. The older man then sees Hugo, who is passionately kissing another man. It then becomes clear that Théo is watching Hugo and the other man kiss, with a disconcerting look on his face. Théo then begins to slowly move around the space, and the older man approaches him, gently stroking his breast, then his stomach, moving down towards Theo's crotch. However, Théo stops him, somewhat awkwardly, and carries on watching the sex that is taking place in front of him. As the scene

carries on, Théo continues to watch Hugo and the man he is with progress from kissing to oral sex. It is at this moment that another man suddenly approaches Theo, kissing him as he does. Théo reciprocates, but even while kissing, he struggles to take his eyes off Hugo. The man Théo is now involved with moves down his stomach, towards his crotch, and begins to perform oral sex, all the while Théo still gazes at Hugo and the sex he is engaged in.

As Théo and Hugo are separately engaged in sexual acts, the music begins to become more dominant within the scene, with rave-style music giving the scene (and the setting) a faster pace and therefore a more frantic mood. The man Théo is with then stops performing oral sex, and they both watch Hugo and his sexual partner as they begin to have anal sex - some of the men also stop to watch, masturbating as they do so. Proceeding this, another man starts to kiss Theo, whose priority is still Hugo (and the sex he is taking part in). After a moment, Théo begins to receive oral sex, and then after this, he takes a condom from the wall, squeezes some lubricant in to his hand, and begins to fuck the man he is with at the same time as Hugo is having sex. As both Théo and Hugo are topping two separate men, they start to become closer and closer, almost bumping heads. Théo tries to catch Hugo's attention in a somewhat subtle manner by edging his head closer and closer to Hugo's – this approach pays off as a few seconds later when they start to kiss. After they have kissed for a moment, they both stop and look at each other – Hugo smiles, and they start to passionately kiss again. Then they stop, Hugo smiling once again.

The scene then cuts to a shot which is from Theo's point of view and shows Hugo naked and erect while a white light exudes from his skin, rendering him angel-like, and this visual strategy tries to capture the 'magical' and 'heavenly' sensations the two protagonists are feeling towards one another. The camera then cuts to a close-up of Theo, who has also been rendered angel-like through white light that exudes from his skin. The way in which two are lit also makes them stand apart from the dark surroundings of the sex club. This also means that, metaphorically, the two now occupy their own 'space', a magical realm where the outside world does still exist (as we still see other couples around them kissing or engaged in sex) but is no longer a concern or a blockage. Now occupying their own metaphorical and symbolic space, they kiss, before Théo moves down Hugo's body, kissing his nipple, chest and stomach as he does so. Then, through a medium shot, the audience witnesses Théo explicitly performing oral sex on/to Hugo. After some more kissing, Hugo then lies down, and we can now see a red platform that both are on, which makes them stand out even more. As the camera performs a three-hundred and sixty degree turn around the platform, the audience sees Theo, once again,

performing oral sex on/to Hugo. The two then switch positions, and as Hugo holds Theo's arms above his head, the camera cuts to a medium shot positioned behind the two men and transports them (and the audience) out of the metaphorical space and it to the literal one (this is primarily signified through the change in lighting). After (just over) a minute of kissing, Hugo then moves down Theo's body to return the favour, kissing Theo's penis and testicles, and he clearly enjoys doing this. The audience is then shown Hugo sucking Theo's penis, in a graphic manner akin to *I Want Your Love*. Proceeding this, they switch positions again, and start to have anal sex while Théo tops and Hugo lies on his back. The audience then receives the first piece of dialogue, with Théo asking Hugo "do you always have your eyes closed?", with Hugo responding, "it helps me to be with you". The two then continue to have sex, and a long take captures Théo orgasming. After this, Théo lies on Hugo's chest and they both laugh. They both then kiss passionately, even lovingly, while they lay in the centre of the floor, rubbing each other's bodies and gazing in to each other's eyes. They then stand up, Hugo takes Theo's hand, and leads him upstairs to get their clothes and leave the club.

It is clear from this scene description that *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* is akin to *Stranger by the Lake*, *120 BPM* and *I Want Your Love*, in the sense that it exhibits graphic sex as a form of realism, that arguably also serves to extend carnal knowledge in the cinema as rarely before has there been a *celebratory* and *exploratory* look in to the sexual activities that take part in gay male sex clubs. However, the moment in which both men look at each other in their own symbolic space, with their skin exuding a white glow which renders them angel-like, is perhaps the most important visual tactic within *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* that tries to communicate that the men have fallen in love with each other. This moment, therefore, is also the 'love at first sight' moment. As Torben Grodal notes, '[l]ove at first sight is among the most powerful forms of love represented on screen' (2004: 29), a moment which is almost always captured through a shot-reverse shot system that functions to show both protagonists as they realise their instant and visceral love for each other. The metaphorical space in which they inhabit also becomes a somewhat utopian space – as I noted above, their own, magical space is not completely secluded, but allows the outside world to no longer be a blockage or concern. Like I discussed in relation to *Carol* and *Call Me by Your Name*, an argument could be made which once again states that the movement from the literal space to the metaphorical space connects the sex acts and the men's sexual intimacy to a politics of privacy, as even though they are in a public place/space, they metaphorically and momentarily move in to their own space which is magical but also isolated. The sex scene is also (somewhat) utopian precisely

because it shows the men entering their own space which is full of pleasure and passion, a space which offers the 'image of something better', as I discussed in relation to *Carol*. On one hand, then, this tactic attempts to visually communicate the (sometimes) unexplainable feelings associated with sex, love and romance. In my analysis of *Stranger by the Lake* in chapter two, Franck and Henri's first sexual encounter is represented through quixotic shots of birds flying and the soothing lake, which functions to symbolically suggest that intense sexual, romantic and taboo desire does not always have to be mediated through a visual presentation of explicit sex, because not even explicit sex on-screen can communicate intense desires. While the context is different in *Stranger by the Lake* (as Franck consciously has sex with a serial killer), *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo*, through its use of a metaphorical space plus lighting which renders the men angel-like, tries to do the same thing as *SBTL*. Essentially, love and sex are 'magical' in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* as opposed to just being a hedonistic act of lust or pleasure.

Furthermore, although this scene tries to offer a visualisation of the magical and romantic feelings surrounding love and sex, the scene offers sex as an act that can generate or confirm romantic partnerships. Sex, therefore, is a catalyst, but a catalyst that closely intertwines with normative notions of what sex *should* symbolise, under a heteronormative rubric. This contrasts to queer perspectives on sex, as I have discussed, which typically oppose the heteronormative, religious and conservative ideologies and institutions which render sex as an act that should be procreative and/or private and/or for the purpose of physically enacting feelings of love or passion. Although the two protagonists have sex in a public space, what their sex represents, and is symbolic of, connects more closely to those conservative ideologies that dictate sex should be between lovers, or should be performed to express love, intimacy and passion. The visual tactics used within the film's opening scene also sentimentalises and romanticises the sex, especially when they enter the 'metaphorical space', a magical and utopian realm. *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo*'s opening sex scene, as I stated, offers 'the image of 'something better''; a romantic but explicit depiction of gay male sex and love, but one that sustains and upholds heteronormative ideals and ideologies.

In contrast to the film's sentimental and idealistic construction of gay male sex, So Mayer identifies *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* as a film that offers a feminist depiction of the soft penis, which is presented in the film as 'soft, slow, vulnerable, transferable and mobile opposite to the phallus' (2017). Moreover, Mayer writes: '[w]hile early reviews drew attention to the unprecedented sex acts of the opening minutes, it is in the closing minutes that the film enters truly new territory, of a tenderness that is also explicitly erotic and embodied, rooted in

Théo and Hugo's discovery of each other as "fellow-creatures" who have complex bodily histories' (2015). Mayer, here, discusses a scene near the end of *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* where Hugo admires Theo's flaccid penis and his testicles. Hugo says:

> "I like your dick. It's really beautiful. I don't know how to describe it, but I like it. I like looking at it. I like taking it in my hand. I like kissing it. Your balls are beautiful, too. Here, in my hand, they're delicate. Yet they have weight. I kiss them. They're soft. So soft".

Instead of the penis being presented as a hard, blunt, impenetrable tool that is used for (and is symbolic of) pleasure and domination, Hugo's celebration of Theo's penis argues 'for an interconnection in which it is not the penetrative power of Théo's cock (nor even the penetrability of his mouth or asshole) that turns him on or connects them, but the shared and tendered vulnerability of flesh as flesh' (Mayer 2015). This celebration of the soft cock, which Mayer identifies as feminist in its construction and its symbolism, also pertains the ways in which *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo* is an important contemporary gay male film, as I stated above in the contextualisation of the film. However, besides some elements of the film which have been deemed "progressive" (such as its showcasing of explicit gay sex and the soft cock), the film's construction of sex (and love) is homonormative because it is represented as magical, as sentimental, and as a catalyst that can unleash/confirm or even generate love and romance. This, in short, continues to preserve heteronormative (and now homonormative) ideals and ideologies that surround sex and intimacy in Western societies and cultures.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has identified that some contemporary gay and lesbian themed films, whether they are mainstream or independent (or whether it be American or European, too), are *upholding and sustaining* heteronormative ideologies, a core element in the critique of homonormativity, and the films therefore offer and adopt tactics which render the representation of sex (and intimacy, romance and love) as homonormative. As I have demonstrated within the first two case studies, this is sometimes executed through the evasion of sex acts, or what I call 'homonormative gestures' which often function to sentimentalise sex as an act that is performative for the sake of love and passion, as well as being anchored to a politics of privatisation. In other ways, as is the case in *Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo*, sex is represented as a catalyst that can either generate or conform love/romance, and this is achieved through visual tactics and symbolism which also sentimentalise or romanticise sex. To

reiterate, then, these films have detached themselves from a queer radical politics in favour of a focus that explicitly puts homonormative ideologies (surrounding love, intimacy and romance) front and centre, not only in their overall narrative focus, but even in their representations of sex.

Conclusion

This thesis has thoroughly examined representations of mainly gay male and lesbian sex acts in contemporary French and North American cinemas (1996 - 2017). This is as well as overtly exploring how homonormativity has influenced certain representations of gay male and lesbian sex in both mainstream and independent filmmaking spheres within these film cultures. Pohave presented sexual acts that (within their physicality and performativity) do not necessarily challenge the status quo. Instead, these films, for the most part, maintain it instead, to which some of these representations also have a close relationship with the normalising impulses of homonormativity. The broader issue of 'normativity' is the main recurring theme and issue that has thread throughout my entire research and is in line with my research aims and objectives too.[92]

However, each chapter within this thesis has also revealed considerably more than issues solely relating to 'normativity', and I have purposefully avoided stating that *all* the contemporary representations I have analysed in this thesis are simply 'normative', because this would be too rigid and reductive, and would frankly be un-queer too. This thesis, then, has presented innovative and unique analysis regarding contemporary representations of gay male and lesbian sex in contemporary French and North American cinemas, where not only one argument pervades my research and findings, but instead the many layers and nuances of these contemporary representations have been teased out with care and (academic) rigour.

Subsequently, then, this conclusion is going to pull together all my research findings across the four chapters, and I will structure this through three main recurring themes and areas, which have either been implicitly or explicitly investigated throughout the main body of my work, in relation to my aims and objectives. The first two I will outline are: the politics of representation, and sex, explicitness and realism/idealism. The next theme I will then discuss is the pervasive issue of the (homo)normalisation of sex acts and gay and lesbian identities. Preceding this, however, I will also delineate further research areas that could and probably should be explored in relation to representations of gay, lesbian and queer sex acts in contemporary cinemas.

[92] Aim two was 'to determine to what extent the representations of gay, lesbian and queer sex in contemporary French and North American cinemas either sustain or challenge normative notions of what can constitute sex, or that sex directly connects with intimacy, romance and love', and aim three was 'to discover to what extent the representations of gay, lesbian and queer sex in contemporary cinema connects with the normalising impulses evident within movements such as 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2002)'.

1. Suggestions for Further Research

I would like to start this first section with a final consideration around the general study of GLQ sex on-screen. In the introduction to Coleman and Siegel's *Intercourse in Television and Film*, they state: 'one may ask, why is there is a need for academic discussion of sex scenes in visual media?' (2017: ix). Their answers to this hypothetical question revolve around how gratuitous sex scenes are now embedded into narratives so much so that old ideas around sex scenes relating to 'marketability' or functioning to be 'daring' are now glib and limiting. They state that there has been 'significant changes in the ways visual narratives use sex' (Ibid), and I would argue that some of the most significance of these changes relates to visibility of gay male and lesbian sex acts. Heterosexual films have been continually more explicit since the rise of Hard-Core Art in the 1990s, so the significance of these contemporary gay and lesbian representations since 2011 is quite substantial. So, let's stop ignoring sex. As Tim Dean writes, eroticism and sex have been eluded from Queer Theory (2015), but I would extend that to suggest it has been ignored by many quarters, from those in Cultural Studies to those in Media or Film Studies. As gay and lesbian identities become increasingly merged with heterosexual cultures and institutions, it is in some ways a political act to investigate these representations, to bring to the fore the limiting or nuanced layers of them, and to push back against normalising impulses.

To reiterate, then, my thesis has started to fill in gaping holes left by other academics in regards to (explicit) gay, lesbian and queer sex in contemporary French and North American cinemas: whether that be scholars who focus more specifically on gay/lesbian/queer film (cultures), or ones who focus more narrowly on sex in cinema, this area of academia is a barren but sizeable landscape in desperate need of nurturing, to which this thesis has provided a sprinkling of nourishment. However, my research is in no means absolute, definitive, or authoritative, and there needs to be a more work conducted within this area; one sprinkling helps things to grow, but more obviously helps it to flourish. On the surface, suggesting that "more work needs to be done" may sound like a (completely) glib statement to write; a sentiment that a large majority of researchers would posit in almost any academic (sub)field. Yet, this statement is instead simply pragmatic since the roles, functions and representations of gay, lesbian and queer sex across (both older and contemporary) World Cinema cultures is uncharted. This thesis has only focused on dominant film cultures, so research on the representation of GLQ sex in non-Western or marginalised cinemas is timely and much-needed. This could include discussions, analysis and theorisation of films ranging from *Free*

Fall (dir. Stephen Lacant, 2013, Germany) to *The Handmaiden* (dir. Chan-Wook Park, 20-16, South Korea), from *No Way Out* (dir. Joel Lamangan, 2008, Phillipines) to *Cola de Mono* (dir. Alberto Fuguet, 2018, Chile) and *Stud Life* (dir. Campbell X, 2012, UK). Furthermore, not only would this strand of research be timely and much-needed, but more importantly it would help to paint a broader picture of how cinemas across the world are mediating, constructing and representing gay, lesbian and queer desires, intimacies, passions, sex acts and sexual practises, essentially and effectively building a necessary bridge between and across film cultures. This bridge is something Galt and Schoonover do wonderfully in their book *Queer Cinema in the World*, but a narrower focus on sex/intimacy/desire (and their intersections) would be original and apt.

Moreover, the issue and role of genre has not been *comprehensively* considered within my analysis of the films and their sex scenes. This is mainly because my thesis is not a genre study, but one that looks closely at a wave of contemporary films that are particularly pushing the boundaries when it comes to levels of explicitness, so my sampling (as discussed in the introduction), revolved around that, instead of the genres the films belonged to. However, genre is, admittedly, an important element to consider when discussing sex on-screen, since certain genres often maintain their own distinctive representations and mediations of sex. The genre of films that I have included and analysed in this thesis mainly belong to the romance or drama genres, yet not *all* of them display, as Krzywinska writes in relation to these genres, 'ideal sex, desire and sexuality' (Ibid), and ideas around the division between mainstream/independent filmmaking practises often infiltrates this discussion. While I have also extensively or partially considered notions of idealism and realism through the chapters in this thesis, a more specific and concentrated focus on the intersection of genre and sex acts is necessary, and would help to fill in the other gaping holes in relation to the academic sub-field of GLQ sex in cinema (or GLQ sex on-screen more broadly).

However, a thoroughly innovative and even more necessary piece of research would be one that moves away from the textual or performative elements of films that represent GLQ sex, to audience reception of these films and representations. *Porn Studies* has a growing body of work that investigates the relationship between the distribution and exhibition of porn, how people watch porn, as well as why they watch porn or certain types of porn (see Neville 2018, Ramsay 2017, Vörös 2015, Scarcelli 2015, Tibbals 2014). In more conventional Film Studies, there are very few academics who have explored the relationship between audiences and sex in cinema, with only a couple of researchers having looked at GLQ audiences and sex in cinema

(see Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti 2016, and Tulloch and Middleweek 2017).[93] Additionally, and as I write above, a discourse that has been either indirectly or explicitly present throughout this thesis is one that is concerned with the politics of representation and the 'importance' of GLQ sexual visibility in both mainstream and independent cinemas. Therefore, extensive studies that centre on audience responses to representations of GLQ sex in contemporary film would progress debates around what these representations actually mean for (some) spectators, as well as *why* these representations are (for instance) important, or on the other hand, limiting or offensive or inauthentic, and so on.

2. The Politics of Representation: Sex, Explicitness, Realism, Idealism

The politics of representation, as I outlined in the literature review and particularly chapter three, has continually been a concern to scholars who investigate and analyse LGBTQ+ identities on-screen. I too have followed this trend, as all of my research questions and aims relate to the politics of representation, as I have de-constructed how mainly gay male and lesbian sex acts are stylistically and narratively represented; how the acts challenge or maintain ideals surrounding sex in heteronormative cultures; and finally how the normalising impulses of homonormativity has intersected with all of this too.

Chapter one, even though it is outside of the time parameter that pervades the rest of this thesis, presents original ideas and theories around how sex acts can be queered either through alternative physicality or 'queer penetration' in *Hustler White*, or masochistic and fetishistic (taboo) desires and practises in *Crash*. Throughout this thesis, and especially in the introduction, I have claimed that 'gay' and 'lesbian' sex acts are not necessarily 'queer' nowadays because being gay or lesbian (specifically in the Western world) is not axiomatically taboo or is no longer widely seen as being perverse or pathological anymore (I recap reasons why below in the next section). Moreover, as I identify in chapter one, the physicality and performative elements of many (typical) gay male and lesbian sex acts are not particularly queer because most are shared with hetero-sex practises, such as: vaginal sex, anal sex, oral sex, cunnilingus, masturbation, and so on. These acts make up the sexual status-quo, in many ways. On the other hand, sex acts like stump-fucking, skin-slicing, solo or joint masturbation while watching car crash demonstration videos or fucking a vagina-like scar are just a few examples of how sexual practises are either queer or rendered queer because they (radically)

[93] Another comprehensive study regarding audiences and their responses to sex in cinema (more specifically sexual violence) was Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijs *et al*'s report to the BBFC entitled 'Audiences and Receptions of Sexual Violence in Contemporary Cinema', which was submitted in 2007.

challenge normative concepts of sex, pleasure, desire and intimacy. I have not and do not claim that the two films used as case studies are the *only* examples of 'queer sex' in the history of cinema. Instead I used these to highlight two imperative things: firstly, that 'queer sex' is much more than *just* sex between people who identify in some way as being LGBTQ+; and secondly, we live in an era where gay male and lesbian sex acts are represented much more explicitly in some quarters, but they often preserve (hetero)normative ideologies and ideals surrounding sex, unlike the two case studies in chapter one. *Crash*, for example, never renders the acts palatable by connecting the taboo sexual desires to notions of love or romance, which a) complements the 'cold' aesthetic and mood of the film, and b) means even though it explicitly focuses on heterosexuals, it communicates not only the *idea* but the *fact* that heterosexuals can partake in queer (sexual) practices. This would be alongside *Hustler White* too, which also unapologetically and (even more) radically challenges what constitutes sexual pleasure and sexual intimacy, but more specifically through characters who belong to numerous sub-cultures and who would identify as 'gay', 'bisexual' or 'queer'.

Moreover, even though chapters two and three had separate focuses on representations of gay male sex and lesbian sex, the central themes and concerns that relates them are notions and themes such as: idealism, realism, in/authenticity, as well as cultural and filmic heritages. Gay male films such as *SBTL*, *IWYL* and *120 BPM* (and *Theo and Hugo*) often utilise and blend stylistic strategies from cinema and (hard-core) porn which honours gay male cultural heritage and also aims to offer more 'realistic' representations of gay male sex through increased visibility and explicitness. This increased explicitness and 'realism' also functions to extend carnal knowledge in the cinema regarding gay male sexual practices, acts and rituals. On the other hand (to say the least), lesbian sex in films like *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* is often accompanied with a variety of issues which often relate to aesthetics and lesbian sexual performativity, where 'scissoring' is the primary focal point for debates around sexual in/authenticity in lesbian-centred films. Chapter two essentially argues (alongside the complementary debate of realism), that films such as *SBTL* and *IWYL* represent the merging of gay cinema and gay porn and are films which not only honour cultural heritage but also help to extend carnal knowledge in cinema in a similar fashion to *Boys in the Sand* in the early 1970s, as Williams (2008) noted. On the other hand, the relationship between lesbian cultural heritage and representations of sex on-screen has always been fraught and highly political, where realism and authenticity seem to be eluded in favour of objectifying and sexualising

lesbian women for the 'male gaze' and male spectator, where similar ideas and debates are circulated in the analysis of lesbian porn.

Where these two chapters split off, then, is that increased visibility and explicitness in gay male films is often 'celebrated' as being more nuanced, realistic and unapologetic, and in many ways a victory for gay male cultural heritage. On the contrary, lesbian-themed films which feature (relatively) explicit sex often seem to 'fail' when it comes to offering 'sexual authenticity', and as I touch upon in chapter four, less visibility often seems to be more popular with lesbian or female bisexual viewers. Furthermore, In *IWYL* and *120 BPM*, sex is often awkward, clunky, or uncoordinated, but also pleasurable and joyous. These performances also add to the realism of the sex scenes as they try to capture a variety of sexual dynamics that are not perfect or perfectly coordinated, like they usually are in a variety of moving-image media. In *BITWC* and *Below Her Mouth* sex is more aesthetically pleasing, decorous and made up of carefully set 'poses' which begs questions about who the representations are really aimed at. The more aesthetically pleasing (which I see as actually being 'aesthetically problematic') the lesbian sex is, the more 'idealistic' and fantastical the representations seem. On the other hand, as I extensively discuss in chapter three, focusing on narrative can unearth ideological tensions between problematic aesthetics but stories that, in part, centre on the idea that sex can be crucial in the formation of an identity (which I identify as being sex-positive). The fact that I have highlighted these nuances certainly does not neutralise debates revolving around aesthetics, but instead it widens them beyond discourses of style and gaze.

Notions of idealism which seem to be present in explicit lesbian-centred films also permeate the discussions within chapter four, of course. Mainstream films which feature gay male sex or lesbian sex are often constrained to stricter censorship laws and rules because the producers want the film to be distributed as far and wide as possible, to make as much revenue as possible too. Explicit or relatively explicit sex, alongside taboo or transgressive desires, often hamper the ability for films to be distributed widely, so mainstream releases typically avoid these topics. Yet, even if this is the most pragmatic reason as to why mainstream films do not feature (explicit or relatively explicit) sex, it does not mean 'softer' depictions should be ignored or not taken as seriously. Moreover, the 'mainstream' is also a battle-ground in regards to representation and visibility; for a sustained period of time now, the evasion of non-heterosexual sex has frustrated particularly gay male viewers - take *Call Me by Your Name* and *Bohemian Rhapsody* (dir. Bryan Singer, 2018) as two pertinent examples of this frustration, where images and representations of gay men are seen to be watered down to appeal to the

heterosexual masses. On the other hand, and as already discussed, less explicit representations of lesbian sex are often more appreciated by critics and viewers as they seem to be less problematic; less visibility essentially means more nuance. Yet, as I discovered through my analysis of *Carol*, just because this discourse seems to permeate the reception of the softer or less explicit representations of lesbian sex, this does not mean these representations are totally unproblematic. The use of blocking devices as well as orchestral non-diegetic sound in *Carol* allows the acts to connect to normative notions of love and sentimentality. To use the words of Luca Guadagnino, '"to put our gaze upon their lovemaking would have been a sort of unkind intrusion"', which suggests that sex between lovers is a sacred and deeply private act – an act that should be kept behind closed doors and not for prying eyes, even in the movies!

In short, considering and taking seriously the stylistic and narrative representation and framing of GLQ sex is imperative for the uncovering and unearthing of the ideologies and meanings behind the images. This is why my first research question was to 'discover how contemporary French and North American films are stylistically and narratively representing gay, lesbian and queer sex acts and practices'. This is precisely because I wanted to discover how the roles of aesthetic and narrative played a part in the circulation of particular meanings, ideals, values and ideologies in relation to gay male, lesbian and 'queer' sex. Although my journey started through an interest in the increased explicitness of contemporary independent (French and North American) gay and lesbian themed films, what this research has discovered moves with but also beyond this topic. It has moved with and beyond it to dig even deeper in to the politics of representation, to not only discover that normativity is pervading aspects of these depictions, but also to suggest that their ideals and ideologies are not completely static and rigid, but contradictory, complementary, and multi-faceted. However, I will now turn more extensively to discussions of 'normativity', the most pervasive issue within this research.

3. The (Homo)Normalisation of Sex Acts and Gay and Lesbian Identities

To recap for the final time: since the (mid to late) 1990s, gay males and lesbians (as well as bisexuals) who reside in nations such as the UK, France, USA and Canada have become progressively more accepted, essentially having more access to 'normal' livelihoods. Normal here, which many academics have explored and which I also have in this thesis, means to live *like* heterosexuals, which means having the ability to: marry, have children, have steady employment, own a home, and so on. These social and cultural shifts regarding gay male and lesbian women and their access to heterosexual institutions has been explored and represented

in dominant film cultures since 2000 (as I wrote in the introduction). Films like *The Kids Are All Right* are emblematic of the shift towards the normalisation of gay male and lesbian identities in cinema more specifically, and these films try (but more often than not fail in various ways) to provide visions of what modern homosexual life can or may entail – which typically includes raising children, having affairs, and bickering – all the things 'normal' people apparently do.

Independent French and North American (and some British films too) have sometimes challenged this recurring trend where films tend to focus on homonormative lives and ideals; in *Weekend*, the normalising impulses of homonormativity are discussed and confronted by the characters; in *I Want Your Love*, the difficulty of twenty-something hipster life is explored alongside gay male sex and intimacy; in *Stranger by the Lake*, deadly and taboo desires are represented as mysterious and erotic. However, some have maintained the normative trend but with different expressions: *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* explores (in part) domestic life as well as the trials and tribulations of love and romantic relationships, and *Below Her Mouth* is similar but eventually more idealistic. It is also interesting to note from this quick survey that the lesbian-centred films I have highlighted seem to uphold homonormative values much more obviously and sometimes unapologetically than their gay male counter-parts.[94]

Yet, away from these overall narrative focuses, the most pertinent (and frankly frustrating) thing is that whether or not its films that confront normativity in their *overall* thematic and narrative focus, nearly all of the case studies in this thesis maintain and uphold heteronormative values and ideals when it comes to sex (and passion/romance/intimacy). Firstly, this maintenance of heteronormative values and ideals in relation to sex is evident through the fact that none of these films actually challenge dominant notions of what constitutes sex and sexual pleasure. Even sexually explicit films which are predicated on unambiguously exploring gay male sexual activity (such as *I Want Your Love* and *Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo*) do not enter territories like *Crash* or *Hustler White* did. *Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo* starts in a sex club, a space/place that typically involves men performing a range of sexual acts – yet, all we see is oral sex and anal sex, as opposed to, for instance: fisting, urolagnia, (auto)asphyxiation, anal stretching, and so on. A perfectly pragmatic response to this would be

[94] Although I cannot provide an authoritative answer to this, I would tentatively suggest that this issue relates to essentialism and gender (more than sexuality). There is no gay male equivalent to *The Kids Are All Right* in regards to tone or genre or mainstream appeal – this may be because it is about mothers – which connects the film (even though it is about lesbians) to essentialist notions of 'femininity' and that womanhood equals motherhood under patriarchal and/or essentialist rubrics often adhered by the mainstream.

to suggest that these films could not feature these specific acts because they are too transgressive and would obstruct the films' distribution and theatrical release, as well as perhaps not even being on the writer's/director's/producers' artistic radar. However, *Crash* and *Hustler White* (as well as other queer films like *Shortbus* or hetero-centric films like *9 Songs*) got made, and whether they were granted a wide or limited distribution, they were shown in cinemas regardless. In many ways, then, these films frankly play it safe with more palatable and 'normative' sexual acts, even if the 'hydraulics' of sex are sometimes shown.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, most of the case studies achieve a preservation of heteronormative values and ideals through the consistent representation of sex as being directly and intricately connected to normative notions of love, romance and intimacy. In more mainstream films, such as *Carol* and *Call Me by Your Name*, I have identified that the use of blocking devices and panning away to conceal sex renders it sentimental and as 'acts of love', reiterating the age-old, heteronormative ideal that sex should an expression of romantic love or an act shared between lovers. In more sexually explicit independent films such as *Paris 05:59 Theo and Hugo* sex is the catalyst which unleashes the protagonists' romantic affection/love for each other; in *Stranger by the Lake*, the film falls in to an ideological trap because it moves away from showing the hydraulics of sex and ejaculation, to representing the sex between Michel and Franck in an idealistic manner, which closely connects the sex to normative notions of sentimentality, love, and romance (even though the film as a whole explores deadly desires). This is also the same in *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Below Her Mouth*, but as I also argue in chapter three, the fact that sex not only unleashes romance but is a rite of passage, is more sex-positive and nuanced than critics and scholars have previously considered.

Overall, then, nearly all of these films present or promote the idea that sex always intricately connects with love, romance and intimacy, but this relationship, arguably, functions to either a) make the acts more palatable for 'wider' and/or heterosexual audiences or b) suggest that the role of sex in gay and lesbian people's lives is the same as heterosexual people. Perhaps less pessimistically, these representations do also provide more visibility than spectators were previously given, and the avoidance of sex acts has continually been a frustration to many gay male and lesbian viewers, and to put it simply, there is more "out there" now than there was even ten or fifteen years ago. But, even if there is more "out there", these representations are saturated with a myriad of issues. I have discovered that most of these films' ideologies, ideals and messages are much more limiting than they seem at face-value, and the normalising

impulses of homonormativity is pervading not *only* general representations of gay male and lesbian identities, but also their sexual activities, practises and intimacies.

Bibliography and Webography

Aaron, M. ed. (2004). *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Aaron, M. ed., (1999). *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Aggleton, P. and Guy Parker, R., eds. (1999). *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, London: UCL Press.

Allon, Y., Cullen, D., Patterson, H., eds. (2002). *Contemporary North American Film Directors: A Wallflower Critical Guide*, London: Wallflower Press.

Andrews, D. (2013). *Theorizing Art Cinemas: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde, and Beyond*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Arroyo, J. (1992). 'Bordwell considered: cognitivism, colonialism and Canadian Cinematic Culture', *CineAction*, vol. 28, pp. 74-88.

Arroyo, J. (2017). '*Paris 05:59: Théo et Hugo*', NotesonFilm1 Blog: https://notesonfilm1.com/tag/paris-0559-theo-et-hugo/ [accessed 09/10/2018]

Aumont, J., Bergala, A., Marie, M., Vernet, M., eds. (1992). *Aesthetics of Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barker, A. (2013). 'On Not Being Porn: Intimacy and the Sexually Explicit Art Film', *Text Matters*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 186 – 202.

Beirne, R. (2008). *Lesbians in Television and Text after the Millennium*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beirne, R. (2014). 'New Queer Cinema 2.0?: Lesbian-Focused Films and the Internet', *Screen*, vol. 55, no.1, pp. 129 – 138.

Benshoff, H. (2004). 'The Monster and the Homosexual', in: H. Benshoff and S. Griffin, eds. *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*, London: Routledge, pp. 63 – 74.

Benshoff, H. and Griffin, S., eds. (2004). *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*, London: Routledge.

Bernabeo, P. ed. (2010). *Sex and Society, Volume 1*, New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

Berlant L. and Edelman. L. (2014). *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Bond, B.J. (2015). 'Portrayals of Sex and Sexuality in Gay- and Lesbian-Oriented Media: A Quantitative Content Analysis', *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 37–56.

Bradbury-Rance, Clara. (2019). *Lesbian Cinema after Queer Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bradshaw, P. (2015). '*Carol* review – Cate Blanchett superb in a five-star tale of forbidden love', *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/26/carol-film-review-cate-blanchett-todd-haynes-rooney-mara [accessed 16/10/2018]

Brady, T. (2014). 'Bruce LaBruce: 'Sometimes there's a real love underlying fetishism', *Irish Times*: https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/bruce-labruce-sometimes-there-s-a-real-love-underlying-fetishism-1.1881665 [accessed 30/07/2018]

Burr, V. and Hearn, J. eds. (2008). *Sex, Violence and the Body: The Erotics of Wounding*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Butler, H. (2004). 'What do you call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography', in L. Williams, ed. *Porn Studies*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 167 – 197.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, London: Routledge.

Castronovo, R. & NelsoN, D.D., eds. (2002). *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Catsoulis, J. (2017). 'Review: '*Paris 05:59 Théo & Hugo*' Finds Two Men Out to Get Lucky', *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/movies/paris-0559-theo-hugo-review.html [accessed 09/10/2018]

Chang, J. (2015). 'The Pornoethnography of *Boys in the Sand*: Fetishisms of Race and Class in the 1970s Gay Fire Island Pines', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. ¾, pp. 101-115.

Chang, J. (2015). 'Film Review: *Carol*', *Variety*: https://variety.com/2015/film/festivals/cannes-film-review-cate-blanchett-in-carol-1201498667/ [accessed 16/10/2018]

Chauncey, G. (2013). 'The Long Road to Marriage Equality', *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/27/opinion/the-long-road-to-marriage-equality.html [accessed 04/09/2018]

Cheves, A. (2018). 'Kink Is Part of My Identity — But Don't Call Me LGBTK', *The Advocate*: https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2018/2/14/kink-part-my-identity-dont-call-me-lgbtk [accessed 19/07/2018]

Chilvers, S. (2018). 'Loose Oxford shirts and short-shorts – why *Call Me by Your Name* is this season's menswear inspiration', *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2018/mar/14/call-me-by-your-name-fashion-inspiration-men [accessed 17/09/2018]

Cinematreasures, 'Movie Theaters Operating as Adult Movies': http://cinematreasures.org/functions/235 [accessed January 2018]

Coleman, L. ed., (2016). *Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema: Explicit Sex, Performance and Cinematic Technique*, London: I.B Tauris.

Coleman, L. & Siegel, C., eds. (2017). *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*, London: Lexington Books.

Coulthard, L. and Birks, C. (2016). 'Horrible Sex: The Sexual Relationship in New Extremism', in: L. Coleman, ed. *Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema: Explicit Sex, Performance and Cinematic Technique*, London: I.B Tauris, pp. 71 – 94.

Collins, Patricia Hill. (2000), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York: Routledge.

Croce, M. (2015). 'Homonormative Dynamics and the Subversion of Culture', *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 3–20.

D'Emilio, J. (1983). 'Capitalism and Gay Identity', in: A. Snitow, C. Stansell, & S. Thompson, eds. *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 100 – 113.

Dargis, M. (2013). 'Seeing You Seeing Me: The Trouble with *Blue Is the Warmest Color*', *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/27/movies/the-trouble-with-BITWC-is-the-warmest-color.html [accessed various times between 2016 and 2019]

Davis, N. (2008). 'The View from the Shortbus; or, All Those Fucking Movies', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 623 – 637.

Dean, T. (2015). 'No Sex Please, We're American', *American Literary History*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 614 – 624.

Dines, G., Jenson, R., Russo, A., eds. (1998). *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality*, London: Routledge.

Dingwell, N. (2010). 'Fetishism', in: P. Bernabeo, ed. *Sex and Society, Volume 1*, New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

Doherty, T. (1999). *Pre-Code Hollywood*: *Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Doty, A. (1993). *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dove-Viebahn, A. (2007): 'Fashionably Femme: Lesbian Visibility, Style, and Politics in *The L-word*', in: T. Peele, ed. *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film and Television*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 71 – 83.

Downing, L. (2017). 'Straight Necrophilia as Queer Perversion in Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed*', in: D. Kerr and D. Peberdy, ed. *Tainted Love: Screening Sexual Perversion*, London: I.B Tauris, pp. 19 – 31.

Driscoll, Catherine. (2011). *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford: Berg.

Dry, J. (2017). 'Luca Guadagnino Had a Good Reason for Not Showing the Sex Scene in *Call Me by Your Name*', IndieWire: https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/call-me-by-your-name-sex-scene-luca-guadagnino-1201910219/ [accessed 17/09/2017]

Duggan, L. (2002). 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in: R. Castronovo & D.D. Nelson, eds. *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 175 – 194.

Duggan, L. (2003). *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Duncan, P., Keesey, D. ed., (2005). *Erotic Cinema*, London: Taschen.

Dworkin, A. (1981). *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, London: Penguin Books.

Dyer, R. ed. (1984). *Gays and Film*, 2nd edition, BFI: London.

Dyer, R. (1989). 'A Conversation about Pornography', in: S. Shepherd and M. Wallis, eds. *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture*, London: Unwin Hyman, pp. 198–212.

Dyer, R. (1992). 'Coming to Terms: Gay Pornography', in R. Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, London: Routledge, pp.

Dyer, R. (1992). *Only Entertainment*, London: Routledge.

Dyer, R. (1997). *White*, London: Routledge.

Dyer, R. (2002). *The Culture of Queers*, London: Routledge.

Dyer, R. ed. (2003). *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.

Ebert, R. (1997). 'Crash': https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/crash-1997 [accessed 22/07/2018]

Ebert, R. (1999). '*Belle de Jour* Review': https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-belle-de-jour-1967 [accessed 11/04/2019]

Fantina, R. ed. (2006). *Straight Writ Queer: Non-Normative Expressions of Heterosexuality in Literature*, Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company Publishers.

Felman, S. (1993). *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Felperin, L. (2016). '*Theo and Hugo* review – lovers on a soul searching odyssey', *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/sep/08/theo-and-hugo-review-lovers-on-a-soul-searching-odyssey [accessed 09/10/2018]

Field, N. (1995). *Over The Rainbow: Money, Class, and Homophobia*, London: Pluto Press.

Fine, Z & Whitlock, M. (2012). 'Film Review: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? A Review of Homonormativity in *The Kids Are All Right*', *Humanity & Society*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp.178 – 185.

Forshaw, B. (2015). *Sex and Film: The Erotic in British, American and World Cinema*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, M. (1981 [fist published 1976]). *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction*, London: Penguin Books.

Fox, N. (2011). 'A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of *The Kids Are All Right*', *LORE Journal*: http://www.lorejournal.org/2011/07/its-kind-of-a-family-values-movie-a-multimodal-critical-discourse-analysis-of-lisa-cholodenkos-film-the-kids-are-all-right/ [accessed 15/10/2018]

Freud, S. (1913 – reprinted 2001). *Totem and Taboo*, London: Routledge.

Fritz, N. (2017). 'From Orgasms to Spanking: A Content Analysis of the Agentic and Objectifying Sexual Scripts in Feminist, for Women, and Mainstream Pornography', *Sex Roles*, vol. 77, no. 9-10, pp. 639 – 652.

Fung, R. (1993). 'Shortcomings: Questions about Pornography as Pedagogy', in: M. Gever, J. Greyson, P. Pratibha, eds. *Queer Looks: Perspectives on lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, London: Routledge, pp. 355 – 367.

Furby, J. and Randell, K., eds. (2005). *Screen Methods: Comparative Readings in Film Studies*, London: Wallflower Press.

Gamman, L. and Marshment, M., eds. (1988). *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* London: The Women's Press.

Garner, A. (2017). 'Queer Sex Is Our Greatest Act of Resistance', *Huffington Post*: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/queer-sex-is-our-greatest-act-of-resistance_us_587d1b4ce4b094e1aa9dc887 [accessed 21/03/2017]

Gennep, A. V. (1960 – reprinted 2004). *The Rites of Passage,* New York: Routledge.

Gever, M., Greyson, J., Pratibha, P., eds., (1993). *Queer Looks: Perspectives on lesbian and Gay Film and Video,* London: Routledge.

Gibbs, J. and Pye, D., eds. (2005). *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gorman-Murray, Andrew. (2017). 'Que(e)rying Homonormativity: The Everyday Politics of Lesbian and Gay Homemaking', in: B. Pilkey, R. M. Scicluna, B. Campkin and B. Penner, eds. *Sexuality and Gender at Home: Experience, Politics, Transgression*, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 149 – 162.

Grant, B. K. (2007). *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, London: Wallflower Press.

Grant, C. and Kooijman, J. (2016). 'Pleasure. Obvious. Queer: An Interview with Richard Dyer', *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies,* no. 1.

Greven, D. (2017). *Intimate Violence: Hitchcock, Sex, and Queer Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Grierson, T. (2015). '*Carol*: Review', *Screen International*: https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/carol-review/5087410.article [accessed 16/10/2018]

Grodal, T. (2004). 'Love and Desire in the Cinema', *Cinema Journal,* Vol. 43, No.2, pp. 26 – 46.

Grof, C. (1996). 'Rites of Passage: A Necessary Step towards Wholeness', in L. C Mahdi, N. G Christopher, M. Meade, eds. *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage*, Chicago: Open Court, pp. 3 – 16.

Grossman, W. (1991). 'Pain, Aggression, Fantasy, and Concepts of Sadomasochism', *Psychoanal Q*, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 22 – 52.

Hall, D. E (2003). *Queer Theories*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hall, D.E, Jagose, A., Bebell, A., Potter, S. eds. (2013). *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.

Harcourt, P. (2004). 'Speculations on Canadian cinema', *Queen's Quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 2, pp. 237 – 248.

Heaney, K. (2017). 'Queer Sex Is Not Resistance — or at Least, Not Resistance Enough', *The Cut*: http://nymag.com/thecut/2017/02/queer-sex-is-not-enough-resistance.html?mid=twitter-share-thecut [accessed 21/03/2017]

Hentges, S. (2006). *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film*, North Carolina: MacFarland & Company Publishers.

Hines, C. and Kerr, D, eds. (2012). *Hard to Swallow: Hard-Core Pornography on Screen*, London: Wallflower Press.

Humphrey, D. (2013) *Queer Bergman: Sexuality, Gender, and the European Art Cinema*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Jagose, A. (2010). *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York: New York University Press.

Janssen, S. (2017). 'Documenting Everyday Male Intimacies in Contemporary Queer Cinema', in: *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*, London: Lexington Books, pp. 67 – 84.

Johnson, E. (1993). 'Excess and Ecstasy: Constructing Female Pleasure in Porn Movies', *The Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 32, no.1, pp. 30 – 49.

Johnson, B. (2012). '*Shortbus*: Highbrow Hard-Core', in: *Hard to Swallow: Hard-Core Pornography on Screen*, eds. C. Hines and D. Kerr, London: Wallflower Press, pp. 163 – 176.

Juett, J. C, and Jones, D. M, eds. (2010). *Coming Out to the Mainstream: New Queer Cinema in the 21st Century*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kaplan, L. (2006). *Cultures of Fetishism*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Keesey, D. (2014). *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, Harpenden: Kamera Books.

Kerr, D. & Peberdy, D., eds. (2017). *Tainted Love: Screening Sexual Perversion*, London: I.B Tauris.

Kitzinger, C & Wilkinson, S. (1996), 'Virgins and Queers: Rehabilitating Heterosexuality?', in S. Davis & M. Gergen, *Towards a New Psychology of Gender*, New York: Routledge, pp. 403 – 420.

Kohn, E. (2015). 'Cannes Review: Todd Haynes' '*Carol*' is a Masterful Lesbian Romance Starring Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara', *IndieWire*: https://www.indiewire.com/2015/05/cannes-review-todd-haynes-carol-is-a-masterful-lesbian-romance-starring-cate-blanchett-and-rooney-mara-61939/ [accessed 16/10/2018]

Krzywinska, T. (1999). '*Cicciolina* and the Dynamics of Transgression and Abjection in Explicit Sex Films', in: M. Aaron, ed. *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 188 – 209.

Krzywinska, T. (2006). *Sex and the Cinema*, London: Wallflower Press.

Levi-Strauss, C. (1949 – reprinted 1969). *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Lodge, G. (2018). 'How Gay Cinema is calling On the Past to Point at a Radical Future', *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jun/15/gay-cinema-radical-future [accessed 01/10/2018]

Lorde, A. (1988, reprinted 2017). *A Burst of Light and Other Essays*, New York: Ixia Press.

Lynch, K. (2003). 'The 'Heterosexualisation' of Sadism and Masochism', *Hecate*, vol. 29, no.1, pp. 34 – 46.

Mackinnon, C. (1996). *Only Words*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Maddison, S. (2017). 'Comradeship of Cock? Gay Porn and the Entrepreneurial Voyeur', *Journal of Porn Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 139 – 156.

Mahdi, L. C., Christopher, N. G., Meade, M., eds. (1996). *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage*, Chicago: Open Court.

Mayer, S. (2017). 'In Praise of Soft Cock', *Cléo: A Journal of Film and Feminism*: http://cleojournal.com/2017/04/20/praise-soft-cock/ [accessed 31/10/2018]

McCosker, A. (2005). ‘A Vision of Masochism in the Affective Pain of *Crash, Sexualities*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 31 – 48.

McCosker, A. (2008). ‘Transformations of Pain: Erotic Encounters with *Crash*’, in V. Burr and J. Hearn, eds. *Sex, Violence and the Body: The Erotics of Wounding*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 103 - 118.

McDonald, Tamar Jeffers, ed. (2010). *Virgin Territory: Representing Sexual Inexperience in Film*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

McPhee, R. (2016). *Female Masochism in Film: Sexuality, Ethics and Aesthetics*, London: Routledge.

Mendik, X., ed. (2013). *Peep Shows: Cult Film and the Cine-Erotic*, Chichester: West Sussex: Wallflower Press.

Mennel, B. (2012). *Queer Cinema: Schoolgirls, Vampires, and Gay Cowboys*, Chichester, West Sussex: Wallflower Press.

Mercer, J. (2018). ‘Sex Positivity and the Persistence of Shame’, *Sexualities*, vol. 21, no. 8, pp. 1304 – 1307.

Mercer, J. (2017). *Gay Pornography: Representations of Sexuality and Masculinity*, London: I.B Tauris.

Mercer, J. (2017). ‘The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name: *O Fantasma* and Erotomania’, in: D. Kerr and D. Peberdy, eds. *Tainted Love: Screening Sexual Perversion*, London: I.B Tauris, pp. 32 – 46.

Miller, J. (2018). ‘Why *Call Me by Your Name* Broke Hearts – Letter to the Editor’, *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Vol. 25, No. 3, p. 6.

Moor, A. (2018). ‘New Gay Sincerity and Andrew Haigh’s *Weekend* (UK, 2011)’, *Film Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, online: https://doi.org/10.7227/FS.19.0002

Morrison, J. (2005). ‘Still New, Still Queer, Still Cinema?’, *GLQ*, vol.12, no.1, pp. 135 – 146.

Mulvey, L. (1975). ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp.6-18.

Mulvey, L. (2005). ‘Repetition and return: textual analysis and Douglas Sirk in the twenty-first century’, in: J. Gibbs and D. Pye, eds. *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 228 – 243.

Murphy, G. J. (2008). ‘Stray Penetration and Heteronormative Systems Crash: Queering Gibson’, in W.G Pearson, V. Hollinger, J. Gordon, eds. *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 121 – 139.

Nault, C. (2018). *Queercore: Queer Punk Media Subculture*, New York: Routledge.

Needham, G. (2010). *Brokeback Mountain*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Neville, L. (2018). *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys: Women and Gay Male Pornography and Erotica*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Palmer, T. (2006). ‘Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body’, Journal of Film and Video, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 22 – 32.

Palmer, T. (2011). *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Palmer, T. (2017). ‘Fine Arts and Ugly Arts*: Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and Abdellatif Kechiche’s Corporeal State of the Nation’, in: L. Coleman & C. Siegel, eds. *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*, London: Lexington Books, pp. 3 – 24.

Parker, R. and Aggleton, P. eds. (2007). *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, 2nd edition, Oxon: Routledge.

Pearson, W.G., Hollinger, V., Gordon, J., eds. *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Peele, T., ed. (2007). *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film and Television*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pennington, J. (2007). *The History of Sex in American Film*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

Pickett, B. L. (2009). *The A to Z of Homosexuality*, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press.

Pike, D, L. (2001). 'Canadian Cinema In The Age of Globalization', *CineAction,* accessed: https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=uce&id=GALE|A84184432&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon [31/01/20]

Pilkey, B., Scicluna, R.M., Campkin, B., and Penner, B. eds. (2017). *Sexuality and Gender at Home: Experience, Politics, Transgression,* London: Bloomsbury.

Puar, J. (2013). 'Rethinking Homonationalism', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 45, no.1, pp. 336 – 339.

Queen, C., & Comella, L. (2008). 'The Necessary revolution: Sex-positive feminism in the post-Barnard era', *Communication Review,* vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 274 - 291.

Ramsay, G. (2017). 'Straight women Seeing Gay Porn: 'He's Too Good Looking!', *Journal of Porn Studies,* vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 157 – 175.

Ramazanoglu, C. (1993). 'Introduction', in: C. Ramazanoglu, ed. *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism,* London: Routledge, pp. 1 – 28.

Ramazanoglu, C., ed. (1993). *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism,* London: Routledge.

Reed, M & Green, M S. (2012). '*The Kids are All Right*', *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy,* Volume 24, No. 2, pp. 167 – 174.

Reid-Pharr, R. (2013). 'Dinge', in: D. E. Hall, A. Jagose, A. Bebell, S. Potter, eds. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader,* London: Routledge, pp. 212 – 220.

Rich, B. Ruby (2004). 'New Queer Cinema', in: Aaron, M. ed. (2004). *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 15 – 22.

Rich, B. Ruby. (2013). *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut,* Durham: Duke University Press.

Richards, S. (2016). 'A New Queer Cinema Renaissance', *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture,* vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 215 – 228.

Rubin, G. (1999). ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’, in Peter Aggleton and Richard Guy Parker, *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, London: UCL Press, pp. 143 – 178.

Rubin, G. (first printed 1984, reprinted 2007). ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’, in R. Parker and P. Aggleton, eds. *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, 2nd edition, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 150 – 187.

Sanchez, M, E. (2012) ‘“Use Me But as Your Spaniel”: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Sexualities’, *PMLA,* vol. 127, no. 3, pp. 493 - 511.

Scarcelli, C. M. (2015). ‘It Is Disgusting, But … ’: Adolescent Girls’ Relationship to Internet Pornography as Gender Performance’, *Journal of Porn Studies,* vol. 2, no. 2-3, pp. 237 – 249.

Scott, A.O. (2017). ‘Review: ‘*BPM (Beats Per Minute)*’ Captures the Fierce AIDS Fight’, *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/movies/bpm-beats-per-minute-review-aids-activism.html [accessed 19/03/2019]

Sedgwick, E, K. (1993). ‘Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel, GLQ,* vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-16.

Shary, Timothy. (2010). ‘Virgin Springs: A Survey of Teen Films’ Quest for Sexcess’, in Tamar Jeffers McDonald, ed. *Virgin Territory: Representing Sexual Inexperience in Film,* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 54 – 67.

Sheldon, C. (1984). ‘Lesbians and Film: Some Thoughts’, in: R. Dyer, ed. *Gays and Film,* 2nd edition, BFI: London, pp. 5 – 26.

Shepherd, S. and Wallis, M. eds. (1989). *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture*, London: Unwin Hyman.

Siegel, C. (2015). *Sex Radical Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Siegel, C. (2017). ‘Fifty Shades Duller, Part II’, *Screening Sex* Blog: https://screeningsex.com/2017/08/01/fifty-shades-duller-part-ii/ [accessed 22/07/2018]

Snitow, A., Stansell C., & Thompson, S. eds. *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality,* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Soble, A, ed. (1997). *Sex, Love, and Friendship: Studies of the Society for the Philosophy of Sex, 1977 – 1992,* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Soto-Sanfiel, M, T. & Ibiti, A. (2016). 'Lesbian Sex in Mainstream Cinema and Audience Enjoyment', *Sexuality & Culture,* vol. 20, no.1, pp. 555–578.

Speck, W. (1993). 'Porno?', in: M. Gever, J. Greyson, P. Pratibha, *Queer Looks: Perspectives on lesbian and Gay Film and Video,* London: Routledge, pp. 348 – 354.

Staiger, J. (2005). *Media Reception Studies,* New York: New York University Press.

Stevenson, J. (1997). 'From the Bedroom to the Bijou: A Secret History of American Gay Sex Cinema', *Film Quarterly,* vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 24-31.

Stewart, F. (2017). *Punk Rock is My Religion: Straight Edge Punk and 'Religious' Identity*, Oxon: Routledge.

Taormino, T. (2003). 'The Queer Heterosexual', *Village Voice,* vol. 48, no. 9, pp.

Tiballs, C. A. (2014). 'Gonzo, Trannys, and Teens – Current Trends in US Adult Content Production, Distribution, and Consumption', *Journal of Porn Studies,* vol.1, no. 1-2, pp. 127 – 135.

Thomas, C. (2006). 'Foreword: Crossing the Streets, Queering the Sheets or: Do You Want To Save the Changes to Queer Heterosexuality?', in R. Fantina, ed. *Straight Writ Queer: Non-Normative Expressions of Heterosexuality in Literature,* Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company Publishers, pp. 1 – 8.

Tsfati, M & Ben-Ari, A. (2018). 'Between subversion to re-affirmation: homonormativism, homonationalism and male same-sex family', *Journal of Gender Studies*: https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2018.1502078 [accessed 30/10/2018]

Turner, W. B. (2000). *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Vannoy, R. (1997). 'Can Sex Express Love', in: Alan Soble, ed. *Sex, Love, and Friendship: Studies of the Society for the Philosophy of Sex, 1977 – 1992,* Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 247 – 258.

Vörös, F. (2015). 'Troubling Complicity: Audience Ethnography, Male Porn Viewers and Feminist Critique', *Journal of Porn Studies,* vol. 2, no. 2-3, pp. 137 – 149.

Walker, A. (1968). *Sex in the Movies*, Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Walters, S, D. (2005). 'From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace', in I. Morland and A. Willox, *Queer Theory*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 6 – 21.

Wardrop, S. (1995). 'The Heroine Is Being Beaten: Freud, Sadomasochism, and Reading the Romance', *Styles*, vol. 29, no.3, accessed: http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=uce&id=GALE|A18096761&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon [30/07/2018]

Warner, M. (1999). *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waugh, T. (1985). 'Men's Pornography: Gay vs. Straight', *Jump Cut*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 30–35.

Welch, B. (2002). 'Bruce LaBruce', in: Y. Allon, D. Cullen, H. Patterson, eds. *Contemporary North American Film Directors: A Wallflower Critical Guide*, London: Wallflower Press, pp. 307 – 308.

Wellman, A. (2015). '*Fifty Shades of Grey*: Dominatrix Reveals Bookings for Bondage Classes are up 50% Thanks to Eager Women', *The Mirror*: https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/fifty-shades-grey-dominatrix-reveals-5134851 [accessed 22/07/2018]

Whatling, T. (1997). *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

White, J., ed. (2006). *The Cinema of Canada*, London: Wallflower Press.

White, P. (2015). 'A Lesbian "Carol" for Christmas', *Public Books*: https://www.publicbooks.org/a-lesbian-carol-for-christmas/ [accessed 16/10/2018]

Williams, L., ed. (2004). *Porn Studies*, Durham: Duke University Press.

Williams, L. (2008). *Screening Sex*, London: Duke University Press.

Williams, L. (2014) 'Cinema's Sex Acts', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 67, no.4, pp. 9-25.

Williams, L.R. (1999). 'The Inside-Out of Masculinity: David Cronenberg's Visceral Pleasures', in: M. Aaron, ed. *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 30 – 48.

Williams, L.R. (2005). *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Williams, L.R. (2016). '*Shortbus*: Smart Cinema and Sexual Utopia', in: L. Coleman, ed. *Sex and Storytelling in Modern Cinema: Explicit Sex, Performance and Cinematic Technique,* London: I.B Tauris, pp. 95 – 118.

Winterton, C. (2017). 'Blurred Lines: The Case of *Stranger by the Lake*', in: L. Coleman & C. Siegel, eds. *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*, London: Lexington Books, pp. 43 – 66.

Wright, S. (2010). 'Depathologizing Consensual Sexual Sadism, Sexual Masochism, Transvestic Fetishism, and Fetishism', *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 1229 – 1230.

Yapalater, L. (2017). 'The Trifecta of Lesbian Icons Sat Front Row at the Givenchy Show', *Buzzfeed*: https://www.buzzfeed.com/lyapalater/the-givenchy-fashion-show-gave-the-lesbians-what-w [accessed 15/10/2018]

Filmography

120 BPM, dir. Robin Campillo, Les Films de Pierre, 2017.

27 Dresses, dir. Anne Fletcher, Fox 2000 Pictures, 2008.

9 Songs, dir. Michael Winterbottom, Revolution Films, 2004.

A Dangerous Method, dir. David Cronenberg, Recorded Picture Company (RPC), 2011.

A Serbian Film, dir. Srdjan Spasojevic, Contra Film, 2010.

A Single Man, dir. Tom Ford, Fade to Black Productions, 2009.

American Pie, dir. Paul & Chris Weitz, Universal Pictures, 1999.

Another Gay Movie, dir. Todd Stephens, Luna Pictures, 2006.

Baise-Moi, dir. Despentes & Trinh Thi, Canal+, 2000.

Barbarella, dir. Roger Vadim, Marianne Productions, 1968.

Beach Rats, dir. Eliza Hittman, Cinereach, 2017.

Beau-père, dir. Bertrand Blier, Sara Films, 1981.

Belle de Jour, dir. Luis Buñuel, Robert et Raymond Hakim, 1967.

Below Her Mouth, dir. April Mullen, Serendipity Point Films, 2016.

Blue is the Warmest Colour, dir. Abdellatif Kechiche, Wild Bunch, 2013.

Blue Velvet, dir. David Lynch, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (DEG), 1986.

Bohemian Rhapsody, dir. Bryan Singer, New Regency Pictures, 2018.

Bound, dir. The Wachowskis, Dino De Laurentiis Company, 1996.

Boys Don't Cry, dir. Kimberly Peirce, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1999.

Boys in the Sand, dir. Wakefield Poole, 1971.

Brokeback Mountain, dir. Ang Lee, Focus Features, 2005.

Call Me by Your Name, dir. Luca Guadagnino, Frenesy Film Company, 2017.

Carol, dir. Todd Haynes, The Weinstein Company, 2015.

Casablanca, dir. Michael Curtiz, Warner Bros., 1942.

Cola de Mono, dir. Alberto Fuguet, Cinepasta, 2018.

Crash, dir. David Cronenberg, Alliance Communications Corporation, 1996.

Cruising, dir. William Friedkin, Lorimar Film Entertainment, 1980.

Dead Ringers, dir. David Cronenberg, Morgan Creek Entertainment, 1988.

Deep Throat, dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972.

Deliverance, dir. John Boorman, Warner Bros., 1972.

Desert Hearts, dir. Donna Deitch, Desert Hearts Productions, 1985.

Easy A, dir. Will Gluck, Screen Gems, 2010.

Eating Out, dir. Q Allan Brocka, Ariztical Entertainment, 2004.

Emmanuelle, dir. Just Jaeckin, Trinacra Films, 1974.

Far From Heaven, dir. Todd Haynes, Focus Features, 2002.

Fat Girl, dir. Catherine Breillat, Arte France Cinéma, 2001.

Fatal Attraction, dir. Adrian Lyne, Paramount Pictures, 1987.

Fetishes, dir. Nick Broomfield, Lafayette Films, 1996.

Fifty Shades of Grey, dir. Sam Taylor-Johnson, Focus Features, 2015.

Flaming Creatures, dir. Jack Smith, 1963.

Free Fall, dir. Stephen Lacant, Kurhaus Production, 2013.

Funny Games, dir. Michael Haneke, Filmfonds Wien, 1997.

G.B.F., dir. Darren Stein, School Pictures, 2013.

Geordie Shore, MTV UK, 2011 -

Go Fish, dir. Rose Troche, Can I Watch, 1994.

High Art, dir. Lisa Cholodenko, 391 Productions, 1998.

Hustler White, dir. Bruce LaBruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 1996.

I Love You, Phillip Morris, dir. Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, EuropaCorp, 2009.

I Want Your Love, dir. Travis Matthews, Naked Sword, 2012.

I'm Not There, dir. Todd Haynes, Killer Films, 2007.

In the Realm of the Senses, dir. Nagisa Oshima, Oshima Productions, 1976.

Interior. Leather Bar, dir. Franco & Matthews, RabbitBandini Productions, 2013.

Intimacy, dir. Patrice Chéreau, StudioCanal, 2001.

Irreversible, dir. Gaspar Noé, Canal+, 2002.

Keep the Lights On, dir. Ira Sachs, Alarum Pictures, 2012.

Ken Park, dir. Larry Clark and Edward Lachman, Cinéa, 2002.

Kissed, dir. Lynne Stopkewich, Boneyard Film Company Inc., 1996.

Klute, dir. Alan J. Pakula, Warner Bros., 1971.

LA Zombie, dir. Bruce LaBruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 2010.

Last Tango in Paris, dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1972.

Le secret, dir. Virginie Wagon, Les Productions Bagheera, 2000.

Love, Simon, dir. Greg Berlanti, Fox 2000 Pictures, 2018.

Love Island, ITV2, 2015 -

Maîtresse, dir. Barbet Schroeder, Les Films du Losange, 1975.

Martyrs, dir. Pascal Laugier, Canal+, 2008.

Midnight Cowboy, dir. John Schlesinger, Jerome Hellman Productions, 1969.

Mildred Pierce, HBO, 2011.

Milk, dir. Gus Van Sant, Focus Features, 2008.

Moulin Rouge!, dir. Baz Luhrmann, Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.

My Hustler, dir. Andy Warhol, 1966.

My Own Private Idaho, dir. Gus Van Sant, 1991.

Mysterious Skin, dir. Gregg Araki, Desperate Pictures, 2004.

No Skin off My Ass, dir. Bruce LaBruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 1991.

No Way Out, dir. Joel Lamangan, DMV Entertainment, 2008.

Nymph()maniac Vol. I and II, dir. Lars Von Trier, Zentropa Entertainments 2014.

O Fantasma, dir. João Pedro Rodrigues, Rosa Filmes, 2000.

Paris 05:59 Théo and Hugo, dir. Olivier Ducastel & Jacques Martineau, Ecce Films, 2016.

Paris is Burning, dir. Jennie Livingston, Art Matters Inc., 1989.

Pirates of the Caribbean, dir. Gore Verbinski, Walt Disney Pictures, 2003.

Poison, dir. Todd Haynes, Bronze Eye Productions, 1991.

Porky's, dir. Bob Clark, Melvin Simon Productions, 1981.

Preaching to the Perverted, dir. Stuart Urban, PTTP Films, 1997.

Querelle, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Planet Film, 1982.

R100, dir. Hitoshi Matsumoto, Phantom Film, 2013.

Rear Window, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions, 1954.

Romance, dir. Catherine Breillat, Flach Film, 1999.

Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Produzioni Europee Associate (PEA), 1975.

Scanners, dir. David Cronenberg, Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), 1981.

Scorpio Rising, dir. Kenneth Anger, 1964.

Secretary, dir. Steven Shainberg, TwoPoundBag Productions, 2002.

Shame, dir. Steve McQueen, Film4, 2011.

Shortbus, dir. John Cameron Mitchell, THINKFilm, 2008.

Stranger by the Lake, dir. Alain Guiraudie, Les Films du Worso, 2014.

Stud Life, dir. Campbell X, New Lime Republic, 2012.

Super 8 ½, dir. Bruce LaBruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 1994.

Superbad, dir. Greg Mottola, Apatow Productions, 2007.

Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song, dir. Melvin Van Peebles, Yeah, 1971.

Swoon, dir. Tom Kalin, American Playhouse, 1992.

Tangerine, dir. Sean Baker, Duplass Brothers Productions, 2015.

Taxi zum Klo, dir. Frank Ripploh, Exportfilm Bischoff & Co, 1980.

The Beguiled, dir. Don Seigel, The Malpaso Company, 1971.

The Fly, dir. David Cronenberg, SLM Production Group, 1986.

The Handmaiden, dir. Chan-Wook Park, Moho Film, 2016.

The Hunger, dir. Tony Scott, MGM, 1983.

The Idiots, dir. Lars Von Trier, Zentropa Entertainments, 1998.

The Kids Are All Right, dir. Lisa Cholodenko, Focus Features, 2010.

The L Word, Showtime, 2004 – 2009.

The Living End, dir. Gregg Araki, Desperate Pictures, 1992.

The Misandrists, dir. Bruce LaBruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 2018.

The Pass, dir. Ben A. Williams, Toledo Productions, 2016.

The Piano Teacher, dir. Michael Haneke, Arte France Cinéma, 2001.

The Raspberry Reich, dir. Bruce LaBruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 2004.

The Story of O, dir. Just Jaeckin, A.D. Creation, 1975.

The Talented Mr. Ripley, dir. Anthony Minghella, Miramax, 1999.

The Virgin Spring, dir. Ingmar Bergman, Svensk Filmindustri (SF), 1959.

The Watermelon Woman, dir. Cheryl Dunye, Dancing Girl, 1996.

Thirteen, dir. Catherine Hardwicke, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2003.

Transamerica, dir. Duncan Tucker, Belladonna Productions, 2005.

Trouble Every Day, dir. Claire Denis, Arte France Cinéma, 2001.

Un Chant D'Amour, dir. Jean Genet, 1950.

Videodrome, dir. David Cronenberg, Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), 1983.

Weekend, dir. Andrew Haigh, EM Media, 2011.

Wonderstruck, dir. Todd Haynes, Amazon Studios, 2017.

Appendices

Appendix I:

Winterton, C. (2017). 'Blurred Lines: The Case of *Stranger by the Lake*', in: L. Coleman & C. Siegel, eds. *Intercourse in Television and Film: The Presentation of Explicit Sex Acts*, London: Lexington Books, pp. 43 – 66.

Chapter Three

Blurred Lines:

The Case of *Stranger by the Lake*

Connor Winterton

In Linda Williams' 2014 article 'Cinema's Sex Acts,' she discusses the complex and intricate debate around what typically constitutes pornography, how 'explicit sex' in narrative film is often thought to be 'pornographic' (therefore decreasing its artistic value in some way), and claims that films such as *Stranger by the Lake* (dir. Alain Guiraudie, 2014) represent 'relatively explicit' sex acts. Williams writes—'I prefer to call all the sex in these contemporary European art films relatively explicit sex: neither pornography, nor the R-rated, acceptable norm' (Williams 2014, 15). She also notes that films such as *Stranger by the Lake* 'are really concerned with sexual relations between human beings' rather than the sex being presented as mere erotic spectacle (Williams 2014, 23). Taking Williams' idea of the 'relatively explicit' representation of sex, this chapter will interrogate the ways in which a film like *Stranger by the Lake* also blurs the boundaries between cinematic and pornographic explicitness, boundaries that often separate the representation of sex for the sake of titillation (porn) and the representation of sex for conveying a message or making an artistic image (cinema). This chapter will first begin by introducing the idea of 'Neo-Queer Cinema,' a contemporary cycle of film-making that has brought to the screen 'realistic' narratives (and sometimes styles), modern queer issues and explicit (queer) sex, as well as locating *Stranger by the Lake'*s place within this cycle. Following on, this chapter will then briefly examine how *Stranger by the Lake* represents gay cruising in (non-urban/metropolitan) France, and how there is a contradiction between the 'lake' as a utopian (or 'homotopian') gay sexual space that is, at the same time, mysterious and dangerous. Finally, and most importantly, this chapter will delineate

how *Stranger by the Lake* blurs the boundaries of explicitness through an open display of ejaculation and other sexual acts, which subsequently creates a unique and confrontational spectatorial experience.

Neo-Queer Cinema

Stranger by the Lake belongs to a cycle of contemporary queer film-making I label as 'Neo-Queer Cinema.' Neo-Queer Cinema began in 2011 with the British film *Weekend* (dir. Andrew Haigh, 2011) and the group of films, which cross national cultures and borders, include (but are not limited to): *Keep the Lights On* (dir. Ira Sachs, 2012), *I Want Your Love* (dir. Travis Matthews, 2012), *Interior. Leather Bar* (dir. Franco & Matthews, 2013) *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (dir. Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013), *Tangerine* (dir. Sean Baker, 2015), *Below Her Mouth* (dir. April Mullen, 2016), *The Pass* (dir. Ben A. Williams, 2016), and *Theo and Hugo* (dir. Ducastel & Martineau, 2016). Before delineating *Stranger by the Lake*'s place within this cycle of cinema, it is worth outlining what Neo-Queer Cinema precisely is, why and how the term was coined, and the stylistic and narrative similarities the films share.

In 2010, JoAnne C. Juett and David Jones released their edited collection *Coming Out to the Mainstream: New Queer Cinema in the 21st Century*, and provocatively claimed that New Queer Cinema (1990—1998, also known as NQC) had endured within contemporary film, albeit in new and different ways. The collection's aim was to 'contextualise and re-frame the New Queer Cinema' (Juett and Jones 2010, ix) and also to assess its (mainstream) presence in twenty-first century film. Juett and Jones assert that even though B. Ruby Rich declared that New Queer Cinema was over in 2000 (as artistic and political energy waned in favour of the mainstreaming of queer issues/lives), the original New Queer Cinema was bound only to indie festivals and niche audiences, and films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (dir. Ang Lee, 2005) marked a revitalisation of NQC, this time appealing, quite importantly, to broader audiences through wider theatrical release (Juett and Jones 2010, xi). In short, Juett and Jones (and their contributors) reject the notion that NQC had ended in 2000, and instead claim that it had become integrated in to the 'mainstream,' where NQC's original aim to challenge gender identification was maintained. The collection focused on films produced up until 2009, and a couple of years after the edition was released, audiences saw a unique change in how queer cinema was presenting LGBTQIA+ narratives, characters and styles. The first to note this was Ben Walters who, writing for *The Guardian* newspaper, declared there had been a 'new wave of queer filmmaking' present in films such as *Weekend* and *Keep the Lights On* (Walters 2012).

He wrote that the films 'show the gay experience in all its complexity,' and that a 'fresh crop of directors [were] rejecting stereotypical roles and predictable plots, creating films that deal with real life and rounded characters' (Walters 2012). As similar films were released over the following years (leading up to 2016), other academics slowly followed suit, with some noting that there had been a revival of NQC in the form of internet-released lesbian films (Beirne 2014) and also a 'New Queer Cinema Renaissance' (Richards 2016). In 'A New Queer Cinema Renaissance,' Richards claims that films such as *Stranger by the Lake* and *Weekend* are new types of queer films that present a realist aesthetic and challenge heteronormativity (and sometimes homonormativity) through dialogue and sexually explicit acts. He writes: 'contemporary queer cinema is experiencing a wave of films that are a response to the contemporary political climate and state of independent film-making' and that 'as progressive texts, they [*Weekend* and *SBTL*] make…unambiguous queerness accessible to wider audiences' (Richards 2016: 217-224), which is a similar argument made in Juett and Jones' collection. While I agree with Richards' analysis of these films as 'progressive' and as indicative of contemporary independent film-making, however, there are a number of issues with Richards' claims, as well as others who compare modern queer independent films to those released in the early 1990s. New Queer Cinema, as an independent form of filmmaking and aesthetic language (Mennel 2010), exists within its own historically and culturally specific era and was a response to both the AIDS crisis and the previous representation of queers (more specifically gays and lesbians) in visual culture. In this sense, then, and as B. Ruby Rich notes, NQC was a 'moment' not a 'movement' (Rich 2013, 131). It is because of this, I believe that the term 'Neo-Queer Cinema' is more suitable and accurate, and there needs to be a linguistic clarification between the two to instantly denote their difference (and also slight connection).

The use of 'Neo' in 'Neo-Queer Cinema' signals that the queer films I have identified as belonging to a trend are indeed *new* but, as the definition of the word 'neo' also states, they are *revived* too. They are 'new' because they adopt alternative/different styles and narratives than that of the NQC, but they are also 'revived' in a sense because they continue, but refresh, the queerer culture that New Queer Cinema 'ushered in' (Aaron 2004, 8). It would be fair to say, then, that my line of argument loosely follows Jones and Juetts' claims that modern queer films marked a revival of NQC, appealing this time to broader audiences (Juett and Jones 2010, xi). However, Neo-Queer films do not simply continue a 'legacy,' but instead they have revitalised it, changing narratives and styles to suit contemporary issues and appeal to contemporary (queer) spectators. New Queer Cinema, as stated by Michele Aaron (2004), ushered in a

queerer culture, arguably allowing Neo-Queer Cinema to be what it is today. Without NQC, then, Neo-Queer Cinema would not exist.

Moreover, while NQC centred on AIDS narratives, hedonism, death, love and included a strand of lesbian experimentalism (with films such as *The Watermelon Woman* [dir. Cheryl Dunye, 1996]), Neo-Queer Cinema moves away from these to explore perhaps more 'modern' queer issues—love (again), companionship, homonormativity (Duggan 2003), heart-break, sex and loss. Of all of these thematic areas, I wish here to momentarily elaborate on the presence of homonormativity in these films, rather than brush by the issue. Homonormativity as a term and concept dates back to the late 1990s/early 2000s and has been labelled as 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds them and sustains them' (Duggan 2002, 179). Homonormative relationships, for example, often include two (perhaps white or middle-class) queers who are involved in a monogamous marriage/relationship with children, which is seen as 'a compliance with heteronormative normalization' (Santos 2013, 58), and instead of opposing the pervasiveness of heterosexuality and its ideologies, homonormative individuals conform to it. While many activists and campaigners have fought for decades for equal/marriage/adoption rights, it seems that 'we are all anti-homonormativity now' and by criticising homonormativity it would suggest there is such a thing as an 'authentic queer'[i] (Lim, Brown, Browne 2007, 218-219). Homonormativity often actually gives 'meaning to many' that want to have children or want to marry (Lim, Brown, Browne, 2007, 218). However, Neo-Queer films often explicitly or implicitly explore this area, even warning of the dangers of a homonormative relationships. In *Blue is the Warmest Colour*, after the film shows Adèle (Adèle Exarchopoulos) and Emma (Léa Seydoux) having sex, their relationships starts to 'normalise'—they live together, host garden parties, and have 'ordinary' jobs. This is also symbolically indicated when Emma changes her hair colour from the quite radical blue to blonde, a more conservative or 'normal' colour. The blue hair represented Emma's liberal attitude and persona, her 'care-free' side—however her blonde hair signifies how normalised she has become within herself, as well as signifying an embrace of traditional beauty. Their relationship becomes homonormative precisely because they begin to obey the 'pervasiveness' of heterosexual culture and its ideologies. The down-hill spiral of their relationship begins when they slip from innocent, sexual and care-free in to homonormative, and the film seems to warn of the dangers of normalisation in a queer relationship—or even maybe that sex is the precursor for this (as the sex comes first within the linear narrative). *Stranger by the Lake* even hints at the promise of homonormativity, as Franck (Pierre Deladonchamps) is almost obsessed with gaining a more intimate relationship with the

dangerous Michel (Christophe Paou). Homonormativity is signalled in other Neo-Queer films through conventional means of bonding, and sex often represents a romantic expression of love, which is in itself a heteronormative construction. In *Theo and Hugo*, although the two protagonists have sex in a public space (a Parisian sex club, as opposed to the bedroom), the sex is represented as an intense and vital element to the forming of a romantic bond. Tied with homonormativity is also the issue of neoliberalism, a 'political, social and economic arrangement within society that emphasize[s] market relations, re-tasking the role of the state and individual responsibility' (Springer, Birch, MacLeavy, 2016, 2). The 'neoliberal subject' is often thought to be a person that privileges success, consumerism and consumer culture, capitalism and self-improvement; the neoliberal subject is one who honours the self over the many. In feminist studies, the neoliberal feminist is one that has 'little in common with many other feminisms, being exponents of an individualistic, entrepreneurial ideology that is complicit with rather than critical of capitalism, and of other systems of (classed, racialized, and transnational) injustice' (Gill 2016, 617). In many ways, like the neoliberal feminist, the neoliberal or homonormative queer often complements heteronormativity in securing a capitalist economy and privileges *personal success* over *communal success*. In the films I have identified as Neo-Queer, many of the protagonists are neoliberal subjects themselves, and therefore the term Neo-Queer Cinema is even more appropriate beyond a linguistic separation from New Queer Cinema. Where New Queer Cinema challenged gender identification, offering radical or experimental narratives that spoke more widely to queer issues and politics (such as AIDS or under/mis-representation), films such as *Blue is the Warmest Colour* and *Keep the Lights On*, focus closely on white, privileged individuals who successfully navigate the economic and social world, and their only real worries lie within personal relationships and the self. These narratives focus more narrowly on personal and inter-personal struggles, revolving around homonormative/heteronormative problems such as marriage, monogamy, and success, and socio-cultural critiques, often ripe in the New Queer Cinema, begin to vanish. This may be due to the fact that *some* LGBT+ persons in real life are beginning to reap the rewards of 'equality' and neoliberalism; when these Neo-Queer films were being released, same sex marriage was legalised in the UK and was becoming legal in many US states (Maine/Maryland/Washington 2012, New Mexico 2013, Florida/Alabama 2015). These films, then, appear to try and reflect social, cultural and economic progress for queers, yet this simply leaves out many members of the LGBTQIA community who do not benefit from neoliberalism (for example transsexuals, queer POC, poor/under-privileged queers and so on). In short, Neo-Queer Cinema focuses less on the community and more on the self; some of these films

privilege normative notions of love, success, consumerism and the self, over the wider community and issues still apparent in the LGBTQIA community.

Alongside neoliberalism and homonormativity, what *both* NQC and Neo-Queer Cinema explore, then, are queer issues within their own historic and culturally specific timeframes, and are/were accompanied, as mentioned, by their own specific film styles. New Queer Cinema stylistically dabbled in pastiche, irony, expressionism, parody and a queering of form, genre and style in films such as *The Living End* (dir. Gregg Araki, 1992), which queered the 'buddy movie' with an AIDS narrative (the film is very interesting when watched alongside *Thelma and Louise* [dir. Ridley Scott, 1991] too), and *Swoon* (dir. Tom Kalin, 1992) which queered iconic heterosexual images, and there is a scene 'right out of *Rear Window* [dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954] with Jeff and Lisa's romantic dialogue now taking place between the male lovers' (Aaron 2004, 4). There is also an aesthetic playfulness within these films; in *The Living End*, for example, all the audience witness in the film's sex scene is the bottom of the protagonists' feet, which is perhaps a playful nod to how mainstream cinema often 'avoids' (heterosexual) sex acts. As Barbara Mennel also notes, the aesthetics of this era 'covered a range from imperfect cinema with low-budget hand-held cameras to sophisticated black-and-white compositions evocative of silent film from the 1920s' and she neatly sums up NQC's style as 'a form of 'in-your-face' and unapologetic filmmaking' (Mennel 2010, 67-69). The stylistic strategies adopted within the NQC were not exactly even across all films, but instead filmmakers created inherently political messages not only through narrative and character, but aesthetic too. Neo-Queer Cinema, on the other hand, presents minimalist and realist styles, which attempt to mirror the queer and social landscape of the time, and represent a more visceral and complex experience that queers undergo in the modern world.[ii] Most of the films include long takes, shaky or imperfect cinematography and composition, a lack or a minimal presence of non-diegetic sound, the use of tight close-ups to convey emotion, a lack of extravagant or camp aesthetic, colour or mise-en-scène, the use of natural lighting, and a slow narrative pace. Overall, most of these films fit in with Marshment and Hallam's four types of film realism, outlined in *Realism and Popular Cinema* (2000), which includes a 'sound-track design in which underscore is absent or minimised,' 'observational or static camerawork,' 'unsteady image[s]' and sometimes favour 'mid or long shots' (Marshment and Hallam 2000, 102-104).[iii] This kind of style also loosely fits in with a form of cinema Jeffrey Sconce first labelled as 'slow cinema.' 'Slow Cinema,' as Ira Jaffe writes, typically features cinematography that is 'unusually still,' has infrequent edits and cuts, and 'slow movies tend to shun elaborate and dynamic décor, lighting and colour' (Jaffe 2014, 3). While some Neo-

Queer films are not strictly a 'slow' like Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) or Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days* (2007), most do have a measured narrative pace much slower than the majority of theatrically released films. The stylistic and narrative strategies adopted in Neo-Queer Cinema are nothing new or radical per se, but are unfamiliar or have not been typically used within the realm of queer film-making. There is an immediate and stark contrast, for instance, between the style of *Weekend* and *Swoon*, or *Blue is the Warmest Colour* and *Go Fish* (dir. Rose Troche, 1994). What these films have in common is that they both centre on LGBT+ protagonists (as well as unashamedly portraying 'queerness'), and their contrasting styles is one element that *defines* them as *different* waves of queer cinema; they both may be saying things about contemporary queer issues, but they are presenting them in entirely different ways. Rarely before have queer films adopted an overtly realist style, favouring either a camp aesthetic or sensibility, pastiche, irony, expressionism, experimentalism, radicalism, parody or humour in the past instead, and in post-2011 (or post-*Weekend*) there appeared to be a proliferation of the 'realistic style' within queer film-making. As Stuart Richards notes, these films belong to and also respond to the contemporary climate of independent film-making, as they divert away from the mainstream, back in to festival circuits, limited releases and sometimes a prolific online release or presence (see Beirne 2014, and the film *I Want Your Love* is a good example of this). A majority of the Neo-Queer films also share a (sub)genre, that being the 'queer romance,' as they centre on themes such as love, lust, heart-break, sex and loss. There a few discrepancies, one actually being *Stranger by the Lake*, which is more of a queer erotic thriller (which still has elements of lust, loss and sex) and *Theo and Hugo*, which presents a more utopian vision of modern gay love, despite the HIV scare one of the characters endures (and therefore is more of an alternative queer rom-com).

Within the Neo-Queer canon of contemporary film-making, *Stranger by the Lake* holds a substantial place. Even though it did not make much of splash in the global box office due to its limited release (the film has grossed $325,196 to date, a somewhat sizeable amount for a foreign erotic thriller, but nowhere near the amount most blockbusters or star-vehicles make), the film was critically (and informally) praised, as a 'significant contribution to contemporary gay cinema' (Lippe 2014, 70), a 'stunning psychological drama [that] takes place in an atmosphere of frank homoeroticism, utterly without inhibition or taboo' (Bradshaw 2014). B. Ruby Rich in 2013 even claimed that the film was 'fascinating' because it took on 'one of the last remaining taboos: full male nudity' and 'raise[d] lots of questions about sexuality and desire' (Alexander 2013). *Stranger by the Lake* revolves around Franck, who after visiting a local gay cruising spot almost every day in the summer, falls for the dark and mysterious

Michel, and even though Franck knows Michel is a dangerous (and homicidal) man, he decides to live out his passions anyway. The film's narrative, which is based around repetition, eroticism, sex and danger, closely follows those other films within the Neo-Queer canon, adopting a slow, unhurried pace (long takes, slow narrative events and so on). However, whereas most of the other Neo-Queer films are based around homonormativity, lust, love and then eventually break-ups or loss in metropolitan/urban spaces, *Stranger by the Lake* instead casts a gaze over the gay cruising scene in non-urban France, within a picturesque and peaceful setting. In regards to the film's representation of cruising (a central element to the film), I am dubious of labelling it a depiction of the *modern* gay cruising scene, as time within the film is presented ambiguously. Since the film takes place in only one (large) space, and each scene begins with the same shot of cars pulling up in the car park on a new day (over ten consecutive days), it is difficult to determine exactly what day/month/year it is. Simply from noting the types of cars in the car park, the type of weather and the clothes the characters wear (conventional and important markers of time or era), it would be fair to claim that this film takes place anywhere in the last ten to fifteen years (and obviously in the summer months). Yet, issues such as time and place are blurred and ambiguous in *Stranger by the Lake* to de-politicise the story and the characters, basing them outside of contemporary LGBTQIA+ politics and problems such as homonormativity, gay marriage, equal rights and societal repression (or 'progression') in France. Instead, *Stranger by the Lake* offers a setting far away from the 'city,' far away from complicated and political issues, far away from heterosexual norms (but ultimately never too far away from danger). The film offers, arguably, a sociological glance at gay mating in our contemporary era, where the audience has the chance to gaze at an alternative cruising scene, perhaps never seen before on-screen. The gay sex scenes are also represented as at one with nature, away from judgement and shame typically projected within heteronormative public space(s) (Warner 1999), and this is reinforced through the 'openness' of the sex acts themselves. The explicitness of the sex scenes is also a central talking point within the critical and informal reception of the film. Keith Uhlich writing for *Time Out* notes that the lake is a 'Edenic [*sic*] haven where gay males of all types lie around nude and sneak off into the whispering woods for sex—before seguing into a deeply unsettling exploration of infatuation' (Uhlich 2014), and Owen Gleiberman reporting for *Entertainment Weekly* writes that 'the film lingers, sometimes explicitly, on random erotic encounters… Alain Guiraudie depicts this tribalistic hot zone with all its codes and rituals, its clandestine abandon, even its comedy' (Gleiberman 2014). The film is unlike many other sexual and erotic Neo-Queer films as it was often praised for its use of sex, rather than criticised, unlike the lesbian sex scenes in

Blue is the Warmest Colour or *Below Her Mouth* were. There is often a ubiquitous feeling of caution towards heterosexual male directors who attempt to represent lesbian sex on-screen, as they often depict sex scenes through a decidedly masculine or even 'sadistic' lens. *Stranger by the Lake*, however, has been praised for its use of sex and how well it integrates the sex acts within the film narrative, which may point to larger issues surrounding authorship, authenticity and especially 'the gaze.' Before delineating the differences between the two types of explicitness, and how *Stranger by the Lake* achieves a blurring of boundaries, it is worth further exploring how *Stranger* builds its gay fictional world as a space/place that is simultaneously utopian and dystopian.

Utopia and Dystopia

Stranger by the Lake, like a number of other Neo-Queer films, presents a fictional world where being queer and loving queerly is an impossibility, a world where happiness and pleasure are only momentary. Neo-Queer films, particularly *Weekend*, *Keep the Lights On*, *Blue is the Warmest Colour* and *Stranger by the Lake*, all present 'relatively explicit' erotic sex that ultimately leads to, as mentioned, a break up or heart-break for the protagonists (Williams 2014). Utopian sex is often placed centrally within a somewhat dystopian or anti-climactic narrative, queering the spectatorial experience as audiences are often left disappointed that the characters could not succeed in their relationship. Sex is often orgasmic, joyful and frank (therefore 'utopian') in Neo-Queer Cinema but is featured in stories and narratives that show queers as unlucky in love, not-quite-good-enough, or ones who give in to normative expectations, leading to some kind of 'downfall.' Queer Sex and its function in these films, then, traverses the boundaries of pleasure and disavowal, of utopia and dystopia. I use the term 'dystopia' lightly since it typically connotes a sci-fi style apocalyptic landscape, and this is the most recognised and popular literary/film form of dystopia. Considering this, we could say that Neo-Queer films show 'personal dystopias,' where, for the characters, the end of a relationship literally is the end of the world as they know it (think of Adèle *bawling* her eyes out in *Blue is the Warmest Colour*), which again relates to the notion of homonormativity and the importance of love and romance that the characters seem to be so obsessed with. If in the 1980s/1990s AIDS was a signifier of a queer dystopia (sex leading to death), in post-AIDS contemporary queer cinema, the end of a relationship now seems to be the ultimate loss. This speaks more widely to issues of homonormativity and LGBTQIA+ assimilation (in to heteroculture), and

these films often also relate to what Lauren Berlant coined as 'cruel optimism' (2011). The concept of cruel optimism connects to the idea that most people strive for 'the good life' and often cling on to ideals, objects and ideologies so the 'good life' materialises (Berlant 2011, 2). As Berlant states, 'all attachment is optimistic' (Berlant 2011, 1), and most of the character's in Neo-Queer films are left disappointed, upset and even pessimistic in some cases because they clung on to the ideal of assimilating in to 'mainstream' culture. The homonormative nature of some characters' relationships also contributes to this notion of 'cruel optimism,' as often couples such as Adèle and Emma (Léa Seydoux) in *Blue is the Warmest Colour*, as mentioned, attempt to live a 'normal,' happy life (clinging on to the idea of 'true love'), yet they are left bitter, disappointed and heart-broken in the end. Joanna Smith notes that in the contemporary world *Blue* presents, it also 'normaliz[es] same-sex relationships through its emphasis on class divisions over sexual identities' (Smith 2015, 71), issues that seem to more present in modern France since the introduction of the PACS legislation and gay marriage.[iv]

Stranger by the Lake also fits in with the other Neo-Queer films as it offers a utopian space/place that is liberating and Eden-like, a space where gay men can openly be themselves while engaging in sexual acts with strangers. The cruising scenes in the film all happen within the woods by the lake, which as I have already mentioned, visually connects the gay sex as being at one with nature.[v] Just as I use the word 'dystopia' lightly, I also use 'utopia' carefully too. In Porn Studies, there is a body of work that claims that porn offers a utopian representation of sex, where the acts are intensely pleasurable, joyous and isolated from politics and the outside world. As Morris and Paasonen note, porn promises a utopia of 'carnal intensity, sexual plenitude, and pleasure' (Morris and Paasonen 2014, 215); and Steven Marcus writing before the majority of contemporary work on porn, even amalgamated the two words to create the term 'pornotopia,' which represents a fictional, sexual world of pleasure and intensity (Marcus 1964),. In Richard Dyer's seminal article 'Entertainment and Utopia,' he critically discusses the ways in which certain cinematic genres like the musical can offer 'what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized' and that these types of fictional spaces provide 'alternatives, hopes and wishes…[and] the sense that things could be better' (Dyer 2002, 20). Dyer's theory has been re-appropriated to a number of other genres (including porn) and it can also be implemented here to the analysis of *Stranger by the Lake*. The film, instead of always representing the sexual act as utopian, it instead places the sex within a location that exudes a utopian sensibility and aesthetic, a gay space that provides 'alternatives, hopes and wishes' in the form of lush, natural surroundings and excessive sex (Dyer 2002, 20). Continually throughout the film, there are sweeping shots of the vast landscape that showcases the

surrounding hills as well as the lake and nearby woods, creating an Eden-like tranquillity, a picturesque and calming location where men can relax and have as much sex as they want, away from shame, judgement or ridicule.

The homo-erotic and homo-social nature of the lake is presented as a 'safe space' and also relates to Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia.' As Foucault states, there is 'not a single culture in the world that is not made up of heterotopias… [i]t is a constant feature of all human groups' and the very word refers to spaces that act as 'counter-sites,' spaces that are often seen as being invisible, and therefore seen as 'natural' by members of society (Foucault 1997, 331). Foucault originally referred to spaces such as prisons, schools and mental institutions as heterotopias where movement and freedom is regulated, and 'hetero' in this sense means 'other,' which means the word itself translates to 'other spaces.' In his fifth principle to 'heterotopia,' Foucault writes:

> [O]ver the course of its history, a society may take an existing heterotopia, which has never vanished, and make it function in a very different way. Actually, each heterotopia has a precise and well-defined function within society and the same heterotopia can, in accordance with the synchroneity of the culture in which it is located, have a different function. (Foucault 1997, 333).

Considering this principle, the lake could be viewed as a heterotopian site that never 'vanished' (and therefore has always 'existed') but now has a 'different' and/or well-defined functions to and for the gay community, a 'safe place' to have sex and relax. This comparison can be furthered by Foucault's claim that heterotopias 'always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time…[o]ne can only enter by special permission and after one has completed a certain number of gestures' (Foucault 1997, 335). While the lake is an open and free space (both naturally and economically), it is isolated and out of the city, and it and its patrons also operate on a system of 'opening and closing'; the lake may be a public space but it is occupied primarily by gay males, who have re-appropriated the space for a very specific purposes: sex, pleasure and relaxation. It is technically an 'open' space but it is also 'closed,' closed off and used by gay males to engage in whatever frivolity they like. There is also a system of rituals and 'gestures' that take place in and by the lake that need to be known by those who occupy it. When, for example, the camera shows Franck and Michel catch eyes, the camera lingers to show us that their eye contact means they are attracted to each other, but also that the connection may be more intense

than the average hook-up. Like in gay bars and clubs, glances, silent gazes and smiles operate to silently communicate sexual attraction, and it is no different in *Stranger by the Lake*. Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' may be better understood in relation to *Stranger* (or gay culture in general), if we referred to the lake as a 'homotopia,' a decidedly (male) gay space that exudes a utopian sensibility but also has the possibility of being real (after all, Foucault states that heterotopias are often *real* spaces), where the members of its culture see its rituals as 'natural.' The lake is a 'homotopian' safe space that is also penetrated by a perilous presence, Michel, a dangerous man who has used his gay sexuality to exhibit 'a certain number of gestures' to therefore enter the homotopia, with the hopes of tainting it. The 'safe space' of the lake, then, is turned in to a 'dangerous space,' and herein lies the paradox of the film: the graceful, intimate and utopian environment that is constructed within *Stranger by the Lake* is then juxtaposed with the presence of Michel, an alluring, erotic and dangerous figure who threatens to (and does) disrupt the peaceful lake and its patrons. After Michel kills one of the men (to which Franck is a witness from afar), a detective begins to investigate the crime at the woods, putting Franck under pressure to release the information about the killing.[vi] The trajectory of the film—which begins with a homotopian representation of sex, space and place, and then ends in a dangerous cat and mouse game—is emblematic of the erotic thriller, and the film plays on generic conventions of tension, intrigue and mystery. This intrigue and mystery is further heightened by how the utopian setting starkly contrasts with Michel's presence; he is not only perilous, but he is also an alluring, a man that is both sexually attractive and dangerously homicidal, which adds a more intense flavour of mystery and excitement to the film. The cruising scene set by the lake, which I have identified as possibly not being as 'modern' as one would first think, is set, however, almost definitely post-AIDS crisis. Nevertheless, Michel's dangerous and alluring presence could in fact be symbolic of AIDS, as no matter where these gay men are, they are never too far away from danger, even in a utopian surrounding. Michel visits the lake frequently and has sex with a number of the men, and his dangerous presence is implicit as no one knows he is a killer; he hides in plain sight. The fact that Michel has sex with one man and then kills him shortly after, furthers this comparison with AIDS, as well as firmly identifying him as a decidedly sociopathic individual, much like many killers in the history of the horror or thriller genre. Michel could also be understood as a 'snake in the garden' of a sexual paradise, a figure who solely symbolises death and dystopia. Ultimately, however, *Stranger by the Lake* plays on the paradox between the utopian space/place/sex with the alluring and perilous presence of Michel, to create an erotic and mysterious mood. The contrast between the utopian setting/sex scenes and the dangerous

Michel forces the locale to be simultaneously utopian *and* dystopian, a queer fictional world full of contradiction, eroticism and danger. The entire film is, arguably, full of contradictions, and this chapter will now turn to how *Stranger by the Lake* provocatively blurs the boundaries of cinematic and pornographic explicitness, which also, I argue, creates a unique spectatorial experience.

Blurred Lines

Pornography as a genre, and cinema as an institution, follow their own set patterns of stylistic and narrative strategies to typically achieve either a maximum view (porn) or a careful concealment (cinema) of sex.[vii] These (quite clear) differences are why I label them, somewhat literally, as 'cinematic explicitness' and 'pornographic explicitness'—both come with their own codes and conventions, which arguably helps to define their status in (film) culture too. If we were to think about these types of explicitness in tangible terms, 'cinematic explicitness' is mainly 'soft' or 'artistic,' where the careful concealment of sex still aims to be (somewhat) erotic, whereas as 'pornographic explicitness' is almost always 'to the max,' showing the 'beaver shot,' the 'money shot,' cunnilingus on a shaved pubis or the close-up of a penis penetrating a vagina, mouth or anus (Williams 2008, 4).[viii] As Linda Williams writes in *Screening Sex*, sex in cinema is often both revealed *and* concealed throughout the history of (primarily North American) film, and cinema often 'goes out of its way' to carefully avoid maximum explicitness (Williams 2008). In *Sex and the Cinema*, Tanya Krzywinska (2006) also notes that cinema has its own lexicon and grammar when it comes to the representation of sexual acts. Speaking of more 'conservative' representations of sex, she highlights the importance of the ellipsis, which 'allows the viewer to project in the gap their own personally tailored fantasy' (Krzywinska 2006, 29), and this type of concealment (fade to black or cut-away) is featured most famously, for example, in *Casablanca* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1942), but also in a host other types of films and genres too.[ix] Krzywinska notes also how other sexual representations are displayed through the two frameworks: idealism and realism. Idealism can be typically found in films that represent 'soft-core' sex (such as *Moulin Rouge!* [dir. Baz Luhrmann, 2001]), that display 'idealised visual tones' or in the romance genre which provides 'ideological and normative' displays of 'ideal sex, desire and sexuality' (Krzywinska 2006, 33-34). In contrast to the more romantic and 'idealised' aesthetic found in romance films, Krzywinska claims that 'in many films that deploy realist aesthetics, love and romance are either absent… or they operate as unattainable ideals' and this is usually found in 'art films'

that carry 'intellectual or psychological dimensions' (Krzywinska 2006, 41-45). Art-house films, and now Neo-Queer Cinema, often uses 'realistic' techniques to also show that sex is a 'physical and problematic business,' and that often the more 'realistic' representations of sex have been 'subject to closer censorship' (Krzywinska 2006, 42). In other genres such as the erotic thriller, comedy, horror or drama, sex can play a number of roles. Typically in the cruder, ruder or erotic genres like the thriller or comedy, sex typically acts as an erotic spectacle, and lesbian or bi women are often included in erotic thriller sex scenes to 'titillate heterosexual men' (Williams 2005, 206), which speaks to the issues I briefly mentioned earlier about criticism that is typically levelled at straight men who direct lesbian/bi sex. In comedy, sex is alternatively seen as a human weakness, a giving in to base urges and desires, and this is usually comes with farcical or comedic results.[x] While some genres, film cultures or directors shamefully endorse and represent a misogynistic or sadistic 'male gaze' (Mulvey 1975), cinema has also seen some more nuanced representations of sex, that 'aid characterisation' and serve to develop plot (Coleman 2016). *Shortbus* (dir. John Cameron Mitchell, 2006), for instance, is a 'smart film' that offers (sexual) spectacles that are 'queer and straight,' as well as reincarnating 'sexual and social freedom in the wake of the AIDS epidemic and 9/11' therefore depicting a sexual utopia, with an 'American flavour' (Williams 2016: p. 116). Unlike porn, which is defined by its 'openness,' cinema has to often be more 'careful' to avoid upsetting censors or even spectators.

The stylistic and narrative elements that divide porn and cinema are also critically discussed in Jacob M. Held's 'What Is and Is Not Porn?' (2016). In his chapter, Held offers a new way of thinking about how we can define porn through narrative, instead of style. Held argues that 'it is not the presence of explicit sex that makes a film pornographic, it is not whether one sees the money shot, it is not about the visual presentation of sex, but instead it is about the role the sex plays in supporting or furthering the film narrative' (Held 2016, 33). He also states that pornographic movies such as *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972) are simply 'fuck film[s]', which lack narrative, plot or characterisation (Held 2016, 33). Where porn was often defined in the past by its open display of the 'hydraulics of sex' (Williams 2008, 5), Held re-visits these arguments to claim that it is cinema's specific use of sex, within film narrative, that defines it as *not* being pornographic, even if it does include 'real sex.' In Held's paradigm, then, porn is defined as quite simply 'fucking on-screen,' and cinema's sex acts are alternatively purposeful and distinctive, and narrative is what divides the boundaries between cinematic and pornographic explicitness. In his conclusion, Held also asserts that his definition does not 'disparage pornography or relegate it to a lesser status among other films, it merely

designates porn as different from non-porn insofar as porn is concerned with sex as a spectacle' (Held 2016, 47). I would claim, however, that Held's argument throughout his chapter over-emphasises the role of (or lack of) narrative as being the *primary* factor to what constitutes porn. Pornographic films *can* have a distinct or clear narrative—*Pirates* (dir. Joone, 2005) is an example of a high-budget porn (which parodies *Pirates of the Caribbean* [dir. Gore Verbinski, 2003]) that follows a clear narrative path from beginning to end. Yet, even if porn does not have a narrative like *Pirates*, and maybe instead it is simply 'kissing—foreplay—penetration—orgasm/ejaculation,' this is in itself a narrative; it has a beginning—middle—and a conclusive end, just like a lot of 'narrative film.' The erotic setup and seduction in porn could also be seen as a 'narrative' of some kind; however awful it may be, it leads the spectator, in narrative fashion, to sex. Porn (especially hard-core porn), then, is supposed to be 'explicit' because of certain stylistic *and* narrative strategies—a marriage of the two, not just one or the other, much like cinema too, which can sometimes balance narrative with 'relatively explicit sex' to create a powerful or affective experience (Williams 2014). Cinematic explicitness, compared to pornography, is often more careful and tactful, but is most importantly powered by successful performances and the assembly of a clear and effective narrative (in other words, sex often has a purpose beyond just spectacle). Cinema also relies on sexual 'explicitness' that can cause strong emotion or affect, which is somewhat unusual and speaks to the power of cinema to produce identification. Pornography can also be affective if it presents powerful performances and effective narratives (or even if it is dull 'humanity' can still sneak in), but often it does not and instead relies on total explicitness and shots of penetration to stimulate the viewer. In short, then, pornographic explicitness relates to a representation of sex as completely visible (whether that be complete visibility of genitalia, penetration, cum shots), whereas cinematic explicitness is not all that 'explicit,' but instead it is tactful and careful (as well as being affective or moving). What is also clear (or even obvious) is that cinema and porn have distinct boundaries that separate them, and film's such as *Stranger by the Lake*, which presents 'relatively explicit' sex acts, blurs these boundaries with stark effect.

Within the first ten minutes of *Stranger by the Lake*, the audience witness the central protagonist Franck arriving at the lake, taking a swim, talking to a local visitor of the lake (the chubby, wise Henri, played by Patrick d'Assumçao) before attempting to cruise for sex in the nearby woods. He strolls around for a while, attempting to find a man to whom he is sexually attracted to (rejecting a few along the way). After a few more minutes walking, Franck stumbles across Michel, who is involved in a '69' with another man. The camera lingers on both of their faces as they notice each other, and Michel gives Franck a smile before continuing to rim the

man he is with. Franck turns around to walk away, and an anonymous middle-aged man stands watching the other two engaged in a '69,' touching himself while he gazes. From these opening scenes, the audience have immediately observed an open and liberating gay sexual space (as discussed), and the camera does not 'shy away' from displaying flaccid or erect penises (of all shapes and sizes!), no doubt causing uncomfortable/confused internal (or external) reactions from some spectators. A little later on, and after a brief conversation between Franck and Michel (in which the sexual chemistry slowly bubbles beneath the surface), Franck returns to Henri for a chat about his feelings towards Michel, and then enters the woods once again in search for a suitable sexual partner. Franck finally finds a man to have sex with, and the audience witnesses the first, 'relatively explicit' sex scene of the film, a scene that is in itself indicative of how, stylistically, *Stranger by the Lake* blurs the boundaries of explicitness.

The sex scene opens with a mid-shot of the two naked men kissing on the ground, and the audience is placed at a far enough distance to make them feel as if they are nosey by-standers, or 'peeping toms' if you like. The sound of sexual moans and groans dominates the diegesis and we can see Franck's legs being rubbed sensually by the other man. The scene then cuts to a shot of the anonymous masturbating man, this time watching Franck and his partner, and we realise that the mid-shot before was in fact from his gaze. The men tell him to go away as he is a distracting presence, and then Franck attempts to perform oral sex, before realising that neither of them have a condom (here we can feel the post-AIDS consciousness engrained in both of the men—"not without a condom," Franck's partner says), and masturbation will have to do instead. After the two men have (silently) decided this, the scene abruptly cuts to Franck lying on the ground, and instantly we realise he is being masturbated by the other man (we know this through the sound of moans, groans, and Franck's slightly shaking body). The camera stays close-up to Franck's face while this happens, conveying the (intense) pleasure he is enduring. Franck then utters "I'm coming," and tells the man to kiss him (and he does). Typically, within cinema, the shot of Franck's intense facial expressions and the mere sounds of sexual activity would be 'explicit' enough. Instead, *Stranger by the Lake* takes it up a gear, and just as Franck is about to cum, the camera cuts to a static shot of his hard penis, ejaculating over his stomach for around five seconds, before cutting back to his post-orgasm reaction. Here, in this ten second sequence, there is an immediate clash between pornographic and cinematic explicitness, an extreme blurring of boundaries that is not often present in cinema.[xi] The way in which the sequence is edited and shot, contributes significantly to the blurring of boundaries. The scene begins with a close-up that functions to convey Franck's sexual tension and the build up to his climax. The uncomfortable proximity of the camera forces spectators to be closer than

they would probably want to be; the tactical cinematography also aligns the scene with pornography, as porn often includes a shot of the man's orgasmic face before he ejaculates (usually over the other man or woman's face/breasts/ass/body). Reflecting on the way in which the sequence is constructed, the film does subtly hint that the cum shot is approaching, but when one is transfixed by the film, it is difficult to realise this clever hint and that a decidedly pornographic act is approaching. It is the cum shot's place as a *decidedly pornographic act* that is another key way in which this sequence blurs the boundaries of explicitness. The 'cum shot' is one of the defining, archetypal, and phallo-centric elements in heterosexual and male gay porn, and it could be argued that it is one element that makes porn so 'explicit,' or even taboo. The cum shot in porn also typically marks the end of the feature and the shot concludes the scene(s) (sometimes viewers are treated to some cheesy dialogue once the sex is over, but usually once the man is finished, so is the scene). The cum shot often functions, as Murat Aydemir notes, to make 'masculinity real,' and 'visibility, narrativity, and masculinity join together felicitously in the cum shot' (Aydemir 2004, 298), offering a sense of closure (therefore it carries narrative purpose), and a distinctly masculine representation of pleasure. It seems, then, that the male cum shot in porn has very rigid and conventional purposes as it marks the end of the scene, it functions to make masculinity 'real,' and it also offers an extremely visible orgasm, as opposed to female orgasm that is often contained inside of the body, which leads to questions of authenticity and performativity (see Frith 2015). The cum shot also allows for a connection between the male viewer and the male performer—if the scene and the 'cum shot' is fully affective, then it allows for complete physical identification, an identification between the viewer and the scenario. Since the cum shot has such distinct purposes in porn, this also leads to some questions: what about when the cum shot is shown in cinema? What is its role? Here in *Stranger by the Lake*, the 'money shot' is re-appropriated and given new meaning. It functions to blur the boundaries of explicitness as I have already delineated—the cum shot's decidedly pornographic and totally explicit nature collides with the often soft-core representations typically shown in cinema and this creates a unique, possibly confusing, and confrontational experience (more on that later). Even though the cum shot is now given new meaning and purpose insofar that it blurs the boundaries of explicitness, it does not completely escape a 'pornonormative' representation. In *Stranger by the Lake*, the cum shot does not necessarily function to make masculinity real (it can do, but it does not do it in the same way as porn) but it does conclude the scene (giving it narrative purpose) and it gives a visible representation of orgasmic pleasure—the cum shot here still acts as a marker of

authenticity and performativity, just like it does in porn, as well as representing the deep sexual fulfilment Franck is searching for (and which he momentarily finds).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note where this scene falls within the entire narrative, as we do not see another cum shot throughout the film. When Franck and Michel finally have sexual contact, the film shifts from a very open representation of orgasm to a more soft-core, artistic, or even 'cinematic' depiction. When Franck and Henri begin engaging in oral/masturbatory sex, the scene displays a montage of soothing images; shots of birds flying, the calming twilight sky, the soothing lake, and while this is happening we can only see the two men's shadows while they engage in the sexual acts (which creates a mysteriously erotic mood). Even when Franck once again utters "kiss me, I'm gonna come," this time we see nothing. This relates to Krzywinska's theory that depending on the context of the sexual act, it is represented through an idealised *or* realistic lens. Before, with the unknown man, Franck was only looking for a 'quick fix' (much like porn) and this more 'realistic' portrayal of cruising was met with an explicit and open representation of orgasm. On the other hand, when Franck is with Michel, the film instead takes an 'idealised' and romantic approach, switching between quixotic shots of the location and the movements and sounds of the two men. This is also evident in the later, more extended sex scenes between Franck and Michel, where carefully placed cinematography only shows thrusting hips (anal), bobbing heads (oral sex), and the 'motions' of sex, much like typical soft-core representations in cinema.[xii]

This somewhat proves, then, that the film carefully and even consciously traverses the boundaries between pornographic and cinematic explicitness, dipping its foot in to two sides of water, but never fully submerging itself in either. The film's queerness can even be defined by its liminal position. It is a film that *likes* to sit on both sides, and this arguably defines the film's status as queer beyond its gay protagonists/antagonists and the open representation of gay sex. This more 'romantic' scenario likewise represents the hope to create an idealized (or utopian) setting for male lovers, but often reminds the viewer that this is not totally possible—after all, Michel is the killer and we know it is not going to end well, even if Franck does get his moment of passion. Porn, in contrast, is always able to make the fantasy self-contained, water-tight, though often implausible or extravagant. Even though this more 'romantic' scene moves from 'explicit' to 'soft'/'romantic,' the earlier cum shot scene is a definitive nod to porn, and it is safe to say the cum shot is not a prevalent feature in (mainstream) cinema, which can also lead some spectators to question *why* the boundaries of explicitness have been blurred in the first place. To conclude, my analysis will now shift away from how *Stranger by the Lake* blurs the boundaries of explicitness to discuss what affect this may have on spectators.

Returning to Williams 'Cinema's Sex Acts,' she notes that American audiences, in particular, 'especially have a hard time separating relatively explicit sex in movies from what seems to be the totally explicit sex of pornography' (Williams 2014, 9). Firstly, I would claim it is not only American audiences that have this 'issue' but audiences that are primarily subjected to American films that are set in American society and culture. The pervasiveness of Hollywood means that audiences across the globe are subjected to American cinema because it is a (or the) dominant film culture, and since American mainstream film primarily shows soft-core representations of sex, this has become the 'norm.' Any representations that dare to step outside of this arguably become difficult for spectators, regardless of their nationality or geographical location.[xiii] *Stranger by the Lake* is certainly one of these 'difficult' films. I have already demonstrated how the cum shot's decidedly pornographic nature can blur the boundaries of explicitness in cinema, but how do people react to these images? How does its presence make people feel? Since I have not undertaken any formal audience research, I will use an anecdote from a recent conference to demonstrate that spectators are most often confused or shocked when faced with 'pornographic' acts in a 'cinematic' film.

In June 2017 I presented at a conference entitled 'The Money Shot Revisited' at the University of Leicester (UK), where I spoke about *Stranger by the Lake* and its specific use of the 'money shot' (I presented an argument almost exactly the same as the one I have made in this chapter). Once I had contextualised *Stranger by the Lake*'s place within Neo-Queer Cinema, I explained how the cum shot blurs the boundaries of explicitness, and then proceeded to show the clip of Franck ejaculating. I had given delegates several trigger warnings throughout the presentation that the scene was 'explicit,' and told them if they were uncomfortable with these sorts of images, they should either avert their eyes or leave the lecture theatre (a warning they would not have received if they were at the cinema or watching the film and/or the short scene at home). Once I began playing the clip, I closely watched others' reactions to the cum shot. Some people squirmed, some averted their eyes, some watched on stoically (probably to demonstrate that they are not fazed by such images) and some others frowned in confusion (and yes, some others did note the size of Franck's penis!). Reflecting on this, I think the film's conscious and overt blurring of explicit boundaries is why the shocked/confused people felt the way they did. This scene, for them, had crossed the line from cinematic explicitness in to pornographic explicitness, creating a unique and confrontational experience. I use 'unique' and

'confrontational' to explain the reactions, and I use them carefully. I use 'unique' because these images, embedded within a theatrically-released film like *Stranger by the Lake*, are uncommon and exceptional. While a handful of films throughout the history of independent, queer or art-house have openly displayed male cum shots and 'relatively explicit' acts,[xiv] these images are not yet commonplace. These acts are not 'cinematic,' and only crop up now and again. These acts are pornographic and private in nature, and are in within themselves 'unique' to the porn genre. I also use 'confrontational' because these images can arguably cause a psychic struggle within spectators, stirring up awkward/confused/angry reactions. In Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti's 'Lesbian Sex in Mainstream Cinema and Audience Enjoyment', they use *Blue is the Warmest Colour* to try and 'understand in more depth how the enjoyment of movies about lesbian protagonists relates to the sexual orientation and gender of the audience' (Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti 2016, 556). This is one of few works in Film Studies that tries to discover who is 'enjoying' queer/lesbian sex in mainstream film though quantitative analysis, rather than typical Film Studies models/theories of spectatorship. Whereas other spectator theories have been grounded in psychoanalysis, gender theory or more complicated sociological theories, Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti collected data through a simple questionnaire, and they asked '236 people (160 women) recruited from three different commercial cinemas in Barcelona (Spain) where *La vie d'Adèle* was shown in November 2013…[and] the mean age of the participants was 36.95 years' (Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti 2016, 561). In the conclusion they note—'our study provides data to confirm that considering scenes beautiful and romantic is important for a positive evaluation of lesbian sex scenes and movies' and that 'the perceived realism in the representation of sex (plausibility and being life like) is a critical aspect of how spectators respond to 'explicit' lesbian sex (Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti 2016, 574-575). While their focus is lesbian sex and not male gay sex, I want to elaborate on the point that 'the perceived realism in the representation of sex (plausibility and being life like) is a critical aspect of how spectators respond to 'explicit' lesbian sex,' but this time relate it to *Stranger by the Lake*. While Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti's study is centred on lesbian sex acts and gender in mainstream cinema, the crux of their survey is to discover *who* enjoys these sex acts on-screen, and what (some) people think of them. While any study of this kind is tied to issues of subjectivity and interpretation, it interestingly reveals that *style* is a key factor to how spectators react to (some) sexual images, as 'realism' is key to their enjoyment or disavowal of the acts. If spectators tend to find that 'perceived realism' is a critical aspect to sex on-screen, then the stylistic presentation of such acts is imperative and will, arguably, command their reaction. The explicit and open nature of the cum shot, anal sex and masturbation in *Stranger by the Lake* is presented as somewhat 'realistic' (also simply due to

the fact that these scenes tend to linger longer than most), and becomes, as Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti state, a 'critical aspect of how spectators respond' (Soto-Sanfiel and Ibiti 2016, 575). The squirming, the awkwardness and the confusion felt from the delegates at the conference, for example, is indicative of *Stranger by the Lake*'s unique place as a theatrically-released film that challenges and surprises spectators by adopting pornonormative elements and a realistic style. The conditions under which a film like *Stranger by the Lake* is viewed is also important, and I have come to the end of the chapter and therefore I do not have enough space to delineate an argument about new media technology and viewing habits in relation to sex on-screen (a full study on this would be very thought-provoking). However, if people were to publically view *Stranger by the Lake* (for example, in a cinema or at a festival) then there would be no doubt that some spectators would find *Stranger by the Lake* confrontational and unique in its ability to rile the psyche through the presence of pornographic acts within a 'cinematic' film. The film also has the ability of depicting a gay fictional world that is riddled with contradiction, danger and eroticism, as well as playing with and queering conventions typical to either mainstream cinema or pornography. It is *Stranger by the Lake*'s liminality, its queerness and its provocative nature that allows it to endure as one of the most important, celebrated and nuanced gay films of this century so far.

[i.] A term and concept which in itself would now be even more contested, as 'queer' can be used in conjunction with many identities (for example, Kirsten Stewart identifies as not 'gay,' but 'queer' instead).

[ii.] Or to use Ben Walters words, they 'show the gay experience in all its complexity' (2012).

[iii.] An argument could be presented that aligns Neo-Queer filmmaking practises with documentary and documentary strategies. However, even though the films appear to strive for a realistic or naturalistic effect, the filmmakers do not simply follow the characters in a cinema vérité style, instead the cinematography, lighting and mise en scène are still carefully constructed and crafted.

[iv.] The 'PACS legislation' was introduced in France in 1999, and allowed queers to enter a 'civil partnership.'

[v.] This space and place is also reminiscent of liberating 'gay havens' like Fire Island in the 1970s (Leland 2014), and provides a nostalgic nod to LGBTQ+ spaces from the past.

[vi.] The detective is another presence that has 'penetrated' the homotopia.

[vii.] While I claim that porn typically offers a 'maximum view,' soft-core porn is still 'porn,' and rarely displays penetration or 'real sex.' Therefore, as short hand, by 'porn' I mean 'hard-core porn.' For more on this debate, see Andrews (2007) 'What Soft-core Can Do for Porn Studies' or Barker (2013), 'On Not Being Porn: Intimacy and the Sexually Explicit Art Film.'

[viii.] Of course, even when porn is 'to the max,' it can still be sensual, erotic and of course stimulating, instead of rough or violent.

[ix.] The rom-com, for instance, typically utilises this strategy; in *27 Dresses* (dir. Anne Fletcher, 2008) there is a passionate kiss in a car before a fade to black. This, quite conservatively, leaves the rest for the spectator's imagination.

[x.] *American Pie* (dir. Weitz Brothers, 1999) or *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (dir. Judd Apatow, 2005) are good examples.

[xi.] This argument can be made for other films too such as *Shortbus* and *Theo & Hugo*.

[xii.] There is a shot of Michel fingering Franck's anus, but this only lasts a couple of seconds and the act is not fully shown.

[xiii.] This viewer identification is still subjective, and this is also the issue with labelling sexual representations as anything from 'romantic' to 'hard-core' because viewers are all different and may find some depictions 'offensive,' some 'acceptable' and others too 'explicit.'

[xiv.] Other examples include *Baise-Moi* (dirs. Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, 2000) or *9 Songs* (dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2004).