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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

FANTASY, SETTING, NARRATIVE SPACE IN THE QUEER CINEMA OF THE USA (1990s–2010s)

PH. D. DISSERTATION

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May, 2016

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IN
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(1990s–2010s)

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"I, Ahmet Serdar Küçük, confirm that the work presented in this dissertation is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the dissertation."

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ABSTRACT

FANTASY, SETTING, NARRATIVE SPACE IN THE QUEER CINEMA OF THE USA (1990s–2010s)

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Doctor of Philosophy in American Culture and Literature

Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Eser Selen

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"Fantasy, Setting, Narrative Space in the Queer Cinema of the USA (1990s–2010s)" investigates the origins and functioning of particular choices of setting, fantasy elements, and non-linear narrative structures in the queer cinema of the United States from the 1990s to 2010s. The study aims to identify a comprehensive counter-culture utopianism in queer cinema with selected examples from American and, to a lesser degree, world cinema.

What is common in the selected films is the notion of escape, and the creation and utilization of alternative spaces in which queer-identified characters can take refuge. In the context of the study, escape and alternative spaces are associated with revolutionary practices in light of arguments that are derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, José Muñoz and, to some extent, Marc Augé.

The selection of films, which also includes some queer classics such as *The Living End*, *The Watermelon Woman*, and *Shortbus*, are assessed through a combination of formalist and contextualist approaches. The formal analyses of the films concentrate on various queer film settings ranging from the road and the stage to the prison and the concentration camp as well as several counter-narrative strategies such as parody, pastiche, and narrative intransitivity, along with particular uses of mise-en-scène, camera movements, sounds, editing choices, characterization, and genre. Special attention is given to cultural and historical context, and the representation of sexuality, race, gender, and class is taken into consideration.

The study reveals the special ways in which queer films give a critique of heteronormativity, racism, class inequality, commodity culture, and nuclear family as well as mainstream film production, which denies or suppresses the queer existence.

Keywords: queer, cinema, fantasy, narrative, setting, space

ÖZET

ABD QUEER SİNEMASINDA FANTEZİ, MEKÂN, UZAM
(1990'LI YILLARDAN 2010'LARA)

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"ABD Queer Sinemasında Fantezi, Mekân, Uzam (1990'lı yıllardan 2010'lara)" Birleşik Devletler queer sinemasındaki belli başlı mekân tercihlerinin, fantezi öğelerinin, ve doğrusal olmayan anlatı biçimlerinin kaynağını ve işlevini araştırır. Bu çalışmayla Amerikan sinemasından ve bir nebze de dünya sinemasından seçilmiş örneklerle queer sinemasında var olan geniş kapsamlı bir karşı-kültür ütopyacılığının tespiti hedeflenmektedir.

Seçilen filmlerdeki ortak nokta kaçış olgusu ve queer kimlikli karakterlerin sığınabileceği alternatif alanların yaratılışı ile bu alanların kullanım biçimleridir. Bu bağlamda kaçış ve alternatif yaşam alanları, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, José Muñoz ve kısmen Marc Augé'nin çalışmalarındaki düşüncelerin odağında yer alan devrimsel pratiklerle ilişkilendirilir.

The Living End, *The Watermelon Woman* ve *Shortbus* gibi queer klasiklerini de kapsayan film seçkisi, biçimci ve bağlamcı yöntemlerle incelenir. Filmlerin biçimsel tahlilleri yol ve sahneden, hapishane ve toplama kampına uzanan çeşitli queer film mekânları ile parodi, pastiş ve anlatısal geçişsizlik gibi anlatı karşıtı stratejilere ve dahası belli başlı mizansen kullanımlarına, kamera hareketlerine, seslere, düzenleme tercihlerine, karakterizasyona ve türe odaklanır. Öte yandan, kültürel ve tarihsel bağlama önem verilir; cinsellik, ırk, toplumsal cinsiyet ve sınıf temsilleri dikkate alınır.

Bu çalışma, queer filmlerin heteronormativiteye, ırkçılığa, sınıf eşitsizliğine, metâ kültürüne, çekirdek aileye ve de queer varoluşu reddeden ya da baskılayan ana akım film üretimine yönelttiği eleştiriyi ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: queer, sinema, fantezi, anlatı, mekân, uzam

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting and Fantasy in Queer Cinema

Queer filmmakers,[1] or the makers of queer films (independent or mainstream) love to imagine alternative spaces, more specifically real, natural, or fantastic environments where the queer experiences, unbound from the codes and conducts of an oppressive civilization, could be realized and maintained. Both in earlier examples of queer cinema such as *Teorema* (Italy, 1968), *I Love You, I don't* ([*Je T'aime, Moi Non Plus*], France, 1975), and in later films such as *My Own Private Idaho* (US, 1991), *The Living End* (US, 1992), *Like Grains of Sand* ([*Nagisa no Shindobaddo*], Japan, 1995), *Desert Hearts* (US, 1985), *Heavenly Creatures* (New Zealand, 1994), *Brokeback Mountain* (US, 2005), subjugated or frustrated queer protagonists, sometimes on the verge of death from AIDS-related illnesses, often find shelter outside a heteronormative culture. In this sense, queer film characters are akin to the Romantic heroes of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century literature such as Lord Byron's

[1] "Queer," in this context, refers to individuals with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, gender-queer, pansexual, or asexual orientation. At minor points, however, it may solely denote practices that do not fit into a "procreative monogamy" (Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 3). And "queer cinema" refers to the films that present apparently queer main characters and their experiences in a non-stereotypical way.

guilt-ridden and moody outcasts, Childe Harold and Corsair, or Caspar David Friedrich's dreamy wanderer (Figure 1.1).

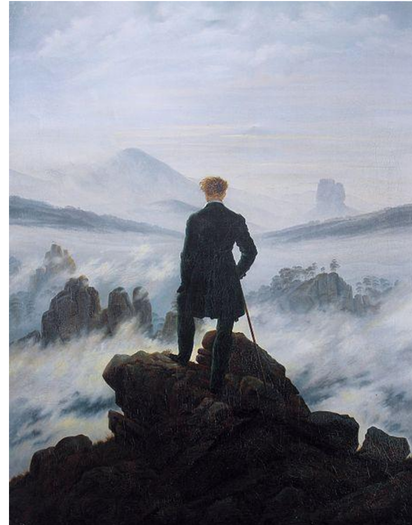

Figure 1.1 Photographic reproduction. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (*Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*) by Caspar David Friedrich, 1818, oil on canvas, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Germany. Photo © Cybershot800i.

Marilyn Butler notes that, "the 'Romantic' personality acts out in life his neurotic gloom; he is frustrated and alienated from society; in his art he proposes an alternative world as a surrogate" (1981: 126). In a similar fashion, a certain strain of queer cinema, which either utilizes a queer version of journey-to-the-wilderness theme or simply contains romantic or escapist elements within its narrative, often presents extreme long shots of harsh, unwelcoming urban settings, which are juxtaposed with natural landscapes, unpopulated barren fields, deserted highways, disposal sites, or dilapidated constructions. While terrestrial imagery of land and soil dominates the scenes in these films, the climaxes are more often than not reached through love making on the open ground (Fig. 1.2). In films such as *I Love You, I Don't*

(1976), *Taxi to the Toilet* ([*Taxi zum Klo*] West Germany, 1980), *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (Italy, 1975), anything that does not respect borders, positions, and rules, that is, things that stand in-between *á la* Kristeva (1982: 4) — the ambiguous, the unhealthy, dirt, litter, all sorts of corporeal defilement and bodily wastes as well as the body and anal intercourse — are unflinchingly exhibited. Thus anything that is rejected or abjected to protect the identity, the system, and the order for the foundation of culture is revived and celebrated. In HIV themed films such as *Buddies* (1985), *As Is* (1986), *A Death in the Family* (1986), *Danny* (1987) (Waugh 2000: 222–8), and *The Living End* (1992) death and non-procreative sexuality blithely dissolve in the same pot.

Apart from the reactionary tone for being excluded, what lies beneath these tendencies might be the very same thing found in the late eighteenth century art, in Butler's words, "a search for purity that often takes the form of a journey into the remote" (1981: 16). Butler explains that the settings of poems, plays, paintings and even novels in the late eighteenth century "evoked a condition of society that was primitive and pre-social. […] Heroes from simpler worlds visited civilization for the purpose of making adverse comparisons" (ibid.). At a first glance, such a motive might seem anti-essentialist: through their search for purity, the queer characters escape from culture to evade identities and social, cultural, and economic constraints that are imposed upon them. Yet there is a crucial distinction here. A search for purity suggests the imagined possibility of a "pure essence." But is it really possible to strip off the entire masquerade one wears on him or her? Is it possible to get rid of the garments of sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and other identity categories? The final scene of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (US, 2001) is a stunning portrayal of the impossibility of being in society while at the same time

being one's own "pure" self. The protagonist, Hedwig, is seen from behind in a deep focus, stripped off her drag costume, completely naked. As she staggers through a dark, empty alley at night towards a busy street in the upper portion of the frame, the camera gradually moves up to an overpowering high-angle shot until the helpless figure wanes and vanishes into the darkness, and the screen fades to black.

Hedwig's exposure to American culture, commodities, and rock & roll when he was still a boy in East Berlin at first offers a promise of freedom. Having been drawn to the world of images, he unwillingly accepts to undergo vaginoplasty with his mother's encouragement, and marry his straight lover, who is an American soldier, to flee his dismal home and his divided and oppressive native country. However, the surgery goes wrong leaving her genital botched. Her husband leaves her in a trailer park in Kansas for another boy. Having no money and nothing to do she forms a rock band and sings in small bars. Although Hedwig's fabulous drag artistry goes unrecognized and often berated, the stage becomes a site of breakthrough where she can express her alienation, anger, and frustration with her cultural and physical in-betweenness. Yet the betrayal of her protégé, Tommy Gnosis, who steals her songs and becomes a rock icon, hits the final blow on Hedwig's endless search for love, connection, and selfhood. The film blends genres as diverse as musical, melodrama, fantasy, and biopic. Throughout the film Hedwig's soul-searching is portrayed through blistering stage performances, fantasy scenes, time shifts, and animation sequences, which retell Aristophanes' story of creation in Plato's *Symposium*.

Although there are also more positive endings, this sort of pessimism haunts many of the films made in different time periods and different countries. The love and passion are terminated in the end with the intrusion of an unbridgeable gap between the characters like the symbolic image of an unfinished suspension bridge in

Amphetamine (Hong Kong, 2010), which stands for the distance between the two lovers who belong to different classes. Daniel, an educated and successful white-collar, cannot sustain his contact with Kafka, a disoriented drug-addict who has grown up in poverty with a fugitive father who commits suicide, a drug dealer brother, and a mother with mental illness. Kafka cannot come to terms with his homosexuality, and cannot overcome his drug addiction and traumatic past either. Like the characters of many queer films who die, murdered, split up, etc., the two men can be together only in idyllic scenes, and death, which is symbolized in the film in a fantasy scene in which they unite under water following Kafka's suicide. *Amphetamine* also facilitates a special use of setting that associates Daniel with the industrial cityscape, and Kafka with natural landscapes as well as the water motif. The beach scene is perhaps the only exception where the couple truly but temporarily unites under the influence of LSD. As will be detailed in Chapter II, most queer films employ a similar use of setting to assign meaning and function to particular places.

Various kinds of setting provide a temporary shelter or breakthrough from homophobia and heteronormativity, which are sometimes aligned with classism and racism. The examples include, the desert in *Desert Hearts* (US, 1995) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Australia, 1994), the woods in *Stranger by the Lake* (France, 2013), the stage in *Paris is Burning* (US, 1990), the bachelor's home in *Weekend* (UK, 2011), the countryside in *Three Dancing Slaves* (France, 2004), the rooming house in *Brother to Brother* (US, 2004), the underground club in *Looking for Langston* (UK, 1989) and *Shortbus* (US, 2006), the magic hole in *Being John Malkovich* (US, 1999), or the road in *The Living End*, *My Own Private Idaho*, and *Butterfly Kiss* (UK, 1994).

Settings like these become a safe zone for the representation of queer experiences and desires, and they are often contrasted with spaces of sexual repression such as schools, public spaces, and domestic space together with various other sites of segregation that contain race, gender, or class inequalities.

Figure 1.2 Screenshots. (From left to right, top row first) *The Living End*. © 1992 Strand Releasing / Desperate Pictures Ltd. *The Trip*. © 2002 Falcon Lair Films. *The Angelic Conversation*. © 1985 Derek Jarman / BFI. *Teorema*. © 1968 Aetos Produzioni Cinematografiche / Euro International Film. *Je t'aime moi non plus*. © 1975 President Films. *Sebastiane*. © 1976 Disctac Ltd. *Dyketactics*. © 1974 Barbara Hammer. *Cloudburst*. © 2011 Stubborn Pictures. *Butterfly Kiss*. © 1994 Dan Films Ltd. *Tomboy*. © 2011 Hold-Up Films / Lilies Films / Arte France Cinéma.

1.1.1. The Uses of "Fantasy"

Many queer films create momentary fissures in hegemonic spaces also through fantasy elements. In the context of the study, fantasy is to be understood in three senses, which sometimes intersect in the same film.

In the first sense, fantasy refers to the fantasy genre in literature and cinema, the popular examples of which include *Alice in Wonderland*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* series. Three films in the study — *Tropical Malady* (Thailand, 2004), *Mulholland Dr.* (US, 2001), and *Being John Malkovich* (US, 1999) — could be regarded as members of this genre. In this regard, E. M. Forster's definition of fantasy is relevant:

> It implies the supernatural, but need not express it. […] [W]e could make a list of the devices which writers of a fantastic turn have used—such as the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, monkey, monster, midget, witch into ordinary life; or the introduction of ordinary men into no man's land, the future, the past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; or divings into and dividings of personality; or finally the device of parody or adaptation. (Forster 1985 [1927]: 112).

In the second sense, fantasy is used for extra-diegetic scenes or plot twists that withdraw from narrative linearity and realism: for instance, the surreal animation sequences in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *Shortbus* (US, 2006), and *Spork* (US, 2010), the musical interludes in *Were the World Mine* (US, 2008) and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* like those in the Indian *masala* movies, the time-warps and quasi sci-fi imagery in *Boys Don't Cry* (US, 1999), and the supernatural events or the elements of myth, magic, or mystery in *Shortbus*, *Amphetamine*, *Mulholland Dr.*, *Tropical Malady*, *Wild Tigers I Have Known* (US, 2006), and *Were the World Mine*.

In the third sense, fantasy implies a spatial-temporal displacement in the narrative such as the daydreaming in *Looking for Langston*, *Un Chant d'Amour* (France, 1950), *Poison* (US, 1990), *Swoon* (US, 1992), and *Bent* (UK, 1997), the hallucinations in *High Art* (US, 1998), the recollections in *Appropriate Behavior* (US, 2014) and *Brother to Brother* (US, 2004), or the momentary fusions of the past and the present in *Brother to Brother* and *Tropical Malady*.

The term "fantasy elements" will indiscriminately refer to these three senses throughout the study. The film discussions in this study will show that all these instances of fantasy provide an imaginary and temporary escape from some unpleasant facts in the queer film characters' fictional lives. In each example, these facts include heteronormativity and homophobia. In several cases they also include racism, gender or class inequality, commodity culture, nuclear family, isolation, longing, trauma, death, oppression, self-doubt, or a lack of intimacy in social relations.

1.2. Non-narrative Elements in Queer Cinema

Other than settings and fantasy elements, many queer films create ambivalent narrative spaces to open up a channel of expression for queer-identified individuals. This sort of films challenge the conventional forms of mainstream cinema along with its limited representations, which hinder sexual diversity, through various counter-narrative strategies. The selection of screenshots in Figure 1.3, for instance, presents variations of one of the most common strategies, the disruption of time and linearity in the narrative. *My Own Private Idaho* conveys love-making scenes as *tableaux vivant*s instead of live performances. The characters pose to the camera and give mo-

tionless slices of the action as if they are resisting to the twenty-four frames per second movement of the film strip. The same style is also employed in a scene of *Looking for Langston* in which a group of gay African-American men in suits pose to the camera before they start dancing. Similarly, in *Tongues Untied* (US, 1989) casual images of gay African-American men socializing, performing, or making love are presented in slow motion with a slow heartbeat effect as if the time is suspended. And Derek Jarman, a renowned British filmmaker, carries this style to its limits by making *The Angelic Conversation* (UK, 1985) entirely in ethereal slow-motion footages accompanied by Shakespeare's love sonnets, psychedelic sounds, and intervals of silence.

Figure 1.3 Screenshots. (From left to right) *My Own Private Idaho.* © 1991 New Line Cinema. *Looking for Langston.* © 1989 Sankofa Film & Video / British Film Institute. *Tongues Untied.* © 1989 Marlon Riggs. *The Angelic Conversation*. © 1985 Derek Jarman / BFI.

It is significant to understand that the core motive behind such a style and many other variations on narrative space in queer-themed films is first and foremost to give visibility to queer identities, queer desires, and queer experiences. Due to restricting legislations, censorships, industrial and moral standards, homosexuality have been banned from the silver screen for a long time at least until the revision and eventual scrapping of the Hollywood Production Code in 1968 (Benshoff & Griffin 2004: 9). As Michele Aaron writes, "[w]hether because of the production code, or

the normative thrust of popular narratives, screen homosexuality frequently existed in the twilight between secrecy and reprimand" (Aaron 2004[a]: 188). Aaron adds:

> Mainstream cinema, whether in the form of *Rebecca* [Hitchcock, 1940], *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948), *Top Gun* (Tony Scott [1986]) or *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), has always depended upon a whole range of disavowing techniques to implicate yet contain any homosexual possibility, demanding its denial yet exploiting its appeal. (Ibid.).

Of course, queer spectatorship has developed resistance tactics and various creative viewing strategies thanks to a "gay sensibility" (Drukman 1995: 87), or "gay gaze" (ibid.), which allows many viewers to uncover the latent queer content in heterocentric narratives, and "detect 'reality' about sexual pleasures even when [they are] obfuscated by a smoke-screen of 'appearance'" (ibid.). Still, mainstream cinema has for long either denied the existence of homosexuality or tried to debase it with stereotypes "such as the sissy, the sad young man, the gay psychopath, the seductive androgyne, the unnatural woman, or the lesbian vampire" (Smelik 1998: 136). In this respect, queer filmmaking could be conceived as an invasion of a restricted terrain. And in the course of this incursion, a provoking visibility and avowal are followed by various other forms of violation: cinematic and sexual excess, abject, camp, anti-realism, genre crossing, parody, pastiche, narrative intransitivity, and historical revisionism.

Looking for Langston embodies several of these strategies at once, and it is also a good model for many queer films' passionate engagement with historical memory and narrative time, which will be explored in depth in Chapter III. Although *Looking for Langston* is meant to be a memorial of the gay African-American poet Langston Hughes, it also pays tribute to a whole generation of gay poets, writers, and artists of the Harlem Renaissance, a sparkling era of artistic and cultural production that flour-

ished in Harlem in the 1920s with a corresponding political upsurge (Huggins 2007 [1971]: xvi). The works and photographs of the artists that were active at the time including James Baldwin, Countee Cullen, Bruce Nugent, Alain LeRoy Locke, and Wallace Thurman, are shown to the camera throughout the film (Figure 1.4). Through a blending of poetry and prose of these artists, a fictional sub-text, jazz score, abstract fantasy sequences, archival footages and photographs, the film eventually turns into a celebration of gay African-American cultural heritage. Thus, it gives voice to a downplayed aspect of history.

Figure 1.4 Screenshot. A young African-American man wearing an angel costume in a cemetery shows Langston Hughes' poster to the camera. *Looking For Langston.* © 1989 Sankofa Film & Video / British Film Institute.

No doubt that such a strong will to reclaim and represent an underrepresented identity inevitably shape the dramatization and visual organization. For this reason, queer films do not readily dismiss classical forms of cinematic identification; they rather employ the "gaze" for their own means, which often becomes a big "turnoff" for straight audiences who are made to identify with on-screen homosexuality. An interesting example of this instance could be observed in a fantasy sequence of *Look-*

ing for Langston in which the body of an African-American man is fetishized exclusively for a male African-American onlooker. The fantasy is preceded by a club scene that is a reenactment of the 1920s' speakeasies (illegal nightclubs that operated in the Prohibition era) similar to the famous whites-only Cotton Club in Harlem whose top entertainers were African-American figures who deeply shaped the popular culture in the US. The major difference in the film is that the middle or upper-class attendants of the club are depicted as gay and predominantly African-American.

In the club scene, Langston and a "Beauty" make eyes at each other until they are interrupted by the latter's jealous white lover who makes his presence bitterly felt, first by hitting a bottle of wine on the table, and then laughing hysterically. In the following scenes Langston dreams about meeting Beauty in a field. While he is still carrying his bourgeois costume, Beauty is naked and the camera gets close-ups of his body while the voiceover reads out a passage from "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" (1926), a modernist short story about love, art, and poverty written by the openly gay Harlem Renaissance artist Richard Bruce Nugent:

> [H]e was in a field...a field of blue smoke and black poppies and red calla lilies...he was searching... [...] and saw two strong legs...dancer's legs...the contours pleased him… […] his hair curly and black and all tousled...and it was Beauty... (Nugent 1926 quoted in *Looking for Langston*).

In Nugent's original story a narrator named Alex, who becomes Langston in the fantasy sequence, dreams about a white man with strong white legs and a Grecian nose, and also an attractive African-American woman named Melva. In the film, however, Beauty's whiteness is omitted and he is represented as an African-American, and the woman character is not included at all. As a result of an undergirding identity poli-

tics, heterosexual and white elements are erased from the fantasy during the shot/ reverse shot sequence.

Looking for Langston is one of the examples that unite fantasy scenes, alternative settings, and a non-linear narrative structure. On the one hand, as will be detailed in Chapter II, many queer dramas employ fantasy scenes (e.g., daydreaming) and settings of escape (e.g., the home or the woods) within a more conventional narrative structure. On the other hand, as will be discussed in Chapter III, queer films that are closer to the art-house such as *Tongues Untied* and *Edward II* tend to be more experimental; they invest more in alternative narrative structures than in alternative settings and fantasy elements. Finally, the case studies that are presented in Chapter IV, namely, *The Watermelon Woman*, *Brother to Brother*, *Shortbus*, and *Appropriate Behavior* will offer a mixture of these different tendencies.

1.2.1. The Uses of "Narrative Space"

"Narrative space" refers to Stephen Heath's original usage in his influential article titled "Narrative Space" (1976). It is the time-place unity that is narratively constructed in a film through a commercial filmmaking process, which is contingent on certain ideologies such as idealism, free market economy, and (although Heath does not discuss) sexism, racism and heteronormativity. "Queer narrative spaces," in this study, connotes a distortion or "re-appropriation" of a conventional narrative space.

In queer cinema such distortion and reappropriation can be found in abundance. For example, the elements of excess such as the irrelevant objects and performances in *Edward II* (UK, 1991), the manipulation of documentary conventions

and genre-crossing in *Tongues Untied* and *The Watermelon Woman* (US, 1996), the disjunctions in the narratives of *The Living End*, *Frisk* (US, 1995), *Mulholland Dr.* and *Tropical Malady*, the revisionism in *Edward II*, *The Hours and Times* (UK, 1991), *The Watermelon Woman*, *Paris Was a Woman* (UK, 1995), *Brother to Brother*, and *Swoon*, the parody and pastiche in several of these films, the intercutting archival photographs and footages in *Looking for Langston* and *The Watermelon Woman*, the *tableaux vivants* or slow motion footages in *My Own Private Idaho*, *Looking for Langston*, *Tongues Untied*, *The Angelic Conversation*, and *Swoon*, as well as other forms of anti-illusionism, which aspire to avant-garde filmmaking such as the anti-realistic acting style in *Swoon*, *The Living End*, and *Frisk* along with several other foregrounding[2] strategies, and more importantly the prioritization of image over action for the sake of giving visibility to queer identities, experiences, and desires in each film that is mentioned in this paragraph. All of these features are digressions from what Stephen Heath defines as narrative space.

Unlike its highly subjective and popular usage today, Heath has used "narrative space" as a descriptive term for certain forms of visual organization of what is in front of the camera in conventional or narrative cinema. In his lexicon, narrative space corresponds to the illusional on-screen reality produced with editing and *mise-en-scène* whose construction takes its roots from the Renaissance aesthetics. Heath explains that "[i]n the fifteenth century, the human societies of Western Europe organized […] a space completely different from that of the preceding generations; with their technical superiority, they progressively imposed that space over the planet" (Pierre Francastel quoted in Heath 1986 [1976]: 387). And this space, which has been constructed and organized in accordance with the actions and dreams of a rapid-

[2] Foregrounding means "[m]aking the mechanics of the film/text visible and explicit" (Wollen 1986: 122).

ly transforming society, is most profoundly reflected in Renaissance art. Heath argues that since Renaissance the dominant motive in art has been to provide a practical representation of the world by establishing various conventions and methods such as a prioritization of scenography ("space set out as spectacle for the eye of a spectator" [ibid.]), a center-oriented perspective in subservience to a narrative, and the employment of precise geometry and optics. This "immediate translation of reality" (ibid.), however, is meant to be "in all its hoped-for clarity" (ibid.) more powerful than any naturally given reality.

The Renaissance perspective, or more specifically the *Quattrocento* system as Heath puts it (ibid.: 385), has been so effective that overtime visual representation has more intensely than before come to be seen by masses as a reality in itself. Cinema, which is based on the same "founding ideology of vision as truth" (ibid.: 397), has followed the principles of Renaissance painting by using the action of human figures, or narrativization in general, as a unifying device; in other words, a perfected narrative continuity has replaced the perfected vision of a meticulously composed painting. In order to achieve the same organic unity and centered frame, however, cinema has had to get around the problem of mobility of the moving images "that could threaten the clarity of vision in a constant renewal of perspective" (ibid.: 392). For Heath as for many of his predecessors, narrative film has overcome this problem with the use of various techniques such as eye line matching, field/reverse field, or the 180-degree rule (ibid.: 395–6) — all of which aim to produce an impression of a coherent and ostensibly real space with a feeling of continuity. By means of a "continuity editing," which provides a smooth transition between fragmented shots, narrative film is able to maintain "a sense of uninterrupted and continuous narrative action within each scene" so as to create an "illusion of reality for the spectator" (Bland-

ford, Grant, Hillier 2001: 56). Editing in narrative cinema is so powerful that cutting up and joining different shots even create a superior unity that binds the spectator to the space represented in the film (Heath 1986 [1976]: 394). Conversely, Heath tells, transgressive techniques such as autonomous camera movement ("accompanying, leaving, rejoining [the character], fixing for itself — in its own time" [ibid.: 410]) can expose the mechanism that creates a spatial unity and continuity in a film as in the case of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's film, *Penthesilea* (UK, 1974) (ibid.). Another transgressive technique that Heath gives as an example is the inclusion of what he and Nöel Burch call "off-screen space" (ibid.: 398) (the spaces that do not have any value within the narrative) through, for instance, a 360-degree rotating camera as in the films by the Japanese filmmaker Yasujirô Ozu (ibid.).

Similar arguments have been voiced in slightly different ways by one of Heath's contemporaries, Burch, in his "Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach" (1986 [1979]). Burch argues that mainstream cinema, or in his own words the "Institutional Mode," has been developed with successive reductions of some major traits of earlier cinema out of a need to conform to "the norms of the bourgeois novel, painting, and the theater and for the recruitment of an audience which would include various strata of the bourgeoisie" (Burch 1986 [1979]: 485). According to him, certain peculiarities that mark primitive cinema's "otherness," for instance, camera's fixity and frontality, the "decentered" viewpoint, the actors' perpendicular movement in the picture plane, the inclusion of margins as a place of action, the use of medium-long shot, the lack of color and sound, the disjunction between shots which culminates in autonomous *tableaux*, the intertitles, and the flickering of the image, as in the films by Auguste and Louis Lumière, Georges Méliès, and Ferdinand Zecca, altogether constitute a distancing, anti-illusionary effect, and a feel-

ing of *exteriority* that Burch calls a "primitive stare" (ibid.: 504). Completely different from Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" (1986 [1975]) — the empowering look of the male film characters that objectify and fetishize the female characters, and which forces the spectator to unconsciously identify and collaborate with the patriarchal ideology — the primitive stare prevents spectator identification in a way antithetical to a bourgeois mode of representation. Just as Heath, Burch thinks that this feature survives today only in contemporary avant-garde films such as Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (US, 1966) and Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (France, 1976), whose spectators are "obliged to reflect on what is seen rather than merely experience it" (Burch: 504), which in turn prevents these films from being a consumable, throw-away product.

The stills from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1919) and *Gone with the Wind* (US, 1939) in Figure 1.5 illustrate Burch's differentiation between what he calls the Primitive Mode and the Institutional Mode by comparing two frames from two different films. Both of the frames render deep space, albeit in a very different way. On the left, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which Burch mentions as an example of the Primitive Mode (Burch 495–6), uses a stationary camera; the point of view is decentered in relation to the actor's perpendicular movement; the set design aspires to German expressionism; and there is no sound or color. In contrast, *Gone with the Wind* is highly concerned with verisimilitude, dramatic effect, and identification. The scene on the right is shot with a crane, which shifts from a close-up to a long shot. *Mise-en-scène* and music are designed to mark a point of rebirth and perseverance for the desperate character.

Figure 1.5 (Left) Film still. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.* © 1919 7e Art / Decla-Bioscop. (Right) Screenshot. *Gone with the Wind.* © 1939 Selznick International Pictures / MGM.

But why should filmmakers bother themselves with such alienation tactics to discard continuity and identification? What problems do these film scholars have with narrative cinema? Although it is not conspicuous in their texts, two fashionable trends of the time govern Heath and Burch's writing method; namely, psychoanalysis and Louis Althusser's apparatus theory (1993 [1970]). In essence, Heath and Burch regard cinema as one of the mediums that lets the hegemony transmit its ideology to masses in ways that hypnotize and stupefy the audience. And like several of their contemporaries, they actually advocate a political struggle that needs to be carried out in form and content with two major goals: to make the spectators alert to the ideology latent in representation, and to liberate cinema "from the weight of the 'illusory imitativeness' and 'representationality'" (Eisenstein 1974 [1923]: 79). In this respect, Chapter III will begin with a brief examination of two more key articles by Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean François Lyotard, who have greatly influenced later scholarship, to reach at a more solid explanation of narrative space, and to understand the kind of ideology with which it is allegedly pregnant. The most significant

conclusion that could be drawn from their writings is the mainstream cinema's aversion to diversity in form and content.

Just like *Looking for Langston*, the queer film examples that will be discussed in Chapter III including *Edward II*, *Tongues Untied*, and *Tropical Malady* do not adopt a conventional narrative space. These films come up with their own counter-narrative strategies that sometimes recall the ones proposed by Heath and Burch. However, their primary motive does not seem to be designing an ideal spectator. Rather, they dump the mainstream forms of filmmaking because such forms have never allowed enough room for the expression of non-normative identities, experiences, and desires. In this regard, queer narrative spaces are a manifestation of protest, and self-realization at once.

1.3. Aim: Fantasy, Setting, and Narrative Space as a Form of Resistance

There are two aspects that distinguish the films in this study. The first of these is the employment of spaces and fantasy elements by which queer-identified characters can survive despite the persistent threat of homophobia and heteronormativity. The discussions in Chapter II and the case studies show how daydreams, recollections, and extra-diegetic sequences as well as settings such as the road, the countryside, or the stage function as spaces of refuge. The other aspect is the creation of ambivalent narrative spaces or non-classical cinematic forms through which queer-identified characters can express themselves, affirm their identities, articulate their desires, ambitions, experiences, predicaments, or anger towards the oppression in real life. These unconventional film forms are also like a reaction to the disavowal of homosexuality

and the suppression of sexual diversity in mainstream cinema. Chapter III and the case studies propound the idea that such counter-narrative spaces are most evident in revisionism, non-linearity, and a defiant queer visibility as in the example of *Looking for Langston*.

In both of these aspects, an alternative time and space provide an imaginary escape from homophobia, heteronormativity, and other types of discrimination in real life and mainstream film production.

In an attempt to find a basis for the uses of fantasy and the choices of setting that have been laid out in Sections 1.1 and 1.1.1, the study draws on *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), the first part of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Although these two philosophers discuss neither fantasy *per se* nor cinematic spaces, they discuss escape as a form resistance, which constitutes the core of the notions of fantasy and setting in this study. Deleuze and Guattari portray an imaginary figure, which they call the schizophrenic personality. Their schizophrenic figure knows no boundaries and no rules, and is able to live outside repressive social and economic structures such as the nuclear family, capitalism, and race-gender-sexuality-class categories. Queer films in this study too target these social and economic structures. Hence, a parallel is drawn between Deleuze and Guattari's schizos and queer film characters who try to purge themselves of sexual uniformity, repression, and discrimination. The discussion of *Anti-Oedipus* is extended further to include José Esteban Muñoz's concept of critical utopianism, which seeks hope in a queer futurity rather than grieving a bleak present. In this interpretation, the notion of escape in queer cinema ceases to mean defeat and passivity.

The study also attempts to conceptualize queer narrative spaces in Chapter III, which have been proposed in Section 1.2.1, by loosely building upon the work of

Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean François Lyotard, Heath, Burch as well as Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985). Each of these theorists has sought ways that would provide an escape from the conventional narrative space of mainstream cinema, which they have regarded as inflected with the ideology of the dominant classes. Queer films that are discussed in Chapter III and IV create channels of escape from the boundaries of narrative space on their own terms. As part of a political stance against the heteronormative ideology inherent in mainstream cinema, their cinematic form is greatly shaped through revisionism, queer visibility, non-linearity, and several other strategies.

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari announce that escape "does not merely consist in withdrawing from the social, in living on the fringe" (2003 [1972]: 341): it entails a revolutionary potential. The escapee, after all, is the one "who can no longer bear 'all that': money, the stock market, the death forces, […] values, morals, homelands, religions, and private certitudes" (ibid.). Still in another passage the two philosophers assert that "sexuality and love do not live in the bedroom of Oedipus, they dream instead, of wide-open spaces, and cause strange flows to circulate that do not let themselves be stocked within an established order" (ibid.: 116).

Queer cinema abounds with spaces of all varieties to escape into — wide, narrow, open, closed, urban, non-urban, public, private, narrative, non-narrative, real, or fantastical. However, fantasy, setting, and narrative space in queer cinema are not merely forms of escapism. Queer cinema is a unique arena where "sexuality as desire" is capable to "animate a social critique of civilization" (ibid.: 332) — a civilization that is "sanctified as the sole agency capable of opposing the death desire" (ibid.). As will be demonstrated throughout the study, fantasy elements, settings, and narrative spaces in queer cinema replace not just reality; in fact they replace and

transgress fantasy itself, that is, the régime of repressions, segregations, and possessions. The films in this study are occupied with challenging the various extensions of this oppressive régime through their form and content.

1.4. Research Questions

"Fantasy, Setting, Narrative Space in the Queer Cinema of the USA (1990s–2010s)" aims to find answers to the following questions in Chapters II, III, and IV respectively: How are fantasy elements and settings used in queer cinema? What are the characteristics of narrative space and narrative time in queer cinema? And, how do fantasy elements, settings, and narrative spaces relate to and take shape in the queer cinema of the United States from the 1990s to 2010s?

1.5. Keywords

Other than the terms that have been explained earlier in the study, certain keywords such as "queer," "space," and "place," recur throughout the text. Succinct definitions of each term might be necessary.

1.5.1. Queer

In most cases throughout the study "queer" refers to people with non-heterosexual orientation such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, polysexual, gender-

queer, asexual, etc. Despite activist coalitions, neither "queer" nor any of these categories imply a homogenous mass. Individuals with non-heterosexual orientations have diverse experiences, and sometimes face multiple forms of oppression that are contingent on a plenty of factors including gender, race, ethnicity, class, physical ability, "desirability" (Johnson & Henderson 2005: 6), and cultural differences. At times there are even inter- and intra-group conflicts. Nevertheless, they are all subject to the same heteronormativity, which Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner define as "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent — that is, organized as a sexuality — but also privileged" (1998: 565, n.2). Berlant and Warner also add that some "forms of sex between men and women might not be heteronormative" (i.e., they may not be directed to a procreative monogamy) and that "[h]eteronormativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality" (ibid.).

There has been a plethora of discussions and debates surrounding these terms for decades, for which there is not enough space to summarize. However, at certain points of the study, especially in the discussions of *Paris is Burning*, *Boys Don't Cry*, and *Shortbus*, "queer" refers to a specific usage that came into prominence in the 1990s with the work of theorists such as Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis, Diana Fuss, and Michael Warner. These theorists associate queer with their anti-essentialist arguments and the concept of performativity.

Anti-essentialism refers to the attitude that rejects natural and unchanging ontological essences of sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and other identity categories in order to replace them with the idea of social constructivism, which regards these categories as "performances" rather than innate essences. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir's famous remark in *The Second Sex* (1949: 14), that "[o]ne is not born, but

rather becomes, woman" remains like a feminist motto of social constructivist critique of gender essentialism. And "performativity," whose origins could be traced back to Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1990 [1976]) as well as the work of sociologists such as Ken Plummer, John Gagnon, William Simon, and Mary McIntosh (Epstein 1994), could be considered as a reflection of that critical attitude onto the queer milieu. Performativity denotes the idea that acts and behavior, especially the ones related to gender and sexuality, are constitutive for the concept of identity; in other words, actions of a person are not the result of his/her essential self, but rather actions are used by the hegemonic discourse to categorize a person into a pre-made identity model. For example, for some queer theorists gender is not an effect of a sexual essence; on the contrary, it is first imposed on the individual as a normative mode of behavior, and then it is used to create an identity. Judith Butler calls this process "performativity of gender" in the sense that constantly repeated performances of gender finally produce a seemingly natural essence (Butler 1990). However, this mechanism is always hidden, and people live under the illusion that gender is the effect of an essence. The concept of performativity, however, is not limited to gender; it targets all layers of social categorization including racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual differentiations. Because of their rejection of identity politics, anti-essentialist theories have drawn serious criticism for being elitist, Euro-centric, and exclusive of women and queers that are non-white and/or economically disenfranchised (e.g., hooks 1990[a]; Cohen 1999; Ferguson 2005).

1.5.2. Space and Place

The uses of terms "space" and "place" rely on Michel de Certeau's succinct definition of space in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984):

> [S]*pace is a practiced place* [sic]. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs. (de Certeau 1984: 117).

The relevant practices in this study are, of course, queer practices that transform public, private, urban, or non-urban places into queer spaces, and also various filmmaking practices that transform classical film structures to queer narrative spaces.

1.6. Defining "Fantasy"

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "fantasy" and its Latin predecessor "phantasia" originate from the Greek word *φαίνειν* (phaínein), which literally means "to show." The senses of the word "fantasy" in modern English include (1a) "Mental apprehension of an object of perception"; (2) "A spectral apparition, phantom; an illusory appearance"; (3a) "Delusive imagination, hallucination; the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences"; (3b) "A day-dream arising from conscious or unconscious wishes or attitudes"; (4a) "Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present; [in early use] an exercise of poetic imagination being conventionally regarded as accompanied by belief in the reality of what is imagined"; (4c) "A product of im-

agination, fiction, figment"; and (4d) "An ingenious, tasteful, or fantastic invention or design."

The uses of fantasy that have been defined earlier in Section 1.2 conform to several of these definitions, especially the senses 2, 3a, 3b, and 4a. Other than these, the modern usage of fantasy also owes much to its central place in psychoanalysis. Theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Susan Isaacs, Jacques Lacan, Jean Laplanche, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, and Slavoj Žižek have struggled to identify the hidden origins and functioning of fantasy (or phantasy) in their major works. Their ideas are often recalled in discussions related to fantasy. Their arguments may at first seem generative and plausible for character analysis if a psychoanalytic approach was exercised in the following film discussions. However, they do not provide a satisfactory explanation for the filmmaker's motive behind designing fantasy elements and alternative spaces in queer cinema. For instance, it would be glib to conclude that fantasy elements in queer films are merely "protective structures, sublimations of the facts, embellishments of them, and at the same time serve for self-exoneration" (Freud 1950 [1892–1899]: 247). Or it would be inadequate to say that they are "the psychic representatives of libidinal and destructive instincts" (Isaacs 1948: 95). Similarly, Lacan's comparison of fantasy to a cinematic freeze-frame, "where an immobile image is often used to conceal the traumatic image that will come next" (Penot 2005: 553) in *Seminar, Book IV: Object Relations (1956-57)* (unpublished in English) becomes irrelevant when he associates trauma with "the perception of 'lack' in the maternal other, thus of castration[3]" (ibid.). Lacan argues that fantasy "is that by which the subject sustains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing in so

[3] According to Freud, "Oedipus complex," which he describes as "our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (1953 [1900]: 262), is repressed in early childhood due to a "castration complex" (or castration anxiety), the fear of retribution from the rival parent (Freud 1955 [1909]).

far as the very satisfaction of demand hides his object from him" (Lacan 2005 [1961]: 207). For him, fantasy functions to keep the subject busy chasing an *objet petit a* (little object a), or "the eternally lacking object" (Lacan 1998 [1973]: 180), which "serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking" (ibid.: 103). Following Lacan's path, in *The Plague of Fantasies,* Žižek writes that "the desire 'realized' (staged) in fantasy is not the subject's own, but the other's desire" (Žižek 2008 [1997]: 9). In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek explains:

> Fantasy appears, then, as an answer to '*Che vuoi?*' ["What do you want?" (Lacan 2005 [1960]: 238)] […] The usual definition of fantasy ('an imagined scenario representing the realization of desire') is therefore somewhat misleading, or at least ambiguous: in the fantasy-scene the desire is not fulfilled, 'satisfied', but constituted (given its objects, and so on) — *through fantasy, we learn 'how to desire'* [sic]. (Žižek 2008 [1989]: 132).

According to Žižek, the Lacanian *objet petit a*, is a "surplus [enjoyment] produced through renunciation [of a real enjoyment]" (ibid.: 89) as in the case of the "Fascist ideology [*sic*]": "the point is not the instrumental value of the sacrifice, it is the very form of sacrifice itself, 'the spirit of sacrifice'" (ibid.: 90). In contrast to these theorizations, fantasy elements and alternative spaces in queer cinema offer completely different forms of enjoyment.

To borrow from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's definition of "fancy," which is the archaic equivalent of fantasy in literary criticism, fantasy in queer cinema "is indeed no other than a mode of Memory [*sic*] emancipated from the order of time and space" but still "it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will" (Coleridge 1817: online). Once taken out of its original context and applied to queer cinema, this definition does not suggest an unconscious motive behind fan-

tasy. It does not imply a sublimation or transformation of a guilt-ridden desire, or an unwitting wish to return to the so-called “primal scenes”[4] (Freud 1950 [1892–1899]: 248), or a “satisfaction of wishes proceeding from deprivation and longing” (Freud 1959 [1908]: 159), or an expression of an innate aggression (Klein 1975 [1936]: 290), or a defensive structure designed to protect against the perception of a “lack,” or an imaginary construction whose function is to hide a “void,” a “nothing” — “that is, the lack in the ‘Other’ [*sic*]” (Žižek 2008 [1989]: 148). Through fantasy elements, alternative settings, and even narrative spaces, queer film characters often break away from an oppressive time and space but, as will be seen more clearly in the following film discussions, the memory and threat of a dystopia is always on the lurk for the purpose of, in Marilyn Butler’s words, “making adverse comparisons” (1981: 126).

By revising Laplanche and Pontalis’ conception of fantasy as the “*mise-en-scène* of desire,” which suggests that the goal of a fantasy “is not the object of desire, but its setting” (Laplanche & Pontalis 1968 [1964]: 17), one could argue that in queer cinema what is being evaded “is always present in the actual formation of the wish” (Laplanche & Pontalis 1988 [1967]: 318). Fantasy elements and alternative settings in queer cinema are like a glance at a utopia; and, they are a willful wish for social change. In this regard, the next section will refer to Deleuze, Guattari, and José Muñoz, to expand on the notion of fantasy and setting as an expression of both resistance and utopianism in queer cinema. The following section intends to propose an alternative form of fantasy one could trace in queer cinema, one that is independent from Freudian or Lacanian motives and their sexist-heteronormative perspective, and

[4] “Primal scenes” or “primal fantasies” refers to children’s fantasies “of the observation of sexual intercourse between the parents, of seduction [of an older family member], of castration, and others” [Freud 1957 (1915): 269]). Freud has thought that the primal fantasies are inherited by the human species as “phylogenetic” memories of actual events (incest, patricide) that took place in the primaeval times (Freud 1963 [1916–1917]: 371).

highly oppositional to repression. The next section will also provide the preliminary literature for some of the discussions related to nuclear family, inter-personal relations, capitalism, commodity spaces, and narrative cinema at certain points of the study. For instance, *Brother to Brother*, *Shortbus*, and *Appropriate Behavior* in the last chapter make an incidental critique of oedipal familialism and ego formation, which lie at the core of psychoanalysis.

1.7. Notes on Theory

Fantasy elements and alternative settings in queer cinema carry the potential of being critical about the prevalent social and economic structures, especially with their tendency to imagine spaces outside heteronormativity, racism, nuclear family, and commodity spaces. Such a tendency is a bit different from what José Esteban Muñoz calls "hope's methodology" in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009: 3–5). Building on Ernst Bloch's ideas in his *The Principle of Hope* (1995 [1959]), Muñoz argues for a form of utopianism that seeks a "radically democratic potentiality" (ibid.:7) in the quotidian including the mass-produced commodities. He exemplifies his point through a comparison of Andy Warhol's musings on Coca-Cola in *Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1977), in which the artist naively proposes that American commodities carry the potential of being shared by the rich and the poor alike, and Frank O'Hara's "Having a Coke with You," a poem that depicts two gay lovers sharing a bottle of Coke, which, for Muñoz, signifies "a vast lifeworld of queer relationality, an encrypted sociality, and a utopian potentiality" (ibid.: 6).

The recognition of such a utopian potentiality lets Muñoz regard an object that would normally represent an "alienated production and consumption," as "an opening and indeterminacy" in a supposedly dead commodity, or as the promising existence of a "utopia in the quotidian" (ibid.: 9). The theory employed in this study does not mean to deny such a potentiality one could find in commodity, pop art, or mass entertainment. Rather, the objective here is to shed light on an alternative critical utopianism in queer cinema, a utopianism that imagines spaces completely against and/or outside capitalism and its extensions. And like any other utopia it carries the potential of working toward social change by making a critique of the present (ibid.: 35).

Fantasy elements and settings in queer films that will be discussed in this study entail an escape from the "dominated spaces" (Lefebvre 1991 (1974): 39) of capitalism, sex-gender-race binaries, and other power hierarchies. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the queer protagonists break through the limits and frontiers by following "the lines of escape of desire" as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari say in *Anti-Oedipus* (2003 [1972]: 277) in relation to the nomadic nature of a schizophrenic personality. In this regard, it is astonishing to discover the similarity between the wandering queers of queer cinema and the "schizophrenic out for a walk," who, as Deleuze and Guattari announce as a part of their war against traditional psychoanalysis, is "a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch" (ibid.: 2). Because of their immunity to be oedipalized, their resistance to be a member of the oedipal triad or the most basic unit of the social structure, the nuclear family, the schizos, Deleuze and Guattari claim, are the ultimate enemies of psychoanalysis. "For we must not delude ourselves," the philosophers argue, "Freud doesn't like schizophrenics. He doesn't like their resistance to being oedipalized, and tends to

treat them more or less as animals" (ibid.: 23). Contrary to the psychoanalyst's expectations, and similar to the situation of queer film characters, the schizophrenic person "has his own system […] which does not coincide with the social code, or coincides with it only in order to parody it […] [H]e deliberately scrambles all the codes" (ibid.: 15).

Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of schizophrenia is better to be seen on a symbolic basis; they use it like a signifier of aberration, fluidity of subjectivity, and nature's resistance to uniformity. Still their point of view makes it possible to establish a link between the repression of non-normative sexualities (in mainstream cinema and in real life) and the medicalization of disconsonant behavior. The philosophers note that completely oblivious to their ability to live life with its whole intensity, the psychiatric practice conceives the schizos as "separated from the real and cut off from life," and reduces them to the "state of a body without organs that has become a dead thing" (ibid.: 19–20). Sharing an anecdote about Melanie Klein, who tries to "oedipalize" a child that seemingly resists to be part of a nuclear family, Deleuze and Guattari call the method of psychoanalytic practice a "sheer terrorism" (ibid.: 45):

> [T]he entire process of desiring-production is trampled underfoot and reduced to parental images, laid out step by step in accordance with supposed pre-oedipal stages, totalized in Oedipus. […] [E]verything [the child] touches [during play] is experienced as a representative of his parents. (Ibid.: 46–47).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, psychoanalysis does this to everyone by reducing them to the state of a neurotic, "a pitiful creature who eternally consumes daddy-and-mommy and nothing else whatsoever" (ibid.: 20). While the neurotic is trapped within the artificial territorialities of our society, the schizo, perhaps like the

queers in cinema, is capable of carrying himself/herself out of those territorialities. In other words, they continually wander about, "migrating here, there, and everywhere as best [they] can, [they] plunge further and further into the realm of deterritorialization, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the socius [the structured society]" (ibid.: 35).

Under the philosophers' employment of the figure of a schizophrenic lies a now-familiar critique of psychoanalysis, which has been voiced in feminisms and queer theories: while the entity called unconscious is full of incredibly productive and fragmentary flows of energy, psychoanalysis disregards them only to substitute the multiplicity of desire with a rigid structure of binaries, hierarchies and lacks. "Lack," Deleuze and Guattari write, "is created, planned, and organized in and through social production" (ibid.: 28):

> It is never primary; production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*[5]) [sic]. […] The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs (*manque*) amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied; and making the object dependent upon a real production that is supposedly exterior to desire (the demands of rationality), while at the same time the production of desire is categorized as fantasy and nothing but fantasy. (Ibid.).

At certain points, Deleuze and Guattari's arguments chime with those of Lacan and Žižek, particularly in terms of the inter-dependence of social reality and desire (ibid.). However, the emphasis on language and discourse is missing. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari reverse the hierarchy between the two entities. It is not the social or economic reality that produces desire and fantasy; on the contrary, "*social production is purely and simply desiring production itself under determinate condi-*

[5] "The French word *manque* may mean both lack and need in a psychological sense, as well as want or privation or scarcity in an economic sense." Translator's note in *Anti-Oedipus*, page 28.

tions" [sic] (ibid.: 29). Under those "determinate conditions," desire is arrested: it is "made to desire its own repression" (ibid.: 105) like an act of self-mutilation.

With its productive and liberatory nature denied, unconscious is turned into a classical theatre of representation based on myth and tragedy (ibid.: 296–321). Deleuze and Guattari claim that far from being a natural phenomenon, Oedipus is forcefully imposed on the subject through certain structures including the nuclear family. Instead of questioning these structures and their relation to desire, the psychoanalyst "supports the movement of social repression and participates in it with enthusiasm"[6] (ibid.: 81). Desire, or what in this context would be queer sexuality, is repressed "because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society, it is capable of demolishing its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy" (ibid.: 116). Thus desire is shut up "in a bizarre sort of box painted with bourgeois motifs, in a rather repugnant artificial triangle," which recasts it as a "dirty little secret," "a private theater rather than the fantastic factory of Nature and Production [*sic*]" (ibid.: 49). The philosophers add that Oedipus, the backbone of psychoanalysis and familialism, is neither an invention of psychoanalysis nor merely a familial structure (ibid.: 113–121). Psychoanalysis is just a cog in the wheel. As Mark Seem writes in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus*, "Oedipus is everywhere" (ibid.: xx). It is engrafted into the very heart of our existence as well as every sort of social, economic, and political formation. To reinterpret Deleuze and Guattari, from the primitive societies to the modern civilization, humanity has little by little constructed its own grand Oedipus, which prevails in the image of the State, the Law, the Despot, the Capitalist, the Colonizer, the

[6] By the same token, Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia* that "[a]lienating him [the individual] from himself, denouncing his autonomy with his unity, psycho-analysis subjugates him totally to the mechanism of rationalization, of adaptation" (2005 [1951]: 64). He also describes psychoanalysis as "a technique by which one particular racket among others binds suffering and helpless people irrevocably to itself, in order to command and exploit them" (ibid.).

White, the Male, the Heterosexual, etc., which have come to be represented in the image of the castrating father. On the other hand, the civilian, the proletariat, the colonized, the black, the woman, the homosexual, etc., have become the castrated child. In accordance with their call to create a materialist psychiatry, or a *schizoanalysis* as they name it, which will "analyze the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres" (ibid.: 105), Deleuze and Guattari argue that there must be an unconscious investment of desire in the constitution of these oppressive relations, a sort of pleasure principle that keeps the subject within the boundaries of oedipalized territorialities. This is an assumption that leads them to the central yet unstated question of *Anti-Oedipus*: "Why do people desire their own oppression?" The simplest answer they provide is that repression "arouses," it is "a pure joy in feeling oneself a wheel in the Machine [*sic*]" (ibid.: 346). In other words, the system creates an artificial feeling of collectivity, and provokes a libidinal energy — the desire to connect, to be a part of something.

A very similar manipulation of desire takes place inside capitalism as well. It is possible to trace a schizoid process in capitalism, which lets it sustain its own feasibility. Capitalism masterfully adapts itself to the changing social structures, standards, and morals to extract a surplus value. In order to keep pace with the new circumstances and the productive, ever-changing nature of desire, capitalism always sheds its skin; in Deleuze and Guattari's words, it *deterritorializes* itself (ibid.: 35). The emergence of a new gay identity in the later stages of capitalism and the subsequent creation of a gay marketplace could provide an example for deterritorialization.

In a well-known essay titled "Capitalism and Gay Identity," John D'Emilio argues that in colonial New England, survival depended upon a self-sufficient house-

hold economy, which necessitated participation in an interdependent family unit (1993: 470). From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, though, "[a]s wage labor spread and production became socialized" within a capitalist free labor economy, "it became possible to release sexuality from the 'imperative' to procreate" (ibid.). Thus D'Emilio writes:

> [C]apitalism has created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life [outside the heterosexual family] around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex. It has made possible the formation of the urban communities of lesbians and gay men, and more recently, of a politics based on a sexual identity. (Ibid.).

Since the early twentieth century, the unhinging of sexuality from family and the emergence of sexual identities and lifestyles have led to the proliferation of urban cruising areas, which are largely bound to commodity spaces. More conspicuously, the new circumstances have fostered new consumer markets: "The physical expansion of capitalism [which had] begun under Fordism," Rosemary Hennessy notes, "continued through the creation and extension of markets, including the deeper penetration and commodification of the body and identity—the growth of health, food, fashion, and athletic markets, for example (Lee 1993: 131)" (Hennessy 2000: 106). "New, non-normative sexual identities," Hennesy adds, "support innovative 'life-style' marketing niches" (ibid.: 108). In this case, private property replaces the privatized family (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 303–4), and the capitalist production remains unaffected by the shaking of the nuclear family, which has always been crucial for the reproduction of surplus labor.

Marx and Engels have already pointed out this shape-shifting self-reforming feature of capitalism in *The Communist Manifesto*:

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole of society. […] All fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned […] (Marx & Engels 1888 [1848]: Chapter 1 [online]).

However, Deleuze and Guattari note that capitalism can push the limits only to a certain degree. The subject is eventually pulled back to the newly assigned limits: "Ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize" (2003 [1972]: 35) the "schizophrenic charges and energies" (ibid.: 246) before they unleash "flows that would be dangerous for capitalist production and [that are] charged with a revolutionary potential" (ibid.: 245). Indeed, Henessey reminds that capital will accept queers only if "gay or queer-identified people are willing to shore up that unequal division [of labor in the home, in the marketplace, in the factories of the third world, etc.] — whether that means running corporations or feeding families, raising children or caring for the elderly" (2000: 105). It should be remembered, though, that the sanctity of heteronormativity is always preserved, and non-normative practices and identities are either kept in check or brutally punished. Most queer-identified individuals worldwide are subject to discrimination and violence in workplaces, schools, and public spaces. Many have limited access to health and social services. Thousands of queer-identified youth are expelled from their homes every year, and they are three times more at risk of committing suicide than their straight-identified peers (ibid.: 66). Intersex kids are forced to undergo non-consensual sex assignment surgeries, which cause mental and physical trauma in their adult lives.[7] Gender non-conforming individuals are equally vulnerable. According to a report published by Transgender Europe (TGEU), there have

[7] [Online] http://www.isna.org/articles/ambivalent_medicine [Accessed in May, 2016].

been 2,016 reported killings of trans and gender-diverse people in 65 countries worldwide between the years 2008 and 2015.[8] There are anti-LGBTI legislations in Mississippi, North Carolina, Russia, and many other places. ILGA'S 2016 *State-Sponsored Homophobia Report* declares 73 UN member States that criminalize homosexuality.[9] In several Middle East countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and DAESH-controlled territories homosexuality is punished by death in horrid ways.

Returning to the topic of reterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari assign a new meaning to schizophrenia; they regard it as a form of resistance to a constant reterritorialization. For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is something outside the premises of nuclear family, capitalism, or state apparatuses. It is immune to the repressive control of these artificial structures because it causes "the flows of desire" to travel in a free state (2003 [1972]: 35); it is the exterior limit of capitalism, a limit that capitalism constantly displaces so as to substitute it for its own immanent limits (ibid.: 246). In order to think through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of schizophrenia as resistance, it could be argued that if the regularly displaced limits are, for instance, the gender and sexuality categories, which are gradually loosening in the more industrial parts of the contemporary world, then the most exterior limit, the state of schizophrenia, would be the total eradication of gender and heteronormativity; and in the economic sphere, schizophrenia would be equal to the collapse of private property and wage labor. In this respect, behind social uprisings and revolutionary practices, it becomes possible to seek a schizoid drive that wants to cast off the chains.

In a similar fashion, fantasy elements and the creation of alternative spaces that are discussed in this study follow the path of schizophrenia by allowing desire free

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[8] [Online] http://tgeu.org/transgender-day-of-visibility-2016-trans-murder-monitoring-update/ [Accessed on April 26, 2016].

[9] [Online] http://ilga.org/downloads/02_ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2016_ENG_WEB_150516.pdf [Accessed on June 27, 2016].

rein, and by rejecting the artificial territorialities of the nuclear family, capitalism, segregative state policies, religious and moral values. Instead of finding pleasure in cooperation, what arouses the queer protagonist is an overthrowing of the system, a breakthrough. In this context, escape becomes revolutionary, a courageous agreement "to flee rather than live tranquilly and hypocritically in false refuges" (ibid.: 341). Queer characters "sweep away the social cover on leaving," causing "a piece of the system to get lost in the shuffle" (ibid.: 277). For instance, in *The Living End*, the HIV positive and economically disenfranchised couple's road adventure initiates with a rage against the establishment: "I think this is part of a neo-Nazi Republican definitive solution," Luke declares to Jon at the breakfast table, "a germ warfare. Genocide. I suddenly realize that we have nothing to lose" (*The Living End*). Later, the two go on a journey, which soon turns into a fluctuating union; and a criminal one too as it involves credit card theft and assault on the police and gay-bashers. The more they get away from the things they leave behind, the more attached they become. Their journey, however, becomes a trial for Jon, who has difficulties in keeping pace with Luke. As the latter gradually trespasses the borderline, Jon gets nervous; he tries to prevent Luke from committing crime, he wants to stay clean, and he cannot help getting irritated even by a parking ticket.

As will be discussed in the first and second chapters, in many queer films such as *The Living End* and *My Own Private Idaho*, the escape or the schizoid breakthrough is terminated before reaching an ultimate deterritorialization or emancipation from social and economic pressures as in the case of a medically treated schizophrenic: the escapee "strikes the wall, rebounds off it, and falls back into the most miserably arranged territorialities of the modern world" (2003 [1972]: 283). In the end of *The Living End* and *My Own Private Idaho* the characters are left desperate and im-

mobile in the middle of a desert. In other examples such as *The Watermelon Woman*, *Brother to Brother*, *Shortbus*, and *Appropriate Behavior*, which are discussed as case studies in the final chapter, the breakthrough is maintained in the prospect of hope and futurity. This kind of films propel a logic that is more congruent with Muñoz's definitive remark in *Cruising Utopia*: "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (2009: 1).

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari offer us two poles of fantasy, which are "individual fantasy" and "group fantasy." The individual fantasy is an extension of "Oedipus, the illusion of the ego, the puppet of the superego, guilt, the law, castration" (2003 [1972]: 311). It provides shelter and satisfaction in servitude to the establishment inasmuch as it shows a way to overcome the death instinct: "what does it matter if I die, says the general, since the Army [*sic*] is immortal?" (ibid.: 62). Lisa Duggan's notion of "homonormativity," by which she defines a recent assimilationist right wing trend in LGBTI politics, which pleads for marriage right and equal citizenship, resembles what Deleuze and Guattari call individual fantasy. Duggan asserts that instead of contesting dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, the homonormative politics "upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2002: 179).

Group fantasy, on the other hand, experiences "institutions themselves as mortal, to destroy them or change them according to the articulations of desire and the social field, by making the death instinct into a veritable institutional creativity" (Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 63). Under group fantasy "each subject, discharged of his personal identity but not of his singularities, enters into relations with

others" (ibid.). In a similar vein, fantasy elements and the creation of alternative spaces in queer cinema fit more aptly into the category of a collective fantasy in the sense that they carry the potential to disturb hegemonic institutions and established norms using the cinematic medium. Hence, the collective outcry of schizos could also be understood as the collective outcry of queer film characters: "We are all schizos! We are all perverts! We are all libidos that are too viscous and too fluid—and not by preference, but wherever we have been carried by the deterritorialized flows" (ibid.).

1.8. Notes on Method

The selection of films is based on three criteria. First, the films create alternative spaces, or employ unconventional styles or fantasy elements in a way that gives rise to a critique of heteronormativity and, additionally, race/class problems, commodity culture, nuclear family, social alienation, or mainstream film production. Second, to narrow down the scope of the study the majority of the films are selected from the cinema of the US in the 1990s and after, probably the richest period of queer film production. Third, the selection aims to be balanced and inclusive as much as possible in terms of representation; the films cast characters with different sexual orientations, sexes, genders, races, ethnicities, and classes although many other bodies are unfortunately missing either for time-space limitations or non-availability of films that match the other criteria. In addition to these three criteria, the case studies in the last chapter aims to highlight a part of the social and cultural atmosphere in the United States in the last two decades through discussions of the representation of urban

African-American gays and lesbians as well as the representation of queer lifestyle in modern-day New York City.

The films are assessed through a combination of formalist and contextualist approaches. The formal analyses of the films concentrate on various queer film settings ranging from the road and the stage to the prison and the concentration camp as well as several counter-narrative strategies such as parody, pastiche, and narrative intransitivity, along with particular uses of mise-en-scène, camera movements, sounds, editing choices, characterization, narrative structure, and genre. Special attention is given to cultural and historical context, and the representation of sexuality, race, gender, and class is taken into consideration.

In light of the brief examples that have heretofore been summarized and those that will be analyzed later, it is argued that certain settings, fantasy elements, and narrative spaces in queer cinema exert resistance to heteronormativity, racism, class inequality, commodity culture, oedipal familialism, and social alienation as well as mainstream film production, which denies or suppresses the queer existence.

1.9. Chapter Breakdown

The study is organized into three main parts that correspond to different but closely related topics. Chapter II deals with queer film settings and fantasy elements while Chapter III focuses on unconventional narrative structures and styles in queer cinema. All of these vehicles function as channels of breakthrough. And the case studies in Chapter IV discuss each of these topics in accordance with the objectives set forth in the introductory chapter.

Chapter II begins with a brief evaluation of actual queer spaces in major cities along with some of their widespread discussions in queer scholarship before examining their relation to queer film settings. Although urban queer spaces are mostly approached on a positive ground as liberating counter spaces, they strongly depend on commodity spaces. There is often an undeniable link between cruising and consumption. Therefore, the chapter continues by drawing a correlation between urban queer spaces and what Marc Augé calls non-places of supermodernity. Augé associates non-places with areas that people, who live or work in metropolises, interact on a daily basis without even realizing it. For Augé, these areas, which include places of business, tourism, short-term accommodation, entertainment, fast transportation, and commodity spaces, offer an experience of anonymity, and an illusionary sense of freedom, but also alienation and isolation. Some of the films that are discussed in this study are in a complicated relationship with non-places. In films such as *The Living End*, *My Own Private Idaho*, and *Butterfly Kiss*, the road is an escape route. Yet the road as a setting of escape also contains all the characteristics of a non-place, and in the end of these films, the characters' journey without destination brings about their entrapment.

Section three of Chapter II scrutinizes some other recurring settings in queer films through discussions of examples selected from American and world cinema. The settings in question include the stage, the countryside, the woods, home, and small town as well as more exceptional ones such as the prison and the concentration camp. What is common to each of these settings is that they serve as a replacement or distortion of hegemonic spaces that are marked with homophobic discrimination, and sometimes also with, depending on the film, gender, racial, or class inequalities.

Paris is Burning and *Three Dancing Slaves* contrast queer spaces with spaces of segregation, heteronormativity, and nuclear family while *Un Chant d'Amour*, *Poison*, *Swoon*, and *Bent* are given as examples of how some queer films use fantasy to manipulate state-controlled spaces of discipline and punishment. These strategies are at work in *Weekend*, *Stranger by the Lake*, and *Being John Malkovich* as well. Additionally, these films also highlight some of the complex realities of queer experience ranging from the fears and risks that queer-identified individuals have to face every day and how oppression can sometimes be voluntary, to the influence of internalized capitalism and commodity spectacle over desire and inter-personal contact.

Just as in the case of the road setting or the dangerous cruising area in *Stranger by the Lake*, the construction of alternative spaces in queer cinema is not free from contradictions. The last part of Chapter II touches upon some of the ways by which queer films unwillingly reproduce various codes of oppression during their attempt to create alternative spaces. In this regard, *Boys Don't Cry*, a film that has drawn considerable attention from critics and audiences alike, is chosen as a point of reference.

Chapter III goes a step further than the assessment of settings and fantasy elements in queer cinema, and observes non-linear elements in selected queer films. Unconventional film forms become a pulpit for a quintessential queer expression, and fantasy plays a role in some of the films. The first section gives a brief survey of narrative space in film theory by informing about how two major theorists, Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean-François Lyotard, regard the visual construction of conventional cinema as ideologically inflected. The next section seeks an answer to the question of what exactly makes a certain kind of queer films different and less plot-driven than popular cinema. The film discussions in this chapter and the following

case studies will reveal that the notion of time and visibility have a very central place in queer cinema.

The first group of films, which consists of *The Living End*, *Edward II*, *The Hours and Times*, *The Watermelon Woman*, *Paris Was a Woman*, *Tongues Untied*, and *Swoon* are like a response to the eradication of queer lives from the recorded history. They revisit the past, and as if to compensate the long-held denial of homosexuality from the silver screen, they give an uncompromising in-your-face visibility to queer desire in creative ways. The priority of time, memory, and visibility in these films has a significant impact on narrativization.

The second group of films, which are discussed in the last section of Chapter III, do not make any direct reference to history but they play on narrative time through cryptic narrative structures and fantasy elements. They also make a comment on the queer experience in different places. *Mulholland Dr.* delves into the Hollywood film industry, *Frisk* visits perilous corners of the urban cruising scene, and *Tropical Malady* is set in a rural part of Thailand.

Finally, Chapter IV concentrates solely on the queer cinema of the United States from 1996 to 2014 through case studies of four films, *The Watermelon Woman*, *Brother to Brother*, *Shortbus*, and *Appropriate Behavior*. This chapter is like a summation of arguments, theories, and themes that are raised in the first three chapters. The four films are related to each other and the previous films through their reliance on alternative settings, fantasy, and non-linear elements. *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother* exemplify historical revisionism and the strategy of contrasting settings as they shed light on the difficult lives of African-American queers. *Shortbus* and *Appropriate Behavior* make it possible to take a look on the queer experience in the present-day New York City. Deleuze and Guattari's argu-

ments concerning oedipal constraints and Augé’s remarks on supermodernity provide the ancillary framework for *Shortbus* and *Appropriate Behavior* to discuss how interpersonal desire is crippled in contemporary life. *Brother to Brother* and *Shortbus* employ fantastical settings as channels of escape while *The Watermelon Woman* and *Appropriate Behavior*, along with *Brother to Brother*, use nostalgia, time shifts, flashbacks, and recollections for the same purpose. What is to be arrived at in the end of the case studies is that each film makes a critique of the present and shares the common ambition to materialize a queer utopia.

CHAPTER II

SETTING AND FANTASY

2.1. Urban Queer Spaces

What is at stake with setting in queer cinema first lies with the film makers' preference for an alternative space over authentic queer spaces. In reality, as many writers and theorists would agree, queer spaces are predominantly urban. Michael Sibalis notes, for instance, that "urbanization is a precondition to [the] emergence of a significant gay culture" (1999: 11). Moreover, as Isaac Mizrahi's 1993 documentary, *Unzipped*, as well as Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (US, 1990), and many queer writings indicate, there are significant ties between queer subcultures and various aspects of urban mass culture such as high fashion and the entertainment industry. Homosexuals, in Dennis Altman's words, "pioneered the values and behavior that have become the norm in modern consumer society" (1983: 96). Queer subcultures, in turn, take advantage of the exquisite "cruising grounds" provided by the modern city: cafés, bars, discos, public baths, toilets, and shopping areas become, as Dianne Chisholm writes in *Queer Constellations*, ideal places for loitering and "casual contact without financial tariff, conjugal responsibility, or bourgeois propriety" (2005: 12).

In queer city writings, urban queer spaces are sometimes elevated to a mythic/utopic status, and become sites of subversion where the queer *flâneur*, in Chisholm's words, "cruise[s] across economic, social, and racial grids of power, defying boundaries between private and public spheres and appropriating dominated space for perverse pleasure" (ibid.: 31). Free, multi-partnered sex in gay bathhouses comes to represent a melting pot for class and racial differences, also a creation of authentic queer spaces, and sometimes an entrepreneurial success of queers in many writings (e.g., Désert 1996; Bérubé 1996; Chauncey 1994; Betsky 1997). Such idealizations regard urban queer spaces as a temporary fissure in the hegemonic space, or to borrow Henri Lefebvre's terminology, queer spaces are, in theory, "appropriated spaces" of the subjugated minorities which contest and subvert the dominated space of commodities, of social/economic norms and hierarchies, and of state power (1991 [1974]: 164–5). But if urbanity is so intrinsic to queer subcultures, and the urban queer spaces are such effective sites of subversion, why do many queer filmmakers need to design alternative spaces?

Chisholm points out the other side of the coin by examining some reflections on the queer subcultures' reliance on the market place for sexual encounters. Following Dennis Altman, who draws attention to contradictions such as the commercialization of desire and the hierarchies of age and beauty in the ostensibly liberating space of the gay bathhouses, Chisholm argues that "the narrative of the gay urban life confuses the production of social space with the reproduction of capitalist dream space" (2005: 78). Queer places such as gay bathhouses, clubs, discos, are in fact, not "a production of gay social space," but they are "a 'perversion' of commodity space" (ibid.: 75).[10] And through urban queer activities such as anonymous encounters,

[10] Similar arguments have been voiced also by J. Halberstam (2005), Scott Herring (2010), Karen Tongson (2011), and Christina B. Hanhardt (2013).

queer cruisers, in a way, appear to be losing their subjectivities since they are transformed into commodities "as fetishes-on-display that [hold] the crowd enthralled" (Buck-Morss quoted in Chisholm: 79). So what seems like a revolutionary blurring of the boundaries between races and classes may also be seen as a form of crude communism that Marx mentions in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Such a communism, Marx writes, "which negates the personality of man in every sphere, is only the logical expression of private property" (2003 [1844]: 102). A refined portrayal of this situation is found in a bath scene of Reiner Werner Fassbinder's *Fox and His Friends* (West Germany, 1975). In Thomas Waugh's words, commodities and artifacts of bourgeois existence — antiques, furniture, clothes, cars — are extended to the body and the genitals in a bath scene of *Fox and His Friends* through "a backdrop of strolling naked young lovelies and carefully posed crotch shots—anonymous and almost disembodied" (Waugh 2000: 48). For Waugh, "the scene effects a stunning visualization of the ultimate degradation of the body, that objectification and consumerization of the body inherent in *The Advocate* lifestyle" (ibid.).

In a similar vein, according to Chisholm queer space means for the most part "an appropriation of the city for gay middle-class living" (2005: 76). In a passage about how the interior design of the Corinthian Club Baths in London institutionalizes racism, the author asserts that "late-twentieth-century gay urban fantasy is [in fact] last century's design of global fraternity, petrified in the strata of bourgeois imperialism and erased in the gaze of fascist aestheticism" (ibid.: 90). Likewise, Marlon Riggs in his 1989 documentary, *Tongues Untied*, and Charles Nero in his article, "Why are the gay ghettoes white?" (2005) call attention to the fact that white gay ghettoes such as San Francisco's Castro District and the Faubourg Marigny in New

Orleans are formed on the basis of racial exclusivity. In addition to gay gentrification, Nero suggests, the integration of homosexuals into the mainstream culture is perpetuated through "overbearing images of gayness as whiteness and as correct taste," which is evident in successful television shows in the new millennium such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Will and Grace*, and *Queer as Folk* (Nero 2005: 243).

In light of these arguments, it is possible to contend that a certain branch of queer cinema evades urban queer subcultures to the extent that they overturn the repressive norms of a heteronormative culture. In a way, some queer films reject the queer subcultures' parasitic relation to commodity space, and they defy the commodification of desire, and sex detached from passion, which is disguised under the mask of a fake idealism and fetish bourgeois spatiality. For instance, *My Own Private Idaho* parodies the inherent codes of white upper-class homosexuality with its portrayal of rich perverts who give silly performances to rent-boys, or make them wear strange cloths or scrub their furniture. And the main character, Mike's narcoleptic attacks are like a symptom of resistance to be fetishized and consumed: twice when the gay street hustler is about to engage in paid sex with strangers, he faints. Similarly, in one of the absurd scenes of *The Living End*, right after Luke writes "I blame society" on a pillar in a public garage, two men in kinky costumes, a master and a slave, pass by. One is sitting in a shopping cart like a piece of commodity with a leash attached to his neck, and the other one is pulling him by the neck, which is seemingly a parody of commodification.

Despite the more or less shared characteristic of pessimism, with their choice of setting, many queer films make a stark contrast with "New Narrative," an experimental literary movement that took place in North America roughly in the 1980s

(Glück [n.d.]; Bredbeck 1995). Unlike the New Narrative writers, whom Chisholm favors, some queer films do not invest in representations "which underscore the politics of community *within* the space of commodity" (Chisholm 2005: 56, emphasis added). They do not seek the disintegration and subversion of the encroaching capitalism from within. On the contrary, they opt for their own settings/fantasies/utopias outside the boundaries of the urban phantasmagoria of capitalism. To open up a parenthesis, it should be noted that films that do not dodge urban spaces often take on a critical or at least parodist stance against such spaces. Frank's adventures in public toilets in *Taxi to the Toilet*, for instance, is at least hilarious if not reproachful when it is compared to a directly oppositional stance that *Urbania* (US, 2000) takes against urbanity despite the film's corny humanism and binarisms (good vs. evil, gay vs. straight, poor vs. rich, etc.), which incidentally approve the establishment while criticizing it.

Consequently, some queer films try to give up or reinscribe what Foucault calls "heterotopias," real places and counter-sites that are formed in the very founding of society, and in which "all the other sites are represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1984: online). Instead, they wish to create their own utopias by turning the society upside down along with its economic structure. This way particular queer film narratives attempt to carry the setting completely outside the capitalist/heterosexist matrix as a reaction to it. However, this is an attempt that remains for the most part unfulfilled. As will be seen in the following discussions and film analyses, especially in the case of *Stranger by the Lake* and *Paris is Burning*, spaces that are narratively constructed in most queer films are never sterile. They do not provide a perfect shelter with characters that are fully aware of complicated networks of oppression. They are more likely to host characters that are caught in transit: characters

that experience temporary anonymity, temporary identity loss, and temporary break-through. Queer film settings resemble more than anything else Marc Augé's "non-places" (1995 [1992]).

2.2. Non-places and Supermodernity in Queer Cinema

In his interesting work *Non-Places*, Marc Augé argues that late twentieth century has witnessed a transformation of place whose definition gradually ceases to conform to its traditional understanding in anthropology. Place once meant for the ethnologist a social ground: it was "where individual itineraries can intersect and mingle, where a few words are exchanged and solitudes momentarily forgotten, on the church steps, in front of the town hall, at the cafe counter or in the baker's doorway" (Augé 1995 [1992]: 66–7). Place was once conceived with history, memory, and identity. The proliferation of what Augé calls "non-places" in the present age, on the other hand, means just the opposite. Hotel chains, holiday clubs, refugee camps, the air/rail/motorway routes with high-tech means of transport (aircraft, high-speed train, road vehicles, etc.), the airports and railway stations, leisure parks, large retail outlets, as well as cable and wireless networks, offer a completely new form of experience. Since whole history along with all exoticism and local particularity is transformed into a spectacle, which is best expressed in travel agency catalogues (ibid.: 110), what reigns in non-places is not past or future, but actuality, "the urgency of the present moment" (ibid.: 104). What is more, Augé argues that the individual identities that once formed the anthropological place gradually give way to the

shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers, which brings along a temporary anonymity that is felt as liberation:

> "[A] person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver […] he tastes for a while — like anyone who is possessed — the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (ibid: 103).

This temporary identity, this liberation, however, comes with a price tag and based on a strict contract that people are reminded of upon entering and leaving non-places. For Augé, the passport or identity card they show at the check-in desk, the ticket they have bought, the card they will have to show at the tollbooth, even the trolley they trundle around the supermarket are all signs of this contract between the person and the public authority.

The most notable aspect of Augé's work is the distinction he makes between modernity that appears in Charles Baudelaire's poetry and Benjamin's writings, and what he calls "supermodernity" of the late twentieth century. By quoting Jean Starobinski, Augé implies that in his wanderings in Paris passages, Baudelaire's *flâneur*, who used to get lost in the crowd, witnessed the coexistence of old and new ("chimneys alongside spires" [ibid.: 92]) instead of an acceleration of history and its transformation into a spectacle (ibid.: 75–94). And unbound from religion or labor he retained at least an individual consciousness, an awareness of his own alienation and solitude. Non-places of supermodernity, on the other hand, subject the individual to entirely new ordeals of solitude. In line with Baudrillard's arguments, Augé notes that the interaction between individuals and their surroundings in non-places is established through non-human mediation of signs, images, words, or texts (ibid.: 94). In the supermarket, for instance,

> The customer wanders round in silence, reads labels, weighs fruit and vegetables on a machine that gives the price along with the weight; then hands his credit card to a young woman as silent as himself — anyway, not very chatty — who runs each article past the sensor of a decoding machine before checking the validity of the customer's credit card." (Ibid.: 100).

The user of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards, Augé tells, "communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce" in a world "surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (ibid.: 79). So to speak, in the space of non-places there is seemingly a lot of interaction and exchange although in reality there is no real contact. All the signs and remarks that emanate from roads and commercial centers ("Thank you for your custom," "Bon voyage," "We apologize for any inconvenience"), Augé adds, "are addressed simultaneously and indiscriminately to each and any of us: they fabricate the 'average man', defined as the user of the road, retail or banking system" (ibid.: 100). This seemingly individualized average man of supermodernity, though, is more like an automaton on an assembly line rather than an autonomous subject. Grounded on the same common law that dictates "do as others do to be yourself" (ibid.: 106), "he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties" (ibid.: 103). According to Augé, "[t]he space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude," which is shared by millions of others (ibid.: 103). What the contemporary ethnologist faces, therefore, is a new challenge to understand this new individual and the places he/she is in transit; and a need for a new social analysis, which Augé calls "an ethnology of solitude" (ibid.: 120).

2.2.1. Queer Road Movies:

The Living End*, *My Own Private Idaho*, and *Butterfly Kiss

The reason non-place is brought up here is not that settings in queer cinema share some features with non-places. It is rather because both urban queer spaces and many queer film settings that are intended to be different than the former fit very well into the category of non-place, a similarity which certainly jeopardizes the viability of certain queer film settings as sites of breakthrough. Motorway or highway that appears in numerous queer films, for instance, is one of these controversial sites, and it gives an opportunity to analyze how and why many queer film settings cannot become ultimate sites of liberation.

The plainest answer is that these settings are never detached from hegemonic spaces. The seductive neon signs in service stations that occasionally catch the drivers' eyes in *The Living End* is a clear sign of this. The cigarette Luke carries in his mouth (he does not even smoke it), the pistol he plays around with, and his masculine bravado throughout the journey signify the roles and performances assigned by this non-place, which has always been the major setting for "regeneration through violence [that] became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" in the established tradition of road/crime movies and westerns (Slotkin 1973: 5 quoted in Pidduck 2007: 269). The turning point in the narrative is when the cash dispenser does not respond to the couple's stolen credit card. An unresponsive machine in a gas station is enough to mark at once the end of the breakthrough, and the beginning of the breakdown, leaving the drifters in complete immobility, isolation, and solitude in the final scene. Similarly, how highway becomes a home for the homeless Mike in *My Own Private Idaho* demonstrates another paradox of non-place: "a foreigner lost in a country he does not know (a 'passing stranger') can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorway" (Augé 1995 [1992]: 106). Mike's loneliness and home-

lessness finds its best expression in the main motif of the film, the stiff and perfectly straight asphalt road breaching the desert, and receding in the horizon with no end (Fig. 2.1). Only in the campfire scene, an exceptional moment in the film, Mike gets out of the non-place of the highway and the commodity space of hustling; as he poignantly reveals his personal feelings to Scott, his best friend and unrequited crush, near a reservation site, distant sounds of a Native American ceremony is heard in the background.

Figure 2.1 Screenshots. *My Own Private Idaho*. © 1991 New Line Cinema.

The same motif of the motorway as a non-place has a more disturbing and pronounced presence in *Butterfly Kiss* (UK, 1995), which is a sort of lesbian *Thelma and Louise* from Scotland. *Butterfly Kiss* presents the story of a serial killer named Eunice who hitchhikes and kills strangers with her accomplice Miriam, a naïve checkout girl Eunice meets and befriends at a gas station store. Since she falls in love with her, Miriam does not leave Eunice alone, and she puts up with her killings with the hope of changing her into a better person. Eunice, in the meantime, keeps on roaming the motorway searching someone named Judith and the record of a love song whose name she cannot remember. She stops by at gas stations and restaurants

to ask the female employees whether they have the record, and whether their name is Judith, and upon receiving a negative answer to each question she kills them.

Although the film never reveals any background information about Eunice and the things she searches for, it is understood that she is a type of person that neurotically absorbs everything she sees, learns, and experiences. She has no limits or fear as Miriam tells the camera in one of the black and white video sequences that cut in at intervals, and she is stuck with her memories just as she firmly holds on her religious belief (Eunice, Miriam, and Judith are strong female figures associated with valiant qualities and cardinal roles such as teacher, protector, and savior in rabbinic parables and the bible). In a scene, she tells Miriam that she kills people so as to be divinely punished, and thus to be assured that god has not forsaken her. However, the external reality does not match with the one in Eunice's mind; she gets mad inasmuch as she is not punished, and she inflicts damage on her own body. The motorway, meanwhile, marks the place of her ultimate failure. It is a non-place where the past, memories, beliefs, loves, and hopes are least expected to be grounded; it is a place of emptiness, transition, actuality, commodity, and finally a path that leads her to suicide. Motorway has an overwhelming presence throughout the film. Deep focus takes of the motorway, and shots taken with front and rear car cameras are repeatedly shown (Fig. 2.2). Especially in the beginning of the film while camera tracks down Eunice as she strides the opposite of the road, vehicles whooshing along the motorway pierce the frame like bullets.

Figure 2.2 Screenshots. *Butterfly Kiss*. © 1995 British Screen Productions / Dan Films / Merseyside Film Production Fund.

Consequently, the preferred setting in the above films does not seem to be promising as a site of breakthrough. The line between the space of survival and what is escaped from becomes insecure. In *Feminism and Geography* (1993), Gillian Rose notes:

> Space itself — and landscape and place likewise — far from being firm foundations for disciplinary expertise and power, are insecure, precarious and fluctuating. They are destabilized both by the internal contradictions of the geographical desire to know and of the resistance by the marginalized victims of that desire. (Rose 1993: 160).

Rose's argument constitutes a part of her general attempt to displace the opposition between the real and the imagined space, which she regards as one of the masculinist narratives in geography. Space from Rose's perspective is discursive, heterogeneous, and complicated (ibid.). Therefore, there might be no reason to expect its narrative counterpart in queer cinema to be very different.

2.3. Fantasy and Setting in Queer Cinema: A *Mise-en-scène* of Desire

Drawing on the work of Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (1968 [1964]) in a notable essay titled "Fantasia," Elizabeth Cowie, too, has once argued that "[f]antasy involves, is characterized by, not the achievement of desired objects, but the arranging of, the setting out of, desire; a veritable mise en scène of desire…" (Laplanche & Pontalis 1968 [1964]:17 quoted in Cowie 1997: 133). Cowie's arguments were in fact meant to be a response to Laura Mulvey's influential article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which treated female spectatorship as something fixed and completely dependent on some patriarchal patterns of industrial filmmaking. By suggesting that it is not the gender of the film characters, but their positions and experiences within a wish-fulfillment process that governs the identification process or suture, Cowie hinted at a possibility of an escape from the so-called male gaze. No matter how irrelevant it might initially seem, the idea of setting as a *mise-en-scène* of desire has some relevance to the context at hand because of queer cinema's penchant to design alternative spaces, or perverse and redesign the existing ones for an escape from the heteronormative-racist-capitalistic domain.

Setting in queer cinema shows up in various forms: it can be, for instance, a stage as in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001); a desert as in *Desert Hearts* (1985) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994); a highway or motorway as in *The Living End* (1992) and *My Own Private Idaho* (1991); a prison as in *Un Chant d'Amour* (1950) and *Poison* (1991); the piers as in *Fireworks* (1947) and *Querrelle* (1982); a forest as in *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) and *Tomboy* (2011); a Turkish bath as in *Hamam* (1997); a rooming house as in *Brother to Brother* (2004); or an underground salon as in *Shortbus* (2006). Such

settings become a place of survival for the characters who are normally not welcome in a world that is hostile to differences. Therefore, they function as alternative spaces where queer desires are temporarily and quixotically realized. For instance, in *Paris is Burning*, which is a significant documentary about the drag ball scene held by gay and transgendered people of color in New York, one of the interviewees describes his experience on stage in the drag balls as “like crossing into the looking glass in Wonderland,” and he adds that “you feel a hundred percent right as being gay” (*Paris is Burning*).

2.3.1. Contrasting Settings: *Paris is Burning* and *Three Dancing Slaves*

Apart from portraying stage as an indispensable queer space (which also applies to Hollywood musicals as recent queer re-readings of these films have shown), *Paris is Burning* is notable especially for exposing racial and economic inequalities through particular uses of setting, which in a way function to demonstrate “the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee 1983: 272). Like many other queer films *Paris is Burning* employs the strategy of contrasting settings to portray the interlocking channels of exclusion.

The pre-title scenes of the film set a nice example. The footage of New York City at night in the beginning with skyscrapers, busy boulevards and squares under neon lights (including a sliding text on a building that reads “white supremacist church”) is contrasted with the back streets of Harlem where the silhouette of mechanically walking people in downtown is replaced with the close-shots of queer blacks and latinos dancing, chatting, exchanging jokes on the streets, and cheering

and shouting in colorful costumes under bright spotlights in the drag ball. The way the skyscrapers are shot in the beginning — an extreme long shot with smaller sub-urban apartments visible at the lower end of the frame — makes a spatial contrast between the spectator's point of view, which belongs to the lower-class outsider, and the focal point of the camera where the dark and grim edifices of capitalism reject and threaten the outsiders.

A similar use of intersectionality and contrasting settings appears in the French film *Three Dancing Slaves* ([*Le Clan*], France, 2004). In an alternative interpretation, *Three Dancing Slaves* transforms the struggles of three mixed-heritage working-class brothers in a small rural town into an allegorical critique of the French national tripartite. We see the collapse of *égalité* and *fraternité* in the experiences of ex-con Christophe, the eldest brother, who thrives amid the ruthless opportunism in the workplace, and Marc, the second brother, who hits the bottom after a strife with the drug dealers and left alone by his brothers and father. *Liberté*, on the other hand, partly survives through the closeted romance between the gay and youngest brother, Olivier, and Marc's friend, Hicham. Their idyllic relationship is conveyed through picturesque shots of daily trips to the countryside, which make a contrast with the claustrophobic small town scenes. Meanwhile, racial antagonism is implied in minor details. Marc's lack of confidence, his feeling of being betrayed by his white-looking brothers, his deep attachment to his recently deceased Algerian mother, and possibly Olivier's curt breakup with Hicham, who is French-Algerian, all suggest that even three brothers from the same parents can be divided by economic, racial, and sexual boundaries.

2.3.2. Fantasy in Captivity: *Un Chant d'Amour*, *Poison*, *Swoon*, *Bent*

Quite different than the stage in *Paris is Burning* or the countryside in *Three Dancing Slaves*, some films mobilize settings such as a prison (*Poison*, US, 1990), a military base (*Yossi and Jagger*, Israel, 2002), a boarding school (*Mädchen in Uniform*, Germany, 1931), a concentration camp (*Bent*, UK, 1997) or other single-sex proletarian areas such as vessels (*Querrelle*, West Germany-France, 1982) where either the punitive state authority or sex-gender normativity and compulsory heterosexuality is at peak in most repressive forms; hence, they too open up a crack in hegemonic spaces. These settings also show how queer desire is irrepressible even in the most oppressive spaces.

For example, the Jean Genet pastiche in *Poison* troubles gender normativity by aligning machismo with same-sex desire. And in Genet's own erotically charged fantasy world in *Un Chant d'Amour* (France, 1950), which presents perhaps one of the queerest lovemaking scenes in film history — inmates in adjacent cells puffing cigarette smokes into each other's mouth via a straw that passes through a small hole on the cell wall — love is unstoppable; it leaks through cell walls and prison bars. Also in a touching scene of *Bent* (UK, 1997), which is adapted from Martin Sherman's 1979 play, two gay captives make love under Nazi watch only by whispering and fantasizing without even touching or looking at each other.

Each film like many others introduces fantasy sequences at most crucial points in the narrative when oppression becomes unbearable. For example, a surrealistic fantasy shot depicting a mock gay marriage in a pastoral setting cuts in immediately after prison bars are abruptly shut on the convict's face in *Poison*; or in *Un Chant d'Amour*, one of the inmates begins to imagine himself and his lover making love in

the countryside after having been beaten by the warden. Sometimes, fantasy is employed in other strategic ways as in the trial scene of *Swoon* (US, 1992) in which the criminal duo is suddenly exposed to be making love on a double size bed in the middle of the courtroom where they are being judged, absurdly not for their murderous crime but for their homosexual relationship. Everything in the courtroom is taken with a low angle shot indicating the omnipresent eye of the law constantly watching and judging the people below who seem to be frozen in a still shot. A close-shot of a tableau, which depicts the hand of the pharaoh pointing to the Jewish slaves who are being whipped by the wardens, cuts in making a correlation between the slaves in the tableau and the people in the courtroom. (Fig. 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Screenshots. [From left to right] *Un Chant d'Amour*. © 1950 Jean Genet. *Poison*. © 1990 Poison L. P. *Swoon*. © 1992 Intolerance Productions Inc. *Bent*. © 1997 Channel Four Television Corporation / Nippon Film Development and Finance Inc.

2.3.3. In Search of a Safe Space: *Weekend* and *Stranger by the Lake*

Another reification of Foucault's panopticism (1995 [1975]) is found in the British film *Weekend* (2011). However, *Weekend* chooses a relatively rare setting in queer cinema: domestic space, which has been for long a subject of inquiry in feminisms rather than queer studies. *Weekend* offers much more than a typical queer melodrama, and gives insight to a paranoid fear of homophobia, and a repressive state control over individual life. The film contrasts the relatively secure space of home with the hostile atmosphere of outdoor spaces.

The central motif in the film, the image of ugly concrete blocks where the main character, Russell, lives with CCTV cameras on top sneakily moving, buzzing, and recording everyone and every activity, exposes the actual dystopia of the present age with strictly organized social life and aggressive state surveillance. Even Russell and his lover, Glen's departing words in the final scene are drown out with the disturbing repetition of the train station announcement, "24-hour CCTV recording is in operation at this station" (*Weekend*). There are few scenes without an intruding unfocused object on at least one side of the frame, which creates the impression that the characters are secretly being watched. In addition to the voyeuristic shooting strategy, Russell's feeling of insecurity is subtly conveyed through the *mise-en-scène*. Sometimes hostile looks from the passersby, sometimes the presence of a group of youngsters outside the camera focus, or a parked sports car playing techno music on the distant side of the street, there is always a creepy, insecure, threatening atmosphere skillfully engrafted in the outdoor scenes. Russell's cozy apartment, which is decorated with vintage paraphernalia, makes a stark contrast with the outdoor shots. "When I'm at

home, I'm absolutely fine," he explains to Glen in a confessional moment, "I'm not embarrassed, I'm not ashamed, and I don't want to be straight" (*Weekend*).

Home is not always a preferred setting in queer cinema. For instance, *Paris is Burning*, *Brother to Brother* (2004), and *Pariah* (2011) present characters of color that are expelled from their family homes for their sexual identity. On the other hand, films such as *Weekend*, *Cloudburst* (2011), and *Love is Strange* (2014) reinscribe the meaning of home as a place of shelter. A very similar re-conceptualization of domestic space occurs in bell hooks' *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (1990).

In opposition to the white-centered second wave feminism's view of home as a site of female subordination, by giving an account of her childhood experiences hooks argues that home, for a black woman, is a site of resistance despite the persistent patriarchy. The feeling of danger and fear she experienced outside as a child due to racial discrimination, hooks tells, would give place upon arriving home to "the feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming […] the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls" (1990[b]: 41). As hooks clarifies, this feeling is tightly linked to her experience of growing up in the margins, in a southern black working-class community segregated from the all-white town center (ibid.).

The correlation between poverty and blackness in hooks' writing take the form of correlation between financial insecurity and closeted homosexuality in *Weekend*. Behind the *façade* of a doomed-to-fail relationship between an insecure working-class homebody and a heartbroken adventurous artist, *Weekend* hints at class inequalities between the two lovers at several key points: for instance, Glen's jokes and remarks such as "there's nothing wrong with being a lifeguard, you know," or Russell's remark to Glen in the beginning, "I thought you were out of my league or

whatever" (*Weekend*). Unlike Russell, who grew up in an orphanage, Glen enjoys his freedom to the extent of his bourgeois privileges. He is quite easy with his homosexuality. He has self-assuredly come out to his parents when he was sixteen: "I told them nature or nurture, it's your fault, so get over it" (ibid.). He can ignore or yell at the homophobes, and he enjoys speaking loudly about his sex experiences to a crowd of heterosexuals in a straight bar despite the surrounding hostility.

Russell's feeling of insecurity has actually more value than it may initially seem. The feeling of insecurity does not only play a role in the production of alternative spaces in queer films but it is also the central proponent in the complaints raised by some queer-identified individuals who are concerned with the invasion and destruction of urban cruising areas by profit-seeking corporates and government officials. Although the central argument in such complaints — that certain urban areas where homosexuals can socialize provide a relatively safe habitat protected from homophobic crimes, and a chance of existence for queer identities and practices — is true to some extent, queer spaces are never safe enough as is sometimes depicted in queer films. *Stranger by the Lake* ([*L'inconnu du lac*], France, 2013) is one of these films, and a unique one with its portrayal of a cruising spot with all its complexities. The setting, however, is not urban.

With repetitive shots of trees slowly swinging in the wind, the surface of the lake wavering in the breeze, naked bodies lying on the beach and undulating in the bushes, and figures stealthily roaming in the woods to find other bodies, *Stranger by the Lake* employs a highly sensual cinematography to transform the cruising area in a rural French province into a bacchanal paradise until the scene reveals its hidden perils (Fig. 2.4). The cruising scene at first seems different from its urban counterparts. Each morning when Franck comes to the woods, the cars in the parking lot are the

same, positioned almost in the same places, and shot through the same angle. The same people lie on the same parts of the beach, they turn and look in the same way, and they more or less know each other although they seldom talk. This is, in fact, a small community which practices the same rituals with the same interest following a stable routine. The "strangers," however, are different. Michel, the gay serial killer with whom Franck falls in love, the jealous visitor who yells at the locals, and Henri who spends his time sitting by himself at the far end of the beach avoiding the sexual activity in the woods do not belong to the place. Michel avoids any contact outside the cruising spot, he seeks detachment from Franck after sex, and he does not hesitate to kill his partners when he gets bored. The drowning scene, which is in a way reminiscent of the shooting in Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), is shockingly bland. Shot with a deep focus long take, the murder is as quiet and casual as a play as if to not disturb the tranquility of the paradise. However, the murder triggers a turning point in the narrative after which the film questions the limits of passion. Although Franck witnesses the murder from behind the trees, he experiences a self-inflicted amnesia. Caught in the sway of his desire for the enigmatic stranger, he keeps the wearing secret to himself, and gets involved in a passionate affair whose price is the fear of death by the hand of his lover.

Several times throughout the film Franck is seen gazing at the other side of the lake where, as he learns from Henri, families attend. It surely must be a different world than the one Franck knows, and a world, too, in which Henri has no place anymore since he has split up with his wife. This side of the beach with its own codes, pleasures, and dangers is the only place where queers are allowed — in a remarkable scene two men and a woman in a boat, seemingly from the other side of the lake, pass along the shore staring at the cruisers' beach as if they are on a safari. The

beach is so indispensable for the cruisers that they begin to come back only a couple of days after the murder as if nothing has happened. The final scene of the film in which Franck is naked and barely visible in the pitch darkness of the forest calling out for his murderer-beloved is perhaps meant to be read as an epitome of the queer experience in the modern age: unreasonable desire with no limits up to the point of self-destruction, which could also be discerned sometimes in the queer films that revolve around HIV and drugs. The underlying message might seem at first twofold: "this is what queers do to themselves" and "this is what queers are led into." Such a conclusion, however, would be misleading.

On a second thought, *Stranger by the Lake* draws a picture of the present condition of the whole social existence as much as it gives insight to the queer experience. Desire (sensual or material) exists from the very beginning; it shapes lives, identities, and social-economic structures, and it has to flow in some way. The problem is, as Deleuze and Guattari have once polemically argued in *Anti-Oedipus*, it has to flow in the wrong paths in the current state of things. Desire is encapsulated in what the philosophers call oedipal or artificial territorialities, a complex network of relations that the civilization is found upon. From the creation of the ego and the loss of collective spirit, to the formation of the nuclear family and a blind servitude to the oppressor (the state, the colonizer, the capitalist, the patriarchal father, etc.) this is a realm of false consciousness that stretches to all social and economic formations. This is a realm, eventually, one might add, where lives and bodies are collected, consumed, and dumped away habitually including one's own. The inclusion of Henri's character, therefore, is crucial to the narrative. Since Henri is not his type (he looks older and heavyweight), Franck is able to approach him on different grounds, which gradually turns into an intimate friendship. Thanks to the deep attachment that devel-

ops between the two, Franck glimpses at a different form of interaction that is unfamiliar to him, but he does not understand it. Henri's rhetorical question, "do you have to fuck someone to sleep next to them?" does not make any sense to Franck, because neither in the straight world that Henri comes from nor in the queer sphere in which Franck partakes, love without sex between two men has any meaning; it is oxymoronic. "Homosocial desire" *per se*, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985; 1990) has once named it, is an invalid proposition. This should not be understood as film's idealization of an asexual mode of interaction since sexual excess in the film would prove otherwise. It rather shows how alternative or more intimate forms of contact are undervalued.

Figure 2.4 Screenshot. *Stranger by the Lake*. © 2013 Les Films du Worso / Arte France Cinéma / M141 Productions / Films de Force Majeure.

2.3.4. Capitalism and Desire: *Paris is Burning* and *Being John Malkovich*

Weekend and *Stranger by the Lake* are of course not the only examples that give an impartial insight to the complicated real life experience of queer-identified individuals. *Paris is Burning*, too, reflects several contradictory aspects of queer communities by scrutinizing another queer space, drag balls. The film provides an opportunity to discuss how gender and sexuality take shape around the commodity spectacle.

Paris is Burning observes drag contests in which participants present stage performances in certain categories, which are graded by a jury depending on how successful the participants are in representing that category; for example, they are evaluated on the basis of how much they can "pass" as a woman, a lawyer, a soldier, etc. The catwalk in the balls obviously gives the participants a chance to transgress their own image and step into an alternative world where "they can be whatever they want," and enjoy "fortune, stardom, and spotlights" (*Paris is Burning*) regardless of the fact that it's just role-playing. The bottom line, however, is that all the "kids" who participate in the balls are "starving" as Labeija, a veteran queen explains, but they do whatever they can to get a costume to walk on the stage. While some contestants perform for the mere sake of entertainment with an awareness of the fact that they are denied from a wealthy way of life from the very beginning, some take the show very seriously regarding passing/failing in the contests as passing/failing (as heterosexual) in real life and equate it with "surviving" (ibid.), at which point the film gets complicated and becomes a subject of discussion among different critics.

The stage performances in the film at first seem to be an exemplar of the concept of performativity. The roles that are played on stage, or the so called categories, which include a woman, a schoolgirl, an executive, etc. acknowledge the fact that in

real life these are all "performances," not true identities, and as one of the interviewees makes it clear, they could be performed in real life by queers of color as well if they were not denied a chance. Thus, the camp in the film is to some extent analogous to theatricality and performativity in real life. For Daniel T. Contreras the film is able to denaturalize race and gender categories simultaneously (2004: 119–127). However, this interpretation becomes problematic because of a disturbing anecdote, which is shared later in the film. We are told that Venus Xtravaganza, one of the drag girls in the film, was found dead in a sleazy hotel room three days after being killed. As Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, whose entire chapter is allocated for the discussion of *Paris is Burning*, the sad event refutes the idea of drag as a parody of sexual identity categories, or as a gender-bending strategy (Butler 1993: 125).

Paris is Burning drew negative criticism too. Considering Venus and Octavia's longings in the interviews to be like "a spoiled, rich, white girl" (*Paris is Burning*), bell hooks has criticized the film by arguing that "[t]his combination of class and race longing that privileges the 'femininity' of the ruling-class white woman, adored and kept, shrouded in luxury, does not imply a critique of patriarchy" (1992: 148). For hooks the drag culture here reflects the mind of the colonized that are made to believe that this is the only meaningful way of life. Contrary to hooks' review, John Champagne regards the film's relationship to this common-sense desire for wealth and fame as necessarily ambiguous and complicated. For Champagne, "the film portrays, in what this context seems a highly critical light, white consumer culture, its distance from their 'real' lives; and the lures that it continues to hold out and to deny to them" (quoted in Contreras 2004: 123).

In any case, the film highlights class inequality and commodity culture alongside the problems of race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, when we listen to the

poignant longings of the interviewees, we are visually confronted not with the things they desire, but their media "images" such as fashion magazine covers, celebrity photos, and footage of expensive stores, or in other words, we are presented with what Jean Baudrillard calls "simulacra" (1983 [1981]), the representations of things that do not exist, but function to create a never-to-be-fulfilled desire in the consumer. Instead of the real things they lack, the film suggests, simulacra are all that govern the characters' desire. One possible outcome of this interpretation is the disturbing realization of how through an insatiable consumer desire coupled with a desire for power, oppression of any kind can be to a significant extent voluntary.

What could be discerned from *Paris is Burning*, *Stranger by the Lake*, and to some extent from the other films that have been mentioned earlier is that gender and sexuality are sometimes formed with a logic of consumption. In *Paris is Burning*, some of the girls' gender identity parallels their desire for wealth and status. In *Stranger by The Lake*, the desire to possess and consume bodies resembles the desire for commodities. Class hierarchies also influence sexual identity and interpersonal contact. In *Weekend*, it is only the economically privileged character, Glen, who is confident with his orientation. And it is again Glen who can easily dump his lover, Russell. This ambiguous interaction between identity and capitalism, which perhaps one may call "internalization of the capitalist field" (Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 268), can be traced in most of the films. Sometimes this interest comes into existence in more visible and unusual ways as in *Being John Malkovich* (US, 1999).

Although it may seem less queer compared to other films, *Being John Malkovich* makes a witty and humorous critique of a world in which people suffer from having not enough pleasure, "the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied"

(Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 28). The characters in the film find a magic portal in their workplace, and via a telekinetic journey in the portal, they somehow find a chance to manipulate and exploit the film actor John Malkovich's body for sexual, emotional, and professional fulfillment for fifteen minutes. This way they also manage to escape from the harsh conditions of capitalism most vividly expressed with the floor 7.5 where they work hunching due to the low ceiling like the workers in Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Hairy Ape* (1923). Their motive and crisis arise from the discrepancy between their actual life and what they have been promised.

What is interesting about the magic portal is that the interior design, which stretches downwards with mud and dirt, looks like sewers, and after the ejection the characters find themselves in a ditch near the turnpikes outside the city as if they are dismissed from culture and thrown away like litter. Yet, as if to ratify Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the culture industry (2002 [1947]), feeling unsatisfied with the experience they have, they want to repeat it again and again.

Several cultural critics have drawn attention to the complicated relationship between desire and capitalism. Walter Benjamin, for example, makes a comparison between the modern city dweller, who is stunned by the phantasmagoria of commodities, and the persona of Baudelaire's sonnet, "To a Passerby" ([À une passante], 1909), who, enthralled by the mesmerizing commodity spectacle of an attractive passer-by, experiences a momentary ignition of desire, which is only followed by a feeling of loss and catastrophe (2007 [1939]). Love in the modern metropolis, Benjamin tells, is a "love—not at first sight, but at last sight" (ibid.: 169), which for Chisholm means, it is akin to the insatiable consumer desire stirred by the commodity (2005: 86). At the core of this and similar observations in Marxist writing was of course Marx's concept of commodity fetishism that he has explicated in *Capital,*

Volume I (1867). However, Marx himself was less interested in interpersonal desire (not at all in homosexual desire) with a few notable exceptions such as his arguments in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The following sentences, for example, are noteworthy: "Poverty is the passive bond which leads man to experience a need for the greatest wealth, the other person" (2003 [1844]: 111), and "[t]he relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being" (ibid.: 103) by which Marx opposes the objectification of women by men. The combining idea in the context of both sentences is how "all the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of all these senses; the sense of having" (ibid.: 107). These and many other ideas are very likely to have woven their ways into *Anti-Oedipus*. The infamous "desiring machines" of Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, must be those alienated physical and intellectual senses Marx talks about. Likewise, Marx's emphasis on "productive life" — active and productive participation in life through direct contact with nature, one's own labor/product, and other individuals — (whose origins are found, according to Erich Fromm, in Spinoza, Goethe, and Hegel's philosophy [2003 (1961): 26]) resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's "desiring-production." And its opposite, the state of inactivity, a passive-receptive attitude, is probably the dead "body without organs" into which the schizophrenic person (and to a degree everyone) is confined by having been stripped off his/her creative faculties.

Still it is Deleuze and Guattari who has made a decisive call for a change in methodologies by proposing an anti-method that they name *schizoanalysis* so as to initiate a scrutiny of the complicated ways in which desire at first structures social, economic, and political formations and then becomes arrested by them. Their approach to schizophrenia is in fact a bit totalizing and at times even offensive (which

are the very problems they criticize most in psychoanalysis). By regarding schizophrenia in a single unified category of deviation — the inability of being integrated into an oedipalized society — they are imagining their own version of it, and remain inattentive to various other forms of problems and sufferings schizophrenic people have in real life. However, Deleuze and Guattari's fictional and rebellious schizo resonates with the characters of queer cinema so well that it is highly practical to rely on three aspects of their perspective for a critical standpoint: the choice of setting — deserts, landscapes, journeys, etc., which appear and reappear in Deleuze and Guattari's writing as sites of breakthrough; the motive of escape as a form of resistance; and the characters' failures, which include a final return to the Oedipus, the termination of their breakthrough, their inability to keep up with the "ego-loss," or various contradictory aspects of their personality. Therefore, R. D. Laing's idea that "[m]adness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough" (quoted in Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 131), which Deleuze and Guattari aspire to and develop into the idea of schizophrenia as a breakthrough from the oedipal territorialities, could perhaps be transformed further into the idea of *queer film settings and fantasy elements as a breakthrough from the dominated spaces*.

2.4. Inconsistencies in Queer Films: *Boys Don't Cry*

Before concluding this chapter, it should be noted that most queer films include other types of contradictions and inconsistencies, which do not seem to be very congruent with an escapist or revolutionary agenda. In most of the films, the scheme of imagining alternative spaces outside oppression is retarded, sometimes by an exploitative

use of sado-masochism and aggressive virility as in *Poison*, *Querelle*, *Swoon*, *Frisk* (1996) and several others; sometimes by a fetishization of lesbian bodies, which appeals to a straight male audience, as in *Blue is the Warmest Color* (2013); sometimes by racial tokenism or even racism as in *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995); sometimes by falling into the pitfall of gay and lesbian essentialism as in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), which "corrects" transgender identity via lesbianism; or by a white-centered elitism as Pratibha Parmar (1993) has once observed in relation to a plethora of queer films that proliferated in the beginning of the 1990s, which is sometimes referred to as New Queer Cinema (Rich 2004 [1992]), and through various other structuring absences. It is as if queer films at times reproduce other than merely expose codes of oppression that they wish to evade. *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) is one of the examples that embody several of these contradictions in its narrative.

Boys Don't Cry (dir. Kimberly Peirce) is based on a true event that took place in 1993 in Humboldt, a small town in Nebraska. A transgender man named Brandon Teena (officially Teena Brandon) was brutally raped after his passing as a man was found out by John Lotter and Tom Nissen, acquaintances of Lana Tisdel whom Brandon was dating at the time. Following the rape, Brandon was killed alongside his two friends Lisa Lambert and Philip DeVine. The tragic event drew nationwide attention and was later made into two films, the other one being a documentary titled *The Brandon Teena Story* (dir. Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdöttir, 1998). Kimberly Peirce's film has been significant for spreading the event to the mainstream audiences, and it has also caused a proliferation of a notable body of criticism since it has provided a practical framework for critics whose work deal with issues ranging from performativity to the representation of race and class.

Boys Don't Cry presents extra-diegetic fantasy shots that are conveyed through time warps, wide open natural scenery, and quasi-sci-fi imagery, which in many ways comply with the characteristics of fantasy elements in queer films. These shots provide a kind of *queer territoriality*, or as Jack Halberstam puts it, an alternative time and space in which Lana prefers to see Brandon's acquired gender — his manhood and masculinity — rather than his biological sex in their relationship (2005: 87). In other words, this is a territory which does not entail what Deleuze and Guattari call an "anthropomorphic representation of sex," or "an ideology of lack" which attributes sexes to partial organs (Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 296). This special gaze is maintained throughout the film until, Halberstam argues, towards the end of the film Peirce "catastrophically" converts the main character to a lesbian by erasing his transgender identity (Halberstam 2005: 89). For instance, the Hollywood style love making scene in the end significantly differs from an earlier sex scene as the film pulls back from its earlier commitment to Brandon's masculinity by using the light and camera in certain ways that accentuate his femaleness (ibid.: 90). Halberstam notes that with "love conquers all" logic, the film succumbs to a "tired humanist narrative" by making Brandon become "truly himself," and "receive love for the first time as a human being" (ibid.: 90–1). Conversely, Julianne Pidduck, who describes herself as "a feminist and a lesbian" (2007 [2001]: 268), praises "the power of true love to transcend even death" (ibid.: 279). On par with Pidduck, Michele Aaron thinks that the film successfully marks gender performativity and anti-exclusivity by avoiding rigid identity categories and clean-cut characters (2007: 259–264).

Boys Don't Cry's treatment of race and class also has been a subject of controversy. The omission of Philip DeVine character, a disabled African-American man who had been dating Lisa Lambert at the time of murder, from the narrative as an

"unnecessary subplot" (Henderson 2007: 285) has been severely criticized by different critics (e.g., Halberstam 2005; Brody 2007; Jones 2010). Halberstam, for instance, draws parallel between the filmmaker's sacrifice of racial complexity and the erasure of transgender identity. Likewise, the limited representation of poor working-class whites of rural America, or the so-called "white trash" has also been pointed out. Lisa Henderson notes that Brandon, whose "gender passing is anchored in a self-promoting tall tale of class status, with a father in oil and a sister in Hollywood," is represented as "a different kind of man — radiant, beautiful, clear-skinned and clean, the promise of masculinity" while Tom and John "stand instead as its scarred and mottled failures" (2007: 287). On the other hand, Aaron describes Tom and John in a quite different way in a passage that discusses how the film presents gender as ambiguous through characterization. In a direct contrast to Henderson's view, she regards Tom's "pubescent flourish of facial hair" and John's "doe-eyed and long-lashed" complexion as androgynous qualities, which for her confirms the film's stake in performativity (Aaron 2007: 262). The endorsement of performativity in this case unfortunately renders certain flaws in representation invisible.

Boys Don't Cry is only one of the examples that show how a certain gender, sexual orientation, race, class, etc. sometimes inconspicuously takes a privileged position in the narrative. Locating such inconsistencies may help filmmakers and artists be wary of various excluding discourses.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided examples of diverse uses of setting and fantasy elements in queer cinema. As is seen each film is concerned with opening up alternative spaces for queer characters to shelter them from the threat of homophobia, heteronormativity, and various other channels of oppression. Many of the films also make an incidental critique of racism, capitalism, class hierarchies, and the reduction of sexuality into consumption by avoiding, demeaning, or parodying commodity spaces, which are actually closely related to urban queer sub-cultures. Yet queer film settings are not totally devoid of the things they try to shun.

The next chapter will analyze how certain non-linear narrative strategies in queer cinema function in a similar way to alternative settings and fantasy elements. Many queer films create their own narrative spaces to express queer desires and experiences in ways that are distinct from mainstream forms of filmmaking.

CHAPTER III

FROM QUEER NON-PLACES TO QUEER NARRATIVE SPACES

In many queer films the disavowal of hegemonic spaces is often aligned with alternative narrative styles that do not fit well into Stephen Heath's concept of narrative space. As has been implied earlier in the study non-narrative elements in queer cinema are likely to be related to a perception of mainstream cinema and its structural conventions as an excluding apparatus. In fact such a perception is not specific to queer filmmaking, and it is not only the non-normative sexualities and performances that are ignored, chastised, or deplored by the mainstream film industry. From the 1960s onward feminist, ethnic, racial, and materialist criticisms have targeted filmic representations as purveyors of dominant ideologies. Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" and Jean-François Lyotard's "Acinema," which will be discussed here, are among the first examples that discuss mainstream cinema as an ideological tool.

Although these two theorists' approach is a bit monolithic since they limit ideology and its reception to a singular form, they endorse experimental ways of filmmaking, which reject conventional methods and adjacent dominant ideologies. Queer films in this chapter do the same, and it is possible to situate them next to the

other counter cinemas. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon among queer filmmakers to pay tribute to pioneering independent filmmakers. For instance, according to Glyn Davis the names of the two protagonists of *The Living End*, Jon and Luke, is seemingly a reference to Jean-Luc Godard, one of the leading figures of the French New Wave movement (Davis 2004: 61).

However, the queer films in this chapter have their own peculiarities. The primary ideology that is under attack is heteronormativity. Concomitantly, they turn their back on mainstream methods perhaps to take a political stance against the exclusion of homosexuality. More significantly, as will be demonstrated in relation to Deleuze's concept of "time-image" (1997 [1985]), one of the major components of the queer film styles in question is a devoted occupation with a collective history, memory, and visibility which inevitably affects the handling of narrative time. Queer films in this chapter revisit the past, and rewrite heterocentric narratives and cultural productions to reclaim undermined queer identities. They also give an unapologetic visibility to queer experiences and desires in creative ways. Their strategies include non-linearity, genre-crossing, pastiche, and parody.

3.1. Apparatus Theory and the Perspective Construction of Narrative Cinema

One of the most known essays that deal with cinema as an apparatus is perhaps Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" in which the writer argues that the mechanics of the camera, which is supported with various cinematic techniques, serve to conceal its use in ideological products (1986 [1970]: 286–7). Before Heath and others, Baudry has thought that cinema takes the

perspective construction of Renaissance painting instead of another system of representation, and he explicates his point by comparing Greek and Renaissance painting. While the perspective in the former is based on a multiplicity of points of views, and the space is discontinuous and heterogeneous, the Renaissance painting, for Baudry, is based on a centered space whose center coincides with the eye of the "subject" (ibid.: 289).

The comparison between a Greek and a Renaissance painting in Figure 3.1 illustrates Baudry and Heath's arguments regarding the perspective construction of mainstream cinema. At the top of the figure, a fresco on the Tomb of the Diver, an archeological monument, which was discovered in an ancient Greek city in southern Italy in 1968, depicts a symposium scene. And at the bottom, German classicist painter Anselm Feuerbach depicts a scene from Plato's *Symposium*. Although the subject matter is the same in both paintings, there are notable differences in style.

Contrary to the decentered point of view and the discontinuous and heterogeneous space in the fresco, Feuerbach's painting presents a rigidly centered and segregated space with meticulously realistic detail. At the center of Feuerbach's composition, just behind the celebrated tragedian Agathon, Socrates, "the man of intellect," sits aloof from the bacchic scenery. Hence, the spectator's view is constructed on the brink of a tension between reason and its opposite, between Socrates and Agathon, between the figures on the right and the figures on the left.[11] From the viewpoint of the said film theorists, Feuerbach's composition seems to be based on a rigid binary in a rigidly divided space. It portrays a clash of attitudes between the nonchalant partygoers and the elite of philosophers. Hence it bears the singular voice of the artist;

[11] This review is based on the description provided by the Google Cultural Institute website. https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/the-symposium-second-version/sQGa34z2sZaRmg [Accessed on August 2, 2015].

Figure 3.1 (Top) A fresco on the Tomb of the Diver, *circa* 470 BC, National Museum of Paestum. Photo © Creative Commons. (Bottom) *Plato's Symposium,* Second Version (*Das Gastmahl des Plato*, zweite Fassung) by Anselm Feuerbach, 1871–74, oil on canvas, Alte Nationalgalerie, National Museums in Berlin. Photo © pbk Photo Agency / Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Klaus Göken / Google Cultural Institute.

the kind of ambiguity and complex characterization, polyphony or "dialogism," which Bakhtin observes in the early Socratic dialogues, in Renaissance literature (e.g., Rabelais or Shakespeare), and in Dostoyevsky's writing, is not found in the perspective construction of this quasi-Renaissance painting or the mainstream cinema. Bakhtin notes that Socrates called himself a "pander," who brought people together and made them collide in a quarrel, and a "midwife" of truth rather than an "exclusive possessor of a ready-made truth" (Bakhtin 1999 [1929]: 110). In Plato's later dialogues, however, he is assigned the rigid role of a "teacher" (ibid.) just as in

the perspective construction of Feuerbach's painting. The painting is also a bit reminiscent of mainstream cinema's aversion to sexual, racial, or stylistic diversity.

According to Baudry, with the help of cinematic devices such as the camera focus, cinema creates a hallucinatory reality similar to that of the Renaissance painting, and it provides an ideal vision that corresponds to the "idealist conception of fullness and homogeneity of being" (1986 [1970]: 289). Here, Baudry recognizes a similarity between the film viewing experience and the so-called "mirror stage," a theoretical stage in early infancy proposed by Lacan, in which an infant dwells in perfect harmony with the image of his own body before it develops a separate consciousness (Lacan 2005 [1949]: 1–6). At a time when home video was not available, the dark isolated cinema hall with the projector behind the head akin to Plato's cave allegory (deceiving and pleasure giving), blockage of the spectator's motor capabilities, and his/her identification with the illusionary image on the screen — like a toddler who is mistaken to identify with his/her image in the mirror — Baudry claims, altogether remind and stimulate a desire to return to an earlier phase of infancy, to a state that is blissful yet illusionary (1986 [1970]: 294). According to Baudry, cinema puts the spectator into a blissful but illusionary state in which the fake impression of continuity and time-space unity derived from the quick succession of montaged images contribute to the ideological function of art, which he defines as a "tangible representation of metaphysics" (ibid.: 289). By quoting André Bazin and Gilbert Cohen-Séat, Baudry implicitly associates the dominant ideology with idealism, a passive receptive determinism maybe also imbued with a regressive spirituality, and he regards cinema as its apparatus (ibid.: 290). In this case the spectator is "[t]he full body without organs […] the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered" (Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 8). Baudry further suggests that "cinema as support and instrument of

ideology" can be dispatched by revealing the hidden mechanism of film work so that the identification with the camera and thus "the assurance of one's own identity" will collapse (1986 [1970]: 295–296).

Jean-François Lyotard, another theorist who shaped the concept of narrative space, has touched upon the film aesthetics–capitalism relationship in psychoanalytic terms in a way similar to Baudry (1986 [1970]). In "Acinema," Lyotard discusses that the cinema industry, whose "products lull the public consciousness by means of doses of ideology," seeks conformity to certain marketable conventions (1986 [1973]: 352). The industrial filmmaker achieves this conformity by constructing a kinesthetic, spatial, and temporal unity (cinematic illusion) in the course of which all "diversity" and "aberrant movements" (of actors, camera, objects, lights, colors, frame, lens) are eliminated from the screen: "Just as the libido must renounce its perverse overflow to propagate the species through a normal genital sexuality," Lyotard writes, "so the film produced by an artist working in capitalist industry (and all known industry is now capitalist) springs from the effort to eliminate aberrant movements, useless expenditures, differences of pure consumption" (ibid.). At this point, it is possible to draw a parallel between Baudry, Lyotard, and Burch's criticism of narrative conventions in mainstream cinema, and Deleuze and Guattari's criticism of psychoanalytic method: "[T]he entire process of desiring-production is trampled underfoot and reduced to parental images, laid out step by step in accordance with supposed pre-oedipal stages, totalized in Oedipus" (2003 [1972]: 46). In both cases, any possibility of aberration and excess is repressed.

Lyotard explains the existence of narrative conventions with an obsession with sameness, repetition, and resolution, which is naturally found in human psyche; by the presence of narrative strategies these drives are passively stimulated in narrative

cinema to give pleasure. Consequently, familiarity and identification play the major role in the consumption of a narrative film. In the absence of artificial stimulations, on the other hand, partial drives are not subordinated to the feeling of a unified identity constructed in commercial cinema (ibid.: 355); instead, they are directed to a more subtle aspect of human psyche, and the spectator is open to appreciate film as an artwork.

Lyotard suggests two strategies to overcome narrative conventions without giving any example. One of these strategies is "immobility" — perhaps a still frame or a deep focus long take, or maybe the intercutting archival photos of queer individuals in *Looking for Langston* (see Section 1.2), *The Watermelon Woman*, and *Paris Was a Woman* (see Section 3.2.3), or the tableaux vivants and the slow motion scenes (see Section 1.2), and the trial scene of *Swoon* (see Section 2.3.2), or the final scenes of *The Living End* and *Tropical Malady*, which are discussed below. And the other strategy is "excessive movement" — perhaps like the fast jump cuts at the Odessa steps sequence of *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), or the flying camera animation sequences of *Shortbus* (see Section 4.2), or the spinning camera view in *Frisk* and *Mulholland Dr.* (see Section 3.3), or the time warps in *Brother to Brother* (see Section 4.1.2) and *Boys Don't Cry* (see Section 2.4), or the unsteady shots taken from the front seat of car in *The Watermelon Woman* (see Section 4.1.1).

For Lyotard, both of these strategies can provide an ideal film viewing experience that he defines as "the sterile consumption of energies in *jouissance*"[12] (ibid.: 351–2). What he does not say, however, is that both strategies also draw attention to cinematic space. For the queer films in this study, the purpose is either to make adverse comparisons between dominated spaces and sheltering settings, or to make

[12] According to the translator's note, in Lacan's vocabulary *jouissance* means intense enjoyment and libidinal discharge (Lacan 1998 [1973]: 281).

room for queer representation by subverting a normally exclusive and restricting medium. For instance, in *Brother to Brother* the subway is depicted as a place of alienation through time warps, and contrasted with the cozy and nostalgic atmosphere of a queer space. On the other hand, as has been told earlier some films such as *Looking for Langston* and *Tongues Untied* subvert continuity and other aspects of a narrative space for the purpose of queer visibility.

The exchange between film scholarship and psychoanalysis have been criticized and reformulated in the following decades. Later scholarship expanded the scope of identification to more flexible conceptualizations so as to include queer and other spectatorships (e.g., Doanne 1988; Drukman 1995). Ideology has come to be seen as too multifaceted to be narrowed down to idealism, capitalism, or patriarchy (e.g., Combahee 1983; Cohen 1997; Moraga 2015 [1981]). And a subjective, transformative filtering that plays role in the reception of ideological products has come into focus (e.g., Muñoz 1999; Hall 2007 [1980]). However, the more recent theorizations about the reception of films do not change the fact that mainstream cinema is still largely inflected with oppressive ideologies such as heteronormativity, sexism, racism, or idealism.

It is also worth noting that a truly materialist and empirical inquiry of a narrative film had already been made at the time: "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" (1970), which is collectively written by a group of editors-artists for the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, preserves its status as a unique piece of criticism with a remarkable scope of analysis that stretches from philosophical assumptions (idealism, theologism), political determinations (republicanism, capitalism), to the artistic framework (characters, cinematic signifiers, etc.) (Editors 1986 [1970]: 453). By scrutinizing key scenes of *Young Mr. Lincoln* (US, 1939) the editors have been able

to expose how various discourses of the dominant ideology such as dualist morality, myth-making, historical determinism, patriarchy, class inequality, and racism intersect as natural givens in the heroic representation of Lincoln. The method employed in “John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*” is more of a deconstructive reading and discourse analysis with more concentration on representation, and less on narrative space.

Although there is arguably a consensus among earlier film theorists that the power of cinema lies under its capacity to “defamiliarize” — so to speak, under its ability to let the spectators perceive the quotidian from a new perspective with a heightened cognitive alertness — there has never been an agreement on what exactly provides a breakthrough from the boundaries of narrative space. For instance, André Bazin has cherished the deep focus long take, which is heavily employed in the Italian post-war films that are categorized as neo-realism such as *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Journey to Italy* (1954), or their American counterparts such as *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). For Bazin deep focus long take makes it possible to present reality “in all its virginal purity” without “those piled-up preconceptions” and “spiritual dust and grime,” which cover the spectator’s eyes (Bazin 1967 [1945]: 15). Heath, on the other hand, has thought that the same device functions as a utopia — “the ideal of a kind of ‘full angle,’ without prejudices, but hence too without cinema” (Heath: 398). For Heath, deep focus long take still retains “the unity of the image in time and space,” and thereby serves “the interests of the narrative composition of space in relation to the actions of the characters” (ibid: 396). And Deleuze praises the very same category of films, neo-realism and its American equivalent, in his *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, because he believes that such films are able to break up with narrative time by giving primacy to the image

instead of subordinating it to movement and storytelling. Deleuze bases his arguments on Henri Bergson's distinction between two different modes of recognition, "automatic or habitual recognition" versus "attentive recognition" (1997 [1985]: 44), and he claims that while pre-war cinema is founded on the former, modern cinema invests in the latter. Post-war films, Deleuze argues, jam the spectator's "sensory-motor schema" (ibid.: xi) as they cut the preconceived link between time and movement at certain instances of shock, immobilization, encounters, and recollections. Hence, the spectators are allowed for the first time to perceive outside their "economic interests, ideological beliefs, and psychological demands" (ibid.: 20).

To give another example, the close-up, which often fragments and fetishizes body parts, is a weapon of a male scopophilic desire from Mulvey's perspective while for one of the pioneering film theorists, Jean Epstein, it is a significant component of *photogénie*, the purest expression of cinema, as it elevates the status of an ordinary object to an intense, dramatic, and live character: "a close-up of a revolver," Epstein writes, "is no longer a revolver, it is the revolver-character, in other words the impulse toward or remorse for crime, failure, suicide […] It has temperament, habits, memories, a will, a soul" (1993 [1924]: 317). Benjamin, on the other hand, favors close-up because of its capability to "render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear," and to "reveal entirely new structural formations of the subject" that are otherwise inaccessible to human consciousness (2007 [1936]: 236).

3.2. Queer Narrative Spaces and Fantasy: Time, Memory, Visibility

There is of course the question of what position queer cinema takes in the context of these discussions? Does it lean on, for instance, an action/narrative oriented "movement-image" filled with film tropes like mainstream cinema does, or is it more concerned with creating "pure optical situations," or "time-images" like most art films do? (Deleuze 1997 [1985]). A good deal of queer films is pretty much comfortable with conventional narrative structures, and they simply incorporate standard forms of narrative space into their cinematography. Such films create their utopias on their own terms. For instance, several of the films that have been discussed in Chapter II rely on a more or less conventional form; yet, they are transgressive because they are not merely throw-away products. They are thought-provoking, they make a social critique, and they give visibility to a previously undermined people. On the other hand, as will be shown hereafter, queer filmmaking that leans on the art house is much more concerned with time, memory, and visibility. The final scene of *The Living End* (US, 1992), in this regard, could serve as a springboard to explore some of the key features of narrative space in less classical modes of queer cinema.

3.2.1. *The Living End*

The framing in the first three screenshots from *The Living End* in Figure 3.2 is not very different than the typical Renaissance perspective that the film theorists have been criticizing. In the first three frames, the characters are centered, the horizon is in the midway, and the background has a trivial, insignificant role that is subordinate to

the action. The HIV positive characters in the third frame look like martyrs in Christian paintings, especially like the *Pietà* paintings or Francisco Ribalta's *Christ Embracing St. Bernard* (1625–27), and the whole composition is designed to create a dramatic effect. In the last screenshot, however, the scale abruptly changes to an extreme long shot leaving the intertwined bodies of the couple in an almost indiscernible, tiny, bug-like existence in complete isolation and oblivion. As the crimson luminance of the evening sky invades more than three-quarters of the frame to the point of overexposure, it is the characters now that is trivial and insignificant.

Figure 3.2 Screenshots. *The Living End*. © 1992 Strand Releasing / Desperate Pictures Ltd.

The film aspires to American pair-on-the-run movies until it reaches a climax — a tensile sexual intercourse loaded with physical aggression and suicidal moments — and terminates before the final scene. The characters find themselves now in the last shot in a "pure optical situation" to which they have no response or reaction (Deleuze 1997 [1985]: 2). Like the female tourist in Roberto Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* (1954), which Deleuze discusses, they are "struck to the core by the simple unfolding of images or visual clichés in which [they] discover something unbearable, beyond the limit of what [they] can personally bear" (ibid.). The characters' lethargic state in the final shot is also reminiscent of a passage from *Anti-Oedipus*:

> [S]ickened by the utensility of Oedipus, but also by the shoddiness and aestheticism of perversions, [the people who are not afraid] reach the [schizophrenic] wall and rebound against it, sometimes with an extreme violence. Then they become immobile, silent, they retreat to the body without organs, still a territoriality, but this time totally desert-like, where all desiring-production is arrested, or where it becomes rigid, feigning stoppage: psychosis. (Deleuze & Guattari 2003 [1972]: 135–6).

The *mise-en-scène* and the use of sound in the final scene make a stark contrast with the juvenile anger presented in the opening scene of the film in which Luke draws graffiti on the ruins, which reads "fuck the world," and then dances on the dirt as he listens to a piece of industrial-rock music in his Walkman. In the final scene, in addition to the immobility of the figures, the only thing heard is the ambient sounds of the wind, the ocean, and the highway, which constitute an apathetic amalgam. As a result, the final scene and the impact editing (the sudden change in the shot scale) set a nice example of that "necessary passage" Deleuze talks about, "from the crisis of image-action to the pure optical-sound image" (1997 [1985]: 3). Concurrently, the last frame also functions as a reification of Bergson's major theses on time that Deleuze translates into modern cinema as the "time-image" (ibid.: 82); the past, the collective memory and trauma of the epidemic, coexists with the present in a single image. The final shot of *The Living End* must be a post-apocalyptic spectacle of a community similar to that of the post-war wasteland of Europe that is reflected in neo-realism.

3.2.2. *Edward II* and *The Hours and Times*

However, as has been suggested earlier, queer cinema's engagement with time and a collective past is most pronounced in historical revisionism and queer archeology, which are prevalent in a good deal of queer films such as Derek Jarman's adaptation of *Edward II*. The introductory scene of Jarman's film manipulates the source text on which the film is based (in a similar way to *Looking for Langston*'s manipulation of a fantasy scene, which is adapted from Bruce Nugent's short story) with the same motives of giving visibility to queer desires, and rewriting a history and literature that has been blind to queer identities for centuries. In the original text written by the Renaissance playwright Christopher Marlowe, Gaveston offers his gratitude to the newly ascended king, Edward II, in a monologue in the beginning of the first act upon receiving a letter of invitation from the king; and then three "poore men" [*sic*] enter the stage (Marlowe 1594: online). Gaveston, the king's favorite, asks them who they are, and they introduce themselves one after the other as a horseman, a traveler, and a soldier. Then, they offer their service to Gaveston, who is now about to leave for London from which he had been exiled. In the film, however, Gaveston delivers the same speech while one of the men is getting dressed near a double-sized bed — apparently after they had an anonymous encounter — and the other two men (who introduce themselves as "sailors") are still making love on the bed behind.

Like Jarman's other films, *Edward II* rests on absurdity, anachronism, minimalism, impressionistic décor, chiaroscuro lighting, and theatrical performance. It also hosts elements of cinematic excess such as the sound of a passing war jet, a printout document dated 1991, or a can of Coke on queen Elizabeth and Warwick's dinner table. Modern dance sequences and homoerotic performances cut in. Costumes,

too, are not faithful to the period. The characters sometimes appear in pajamas, suits, or sports outfit. The royal conspirators, who try to get rid of Gaveston for they are disturbed by the King's unabashed love and partiality for him, are dressed as bureaucrats, ministers, army and police officers of Thatcher's England. Edward's revenge on Warwick and Lancaster, by the way, is modeled on the Stonewall riot led by a mob of queer protestors who resist the police brutality. And in the end, Edward II is presented as a queer martyr with mourning rioters. (Fig. 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Screenshots. *Edward II*. © 1991 British Screen Productions / BBC Films / Working Title Films / Uplink.

Another British example of queer revisionism, *The Hours and Times* (1991), which is made in a grainy black-and-white period style like *Looking for Langston*, takes its subject matter from an affair that allegedly took place between John Lennon and The Beatles manager, Brian Epstein, during a weekend trip to Barcelona in 1963. Just like the relationship between Edward II and Piers Gaveston, Epstein's homosexuality and the said event is something rumored, or known, but never talked about. The affair is an anecdote that has been kept enclosed between the lines of the record-

ed history. The film rewinds in time, and imagines what might have developed between the two during that trip, again with the same wish of excavating and visualizing the queer moments that are never voiced and remain buried in history. The urge to revive and legitimize those undervalued times is most remarkably portrayed in a scene towards the end in which the two are sitting on a bench when Brian gets John to promise him that in ten years' time no matter where each of them is, and no matter whom they are married to or involved with, they will meet there on the Ramblas on 30 April 1973, or at least remember it. (Fig. 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Screenshots. *The Hours and Times*. © 1991 Antarctic Pictures.

3.2.3. *The Watermelon Woman* and *Paris Was a Woman*

There are also cases, though, in which there is not even a small piece of recorded anecdote to begin with, not even a speculation about persons and peoples whose stories have never been told. The filmmaker Cheryl Dunye's solution to this problem is that "sometimes you have to create your own history" (*The Watermelon Woman*). In the beginnings of her mock-documentary, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), Cheryl, a self-described black lesbian filmmaker who has a daytime job at a video store, explains to the camera how she was shocked and upset when she found out as a movie collector that some black actresses who performed in the 30s and 40s are not even

enlisted in the credits. Cheryl continues to tell that she one day came across the most beautiful black "mammy" who is credited in the cast as "The Watermelon Woman" in a movie titled *Plantation Memories* directed by Martha Page, and that she has decided to find out who the actress really is to make a movie about her. Her investigation, which consists of archival research and consultation with collectors and acquaintances including her mother, finally leads Cheryl to the actress's real identity, her life story, and personal photographs. It turns out that the Watermelon Woman, or Fae Richards with her real name, was "in the family" (ibid.), that is to say, she was a black lesbian, and what's more, she was in a relationship with Martha Page, the white film director of *Plantation Memories*. However, it is revealed in the end-credits that the Watermelon Woman, Martha Page, their photographs, and *Plantation Memories* are all fictional. (Fig. 3.5–6).

Figure 3.5 Screenshots. Cheryl Dunye with the faux archival photos of the fictional Fae Richards character in *The Watermelon Woman*. © 1996 Dancing Girl.

Figure 3.6 Screenshots. The faux archival photos of Fae Richards in *The Watermelon Woman*. © 1996 Dancing Girl.

Obviously, “mockumentary” is only an alternative way of documentary making in queer cinema, and there are queer-themed documentaries that rely on actual material, thanks to the fact that not all lesbians share the fate of many like Fae Richards. Some lesbians who are well known today in literary milieu have had at least the privilege of being noted down in biographies and archival records. *Paris Was a Woman* (1995), for instance, documents a period in a bunch of creative women’s lives who, having been drawn to the promise of freedom, turn their backs to their past lives and flock to the left bank of Paris to follow their passions in the beginning of the 20th century (*Paris Was a Woman*). It is told in the film that outside the institutions of marriage, motherhood, and other classical patterns of women’s life, they create a community, and fuse into the avant-garde culture that was already there. By looking at each other for inspiration and practical support, they become professionals, patrons, and entrepreneurs of art and literature (ibid.).

Basing her film on the book of the same title by Andrea Weiss, the filmmaker Greta Schiller, who is also known with her another award-winning documentary, *Before Stonewall* (1984), brings their personal histories together with archival photographs, video footages, original voice records, and interviews to uncover a lesbian utopia which has come true between the two world wars. The names and addresses of the women are given with inter-titles and their places of residence are shown on a map as if to solidify the reality of their experience as much as possible. Each segment focuses on a certain character’s love affair, partnership, her contribution to art and culture, and her professional career.

Each woman plays a pivotal role in the shaping of modern art and culture. Gertrude Stein, for instance, begins to build up an exquisite collection by trading paintings for food and eggs, and when she has a little more money she purchases works by

then unknown painters such as Marie Laurencin and Pablo Picasso. As the collection grows, it attracts visitors from the neighborhood, and Stein's famous apartment on *Rue de Fleurus*, which has also been reenacted in Woody Allen's film, *Midnight in Paris* (2011), becomes a meeting point for intellectuals and artists such as Matisse and Picasso, who love the international flavor and sexual ambiguity in the Friday evenings. Other gathering points for the intelligentsia include the two small bookshops on *Rue de l'Odéon*, one of which is run by Adrienne Monnier, and the other by Monnier's lover Sylvia Beach, and Natalie Barney's literary salon.

Monnier starts her famous bookshop *La Maison des Amis des Livres* in 1915 when she is twenty-three with the compensation money given to her poor postman father who is almost killed in a railway accident. Thinking that the price of books are too high, and in particular women are disadvantaged since very few women go to university, and that most housewives do not have any pocket money to spend on books, Monnier invents the idea of a lending library in France, and she pioneers to-day's public libraries. The close contact she makes with her clientele and the group readings she holds in the bookshop makes the place an intellectual hotspot.

Stein's apartment, the two bookshops, and Barney's salon, which often hosts two hundred people at a time including female performers and young writers who come with their manuscripts to read in Friday afternoons, become the center of cultural life for the French and expatriate community. Barney's close friends, Romaine Brooks, and Colette, one of France's most esteemed and celebrated authors, are among the regular guests of the salon. Other members of the creative circle of women include: the accomplished journalists and lovers Janet Flanner and Solita Solano, who leave their husbands in the US and come to Paris to begin a new life together in 1923; Djuna Barnes who pioneers a new kind of journalism by documenting her own

adventures but most notably known with her masterpiece, *Nightwood* (1936), a lesbian-themed novel with an unusual narrative form; Barnes' lover, American artist, Thelma Wood; the highly popular African-American dancer, singer, and actress Josephine Baker; and the respected photographer and photojournalist Gisèle Freund. (Fig. 3.7–8).

Figure 3.7 Screenshots. (From left to right) Gertrude Stein (front) and her life-time companion, typist and publisher Alice B. Toklas. Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach. Solita Solano and Janet Flanner. *Paris Was a Woman*. © 1995 Jezebel Productions and Cicada Films.

Figure 3.8 Screenshots. (From left to right) Thelma Wood and Djuna Barnes. Natalie Barney and Renée Vivien. *Paris Was a Woman*. © 1995 Jezebel Productions and Cicada Films.

However, the woman characters in the film also face various obstacles in their literary career. For instance, because of her unconventional literary style and experi-

mental writings that feed on lesbian eroticism, Stein's works are often ridiculed by publishers, and they remain largely unpublished at the time. Since she does not have enough support Monnier, too, has to go on with selling and publishing others' books although she has a remarkable talent in writing. And Colette is excluded from *l'Académie Française*, an institution which prohibited women from studying and exhibiting art. Other than problems in their professional life, Djuna and Thelma suffer from alcoholism, and they split up for personal reasons. The global economic depression of the 1930s and the breaking out of the Second World War bring an end the lesbian utopia. Sylvia is arrested by German officers and hold in an internment camp for six months, while Adrienne manages to keep her shop open without collaborating. Djuna returns to the US and lives as a recluse in Greenwich Village until her death. Gertrude and her life-time lover and partner, Alice B. Toklas, flee to the French countryside, and hide there throughout the war. Natalie and Romaine become fascist sympathizers, and they join their equally deluded friend Ezra Pound in Mussolini's Italy. Gisèle escapes to Latin America, and Janet woks as a war correspondent.

What is more striking than the biographies, and what constitutes the real essence of the film's narrative space, is the still shots of the characters' works of art, which are presented throughout the film. For example, the first still shot on the left in the stills from *Paris Was a Woman* in Figure 3.9 shows a photograph of one of the theatrical performances held in Natalie Barney's garden. Inspired by the writings of Pierre Louÿs, who invented a fake Greek poet named Bilitis (a contemporary of Sappho) and published alleged translations of her poetry in *The Songs of Bilitis* (1926), Barney fantasized recreating the golden age of lesbos. The photo also reminds the circle of nude dancers in Barbara Hammer's highly sensual and dream-like short,

Dyketactics (1974) (Fig. 1.2). The second is a funny illustration from Djuna Barnes' lesbian-themed fiction, *Ladies Almanack* (1928), which schematizes esoteric meanings attached to female body parts. The third is a portrait by Romaine Brooks that reflects her gloomy style. And the fourth is a painting by Marie Laurencin. Elizabeth Ashburn writes that "[w]hile Laurencin had a succession of male lovers, she also had close female friendships and lesbian relationships" (2012: online). According to Ashburn, lesbianism for many of the female expat community in Paris, "was a crucial element of their resistance to bourgeois social conventions" (ibid.).

Figure 3.9 Screenshots. *Paris Was a Woman*. © 1995 Jezebel Productions and Cicada Films.

Paris Was a Woman has probably the most conventional and modest narrative style among the films that are discussed here. Yet it praiseworthily manages to create and visualize a concise utopia out of such a low-cost base material. There are other cases, though, in which filmmakers do not hesitate to add a more queer quality to their cinéma vérité. If *Paris is Burning* is one example that opens a stylized window (or "carnivalistic" as Bakhtin would put it) to a colorful, multi-voiced, and heterogeneous subculture, another one that is equally important and foundational is Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* (1989).

3.2.4. *Tongues Untied*

According to B. J. Bullert, when *Tongues Untied* was first shown as part of a public television series, which featured provocative programs by independent filmmakers, the state politicians threatened to cut all funding to the state's public broadcasting service (PBS) if it ever dared to air a program like *Tongues Untied* again (Bullert 1997: 93); and conservative interest groups along with politicians attacked the public television citing programs like *Tongues Untied* as "obscene" and "promoting a gay life-style" (ibid.). Yet, this did not prevent the film from receiving critical acclaim. In addition to television it was screened at film festivals all around the world winning numerous awards.

With *Tongues Untied*, Riggs intends to break apart the impairing silence of gay African-Americans by letting them speak about their experiences while encouraging them to affirm and celebrate their identity. Through a blending of archival footages and photography, interviews, poetry, and personal histories that are at times enriched with rap and R&B rhythms, *Tongues Untied* exposes different facets of oppression gay African-Americans encounter in their daily lives: racial prejudice and police brutality, the hostility that comes from straight African-Americans, the invisibility of gay African-Americans among the white gay culture, the degrading representations of black bodies in white gay pornography, and finally the deeply internalized homophobia among gay African-Americans themselves.

Sheila Petty notes that, in *Tongues Untied* the "lack of distinction between poetry and personal recollection, between authorship and utterance, creates ambivalent narrative spaces that are at once confirmatory and confrontational" (2014: 425). *Tongues Untied* is not modeled on a typical talking heads style documentary. In the

film still in Figure 3.10, for instance, the poet Essex Hemphill does not talk, instead he stares at the camera while in the voiceover Marlon Riggs and Hemphill read out a verse made of rhyming couplets. The first lines of each couplet are read by Hemphill and then completed by Riggs in a whispering tone, which constitute a kind of call and response dialogue: "Silence is my shield / *It crushes*. Silence is my cloak / *It smothers*. Silence is my sword / *It cuts both ways*" (*Tongues Untied*). This inner confrontation, or soul-searching, is intercut by various sequences: extreme close-ups of black male mouths that scold or preach against black gays, a footage of Eddie Murphy making jokes about faggots in a stand-up show, a scene from Spike Lee's film, *School Daze* (1988), in which a group of black dancers tease homosexuals, and a gay-bashing sequence. Finally, Hemphill breaks his silence and initiates a tense speech by quoting a passage from the black lesbian poet, Audre Lorde's book, *Sister Outsider* (1993 [1984]: 153) with a heartbeat effect in the soundtrack:

> I know the anger that lies inside me, like I know the beat of my heart, the taste of my spit. It's easier to be angry than to hurt. Anger is what I do best. It's easier to be furious than to be yearning, easier to crucify myself and you, than to take on the threatening universe of whiteness by admitting we are worse wanting each other. (Lorde quoted in *Tongues Untied*).

Figure 3.10 Screenshot. Essex Hemphill in *Tongues Untied*. © 1989 Marlon Riggs.

Mark Reid likens the two competing voices in the internal dialogue to the double-voiced discourse in slave narratives (1997: 85). He associates the first voice with the voice of the colonized subject who wants to remain silent and closeted by internalizing hatred ("sometimes we join the laughter with a deep belief we are the lowest among the low" [*Tongues Untied*]), and the second, whispering voice, with the voice of the unconscious, which is in Lacan's vocabulary "the discourse of the Other" (Lacan 1998 [1973]: 131) — the force that urges the subject to seek recognition from the society — ("No one will save you but you… your silence [is] suicide" [*Tongues Untied*]). This interpretation naturally invites W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of "double-consciousness" — the "two warring ideals in one dark body": "The American Negro," Du Bois writes, "simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity [*sic*] closed roughly in his face" (Du Bois 1903a: online). From such a perspective Riggs simply intends to add a third facet to the multitude of competing identities: "Negro," "American," and finally "gay." Hence, the subject in the film finally speaks because he wants to be accepted as what he really is, and by the way, he wishes to keep "the doors of Opportunity" open. However, with an alternative interpretation one could argue that the person speaks because he wants to dismantle the authority that grants recognition. Riggs does not seem to be seeking recognition at all. His tone is unapologetic, and the characters in the film talk with a daring demeanor. The bourgeois makeup and emotional equilibrium of *Looking for Langston* is not observed here. Rather than a call for acceptance, *Tongues Untied* is like a passionate utterance of defiance.

Throughout the film, Riggs tries to invoke a collective consciousness that share and speak about a similar experience. For instance, the names of the interviewees are

not given, and their speech is intercut with others' speech to make up a polyphonic discourse, which is solidified with the fast rhythmic chanting of the words *brother-to-brother, brother-to-brother* that opens and ends the film by making a reference to the gay African-American writer, Joseph Beam's influential essay "Brother to Brother" (1986). In this respect, it is better to think of the whispering second voice in the voiceover as an encouraging plea given by a brother rather than an alter ego. Just as his contemporary, Samuel Delany, does, Riggs simply wants to remind his folks that African-American queers have survived for centuries, and they will always be despite the ongoing assimilation and hatred. What is more important, it is here in this narrative space where the feelings are most lucidly expressed, and the tongues are untied. (Fig. 3.11).

However, at some point towards the end things get a grim outlook when Essex Hemphill begins to read out his poem "Now we think," at a slow dramatic pace in coordination with another performer's fast rap-like repetitions of the words *now-we-think-as-we-fuck*: "Now we think / as we fuck / this nut might kill us. / There might be / a pin-sized hole / in the condom. / A lethal leak. / We stop kissing / tall dark strangers, / sucking mustaches, / putting lips / tongues / everywhere. […]" (*Tongues Untied*). Then, Riggs speaks to the camera about his discovery of "a time bomb ticking in his blood" (ibid.) and the sequence is followed by the still shots of obituaries of Riggs's friends who died from AIDS-related illnesses with the sound of a ticking clock in the background. The passing of the pictures speeds up until it finally freezes on Rigg's own photograph and the ticking stops.

Yet, Riggs finds solace by locating his personal experience within the larger context of African-American liberation movement. While black-and-white photographs and archival footages of African-American activists such as Harriet Tubman,

Frederick Douglas, and Martin Luther King are shown in slow motion, a slightly distorted version of “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round,” one of the freedom songs of the African-American Civil Rights Movement, is heard in the background: “Ain’t gonna let homophobia turn me around / I’m gonna keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’ / Marchin’ up to freedom’s land” (ibid.). The collage culminates in more recent color footages of queer African-Americans marching and carrying banners that read “Black Men Loving Black Men Is A Revolutionary Act” [*sic*] (ibid.) that is also shown word by word as inter-titles in the end with an underscored “the” instead of “a”: “Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act” [*sic*] (ibid.). Unfortunately, Riggs’ revolutionary declaration loses its intimacy due to a minor biographical detail, his long-term relationship with a white man named Jack Vincent, which naturally has drawn criticism from different sides. Isaac Julien has described Riggs’ declaration as a “utopian calling,” while Cary Alan Johnson from the *Gay Community News* has regarded Riggs’ call as a “deception” (Gerstner 2011: 203).

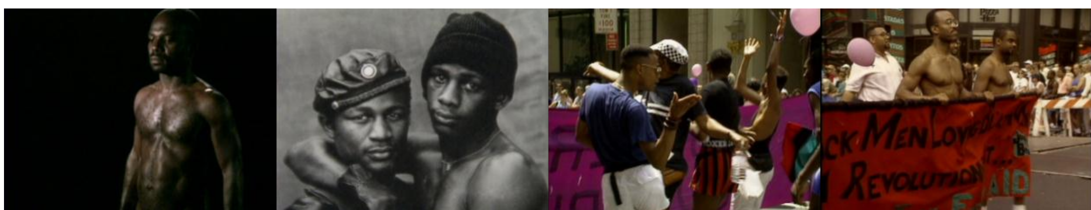

Figure 3.11 Screenshots. *Tongues Untied*. © 1989 Marlon Riggs.

3.2.5. *Swoon*

Some films such as *Swoon* (US, 1992) bring a new dimension to the issue of visibility and historical revisionism by decidedly rejecting to cultivate a positive representation of homosexuality. *Swoon* is a retelling of the infamous Leopold and Loeb murder case of 1923 — the case of the two gay teenagers who kidnapped and killed a 14-year-old boy just for the thrill of it. However, rather than telling the story of two relentless murderers as in the two previous films based on the same case — Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) and Richard Fleischer's *Compulsion* (1959) — the film makes a critique of essentialist discourses through a black-and-white mock period style and anti-realistic acting performances. According to Michele Aaron, the film "retells Hitchcock's rendition of the Leopold and Loeb murder case in *Rope* (1948), but with the homosexuality of the murderers fully present" (2004[b]: 4).

During the trial the legal authorities discuss the criminal couple's sexual activities with detailed descriptions, and an embryotic link is made between their so-called sexual perversion and their crime. Women are taken out of the courtroom by the judge to avoid any possible threat to heteronormative morality. Moreover, the couple's tactless and unapologetic demeanor infuriates the officials; "they must be hung," the attorney says, "in the name of the citizens, fathers, women, and children" so that "the public will see they have fear and emotion" (*Swoon*). The trial scenes are cross-cut with footages from the real trial and shots from old Hollywood films. In the meantime, essentialist attitudes and stigmatization of minorities are parodied in an animation sequence, which presents cranial analyses of convict portraits. The mock-analyses reveal traces of Jewish and Catholic ancestry that explain "the lack of moral values and fascination with crime" (*Swoon*).

Just like Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991), which also plays with film noir and documentary tropes, *Swoon* highlights the hypocrisy in society. Although they are severely judged and punished, Leopold and Loeb are treated like film stars and heroes before they are persecuted. They draw special attention from the media; their sensational image and story fascinate the public. The couple's criminalization and stigmatization invigorate both the legal authorities and ordinary people.

3.3. Impermeable Narratives

The innovations brought upon narrative conventions are carried to a different level in feature films such as *Frisk* (US, 1995), *Mulholland Dr.* (US, 2001), and *Tropical Malady* ([Sud Pralad] Thailand, 2004), all of which embody cryptic and unusual narrative structures. These three films differ from the rest in this section in the sense that their engagement with time rests upon a disruption of narrative time rather than a historical revisionism. For this reason they are also reminiscent of earlier queer underground films such as *Flaming Creatures* (US, 1963), *Scorpio Rising* (US, 1964), and *Pink Narcissus* (US, 1971) (Dyer 2003: 109–168). They explore some negative or controversial aspects of queer experience, too.

3.3.1. *Frisk*

Frisk belongs to the same category of self-critical queer-themed crime films such as *Stranger by the Lake* as it makes references to limitless sado-masochism, indiffer-

ence to HIV, indulgence in drugs and alcohol on the basis of a bow to the will of a misguided desire. While *Stranger by the Lake* is centered on a victim's point of view in a bucolic setting, *Frisk* tries to delve into the mind of a gay serial killer named Dennis in an urban environment. During his initial exposure to gay pornography at a local adult bookstore at the age of thirteen, Dennis becomes obsessed with a snuff photo he is shown by the owner of the bookstore — the body of a tortured and killed young man named Henry, whom Dennis' partner meets years later at a party. The image haunts him in his adult life, and he gradually develops sadistic tendencies, which are brought to life by means of role-playing with buddies and hustlers before they eventually mature into a killing spree.

When Dennis Cooper's novel of the same title on which the film is based was published in 1991, it drew attacks from gay activists because of the book's negative representation of homosexuals (Craig 2008: online), and according to Michael D. Klemm, when Todd Verlow's film adaptation premiered at the 1996 San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, *Frisk* polarized the audience causing walkouts and boos during the screening (2009: online). The truth is, with a stylized shooting and a fancy electronic score *Frisk* eroticizes and even revels in violence in a disturbing way. Nevertheless, such reactions are a bit unfair, and they certainly undermine the film's artistic and critical aspects. First of all, *Frisk* is modest in terms of graphic violence, especially compared to straight exploitation films such as *Irréversible* (France, 2002) and *A Serbian Film* ([*Srpski Film*], Serbia, 2010) which visualize a deep-seated misogyny and/or homophobia, and are still banned in several countries. Instead of a direct visualization, most of the violent action in the film is conveyed through the killer's voiceover and metonymic imagery such as the close-ups of the screaming mouths of the victims, or other signifying sequences such as the killer's

washing the blood off his hands and his knife, and his packing the victim's clothes into a litter bag. The disposed bodies are never shown and are supposedly locked in the attic, and there are implications that everything takes place in Dennis' mind. For example, in the pre-credits scene he is seen with a typewriter, a pack of manuscripts, and an ashtray full of cigarette butts, which suggests that he might be writing fiction. Second and more importantly, *Frisk* parodies its own content by following the tradition of anti-realistic acting style of queer cinema as in the films by Paul Morrissey, Gregg Araki (Davis 2004: 60) (including *The Living End*), and many other individual examples, and by disrupting the narrative continuity at several points. The actor who plays Dennis' youth, for instance, becomes one of his victims in the future, just as the owner of the bookshop, who shows porn magazines and photographs to the child Dennis, and Dennis' future accomplice are performed by the same actor. Similarly, one of the murdered victims shows up later covered in fake blood, and speaks into the camera through a TV screen about how he has become smarter now to not go with strangers. However, the most revelatory scene, which is made of a video clip that is also played on a noisy black and white TV screen, comes after the end credits. Kevin, who is strangled with a plastic bag after his hands and feet are duct-taped by Dennis prior to the end credits, suddenly appears in front of a wavering shiny silver plastic sheet, which in the previous scene constitutes the studio décor for the final killing. After the end credits, Kevin stands up in front of the silver sheet, and plays with the plastic bag he was drowned in, then Dennis comes in and they smile and kiss each other until the screen fades out. The final shot foregrounds the *mise-en-scène* and setup behind the camera, and strangely, the silver sheet plays a central role after the killing. The camera focuses on it in successive shots, and it is lit several times by camera flashes as if it is a film character, and it is slowly inflated in the last

shot before the end credits, which perhaps implies that it is the paraphernalia, the setting or the setting out of desire, and not the action itself, that arouses the killer (and maybe the audience) most. These constant allusions to filming, acting, watching, fantasizing as well as the hypnotizing/sexually arousing influence of TV, videos, photos, and other types of media, which are a bit reminiscent of the themes in Don DeLillo's thought-provoking novel, *White Noise* (1984), seem to be the unifying elements in the film. Either coincidentally or intentionally *Frisk* invokes the idea that the modern world of communication is virulently pornographic — in one of the scenes while a news reporter talks about a serious issue concerning AIDS through a TV screen, a delirious montage of erotic images plays in the backdrop.

Frisk does not offer much in terms of a narrative substance. It is actually less about a psychopath and his sadistic activities, and more about imagery: the urban cruising scene, pornography, sadomasochism, and graphic violence. Dennis' sexuality and curiosity evolve around cartoons, illustrations, photography, and videos. Still shots of snuff comics, S&M and homoerotic photography are given together through dazzling and twisting shots of male body parts on magazine pages that are combined with frenetic sounds as if to mark their hallucinatory effect. Although it would surely be illogical to link Dennis' sadism to such material, the film might be covertly suggesting that desire is, in whatever form it takes, always shaped inside the world of simulacra, and it is closely tied to the commodity space, which is symbolized in the film with close-shots of money changing hands before or after sex. (Fig. 3.12).

Dennis is struck with excitement at the sight of the enigmatic photo he sees when he was a child, and throughout the rest of his life he wishes to master that feeling by actualizing it. His experimentation, however, is concluded with a bit of disappointment after his first evisceration:

> I just opened him up like a kid who'd take a part of toy… studying every slimy organ and tube and all that weird moisture and muscle until he was just this giant white seashell full of horrible-beyond-belief crap. I felt like it's over. I know what I need to know… and all this other pretentious stuff. I felt so clean and asexual. But every answer just starts another question… same old apocalyptic porn. (*Frisk* 1995).

As usual, his disappointment does not hold him off; conversely, it ignites his desire deeper. With the elusive promise of excitement and thanks to the availability of victims who are, mostly on drugs, willing to be tortured, beaten, or even killed either for sexual pleasure or for money, Dennis helplessly pushes further and further to satisfy his insatiable curiosity. He is an unrepentant consumer while Henry, the masochist whose body is ripped and thrown away, is portrayed as a commodity, a body of fetish, and a self-conscious narcissist, who always asks the same question to the people he has sex with: "If you could change one thing about me, what would it be?" (*Frisk*). In parallel to *Stranger by the Lake*, *Frisk* exaggerates and caricaturizes a darker side of queer relations in the modern world.

Figure 3.12 Screenshots. *Frisk*. © 1995 Strand Releasing.

3.3.2. *Mulholland Dr.*

The ambiguous references to a neurotic world of images in *Frisk* take a different shape in David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.*, which targets mainstream film industry. *Mulholland Dr.* deprives Hollywood of its spell and glamour; and portrays it as a place where certain forms of love have to remain closeted, and the dreams of some go unrealized, which eventually give way to tragic endings. The eerie visualization of the cityscape, city lights, skyscrapers, and streets emerge as recurrent symbols of illusion that people fall prey to. Just like the city and its industry are an illusion, so is the filmic medium. The film presents two puzzling narratives that resist to be tucked into an organic unity.

In the first narrative, Betty, a talented and ambitious wannabe actress from Ontario, comes to Los Angeles with the hope of becoming a film star. While she is unpacking in her aunt's luxury apartment, she meets an uninvited guest named Rita, a wounded amnesiac who has just survived a car accident, and having nowhere to go she has broken into Betty's place before she arrives. The two make friends, and as they work together to find out Rita's real identity, they fall in love with each other. In the second narrative, Betty (who is now Diane) wakes up in squalor, and soon it turns out that the names and roles of the characters are all jumbled. Betty is now a failed actress, and she suffers from a nervous breakdown after having been left by Rita (who is now Camilla, a successful actress) for Adam, a filmmaker who appears also in the first narrative. After a series of flashbacks, it becomes possible to think that the second narrative might be the reality while the first narrative was a dream or a fantasy projection of Diane's wishes. It is as if Diane's experiences, and the names and faces she sees in the second narrative are all locked up in her subconscious, and then

they are transferred into Diane's dream in the most unimaginable Freudian ways to form an alternative universe in the first narrative. Film noir tropes keep the feeling of suspense intact throughout *Mullholand Dr.* The film, however, avoids reaching a final resolution and equilibrium. (Fig. 3.13).

Mulholland Dr. draws the picture of Hollywood as a rancid industry that prioritizes male satisfaction over individual talent, and whose strings are in the hands of patriarchal and sexist formations such as the production company, which is under the thumb of mafia, and a self-seeking filmmaker. The impermeable structure of the narrative and the obscure symbolism make it almost impossible to arrive at rational conclusions. Still it could be argued that only after the two main characters' memory is temporarily erased, and their social-economic status is altered as in the first narrative do they find themselves out of the patriarchal and heteronormative domain of Hollywood. Fantasy becomes the only way to sustain the romantic lesbian relationship.

Figure 3.13 Two different narratives, two different lives. *Mullholand Dr.* © 2001 Les Films Alain Sarde / Asymmetrical Productions / Babbo Inc. / Canal+ / The Picture Factory.

3.3.3. *Tropical Malady*

In parallel with *Mulholland Dr.*, *Tropical Malady* consists of two different and hardly linkable narratives that correspond to the first and second halves of the film. The first half of the film narrates a love affair between two young men, Keng and Tong, and the second half of the film depicts a tussle between a hunter, Ekarat, and a mythical creature called Tiger-man. While the story in the first half combines elements of romance and realism, the story in the second half is designed as a psychological fantasy-thriller. Although the main characters are performed by the same actors in both parts (Banlop Lomnoi and Sakda Kaewbuadee), the story and atmosphere in each part are totally different except for the subtle and ambiguous ties that hold the two parts together. (Fig. 3.14).

Figure 3.14 Screenshots. The first part at the top and the second part at the bottom. *Tropical Malady*. © 2004 Anna Sanders Films / GMM Grammy PCL / Kick the Machine / Thoke + Moebius Film / Downtown Pictures.

The story in the first part of *Tropical Malady* presents an idyllic romance between Keng, a soldier who works as a forest patrol, and Tong, a shy village boy. As

the two spend time together in the countryside and the city, their friendship develops into love. However, an unidentifiable obstacle, which at first seems like Tong's timidity, stands on their way. Tong responds to Keng's advances a bit lightheartedly as if everything between them is a joke. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that class antagonisms, like those in *Amphetamine*, *Three Dancing Slaves*, and *Weekend*, undercut the couple's relationship. Keng does not come from a wealthy family; yet he certainly does better than Tong who is illiterate and unemployed. The latter's depravity is felt at key moments: when, for instance, he hesitates to go downtown and puts on a soldier uniform so as to not look foolish, or when he is surrounded by commodities in a shopping mall and looks around in awe while Keng is waiting for him outside. Whenever Tong is offered a treat, he first asks how much it is.

Interestingly, the film does not convey Tong's pennilessness much like a depravity. Rather, Tong and Keng seem to be belonging to different worlds and spaces. Keng spends his idle time in the city, and he does not lead a rural life except occasional visits to his family. On the other hand, Tong lives in the village. Tong's peasantry is also proclaimed in character traits such as his naïveté, childishness, sincerity, and loving nature. Although Keng's character is not a direct opposite of these traits, he represents a different nature, which comes to the surface during a visit to an underground Buddhist temple in the forest. Having been warned about the risk of death, Keng is panicked and does not want to go any further into the deep tunnels of the cave whereas Tong does. These dark and unknown territories are perhaps too distant to Keng's usual habitat.

Towards the end of the first part the two friends are separated for the night at a roadside. Their separation is suggestive of the differences in their personalities and social-economic position. Tong, who belongs to nature, walks into the forest and dis-

appears in the dark while Keng, who belongs to civilization, returns to the city on his bike on a brightly lit road. In the following scenes Keng is seen in Tong's bedroom looking at his photos, and touching his bed in his absence. It turns out that Tong is now missing. We also hear the voice of Tong's mother who tells that she has found a paw print, and one more cow has vanished for the third time, and that the villagers are scared of a monster. The mother's words link the first part of the film to the following part, which depicts the story of a hunter and a monster.

After a fade-out, the second part begins with inter-titles to tell the story of a soldier named Ekarat (previously Keng in the first part) who goes into the jungle to look for a missing villager. Instead of the villager, he encounters a stray Tiger-man (previously Tong), a shape-shifting shaman who bedevils the locals and steals their livestock. The soldier and the tiger start to trail each other's track, and soon the soldier finds himself embroiled in a deadly hide-and-seek in which the hunter and the hunted become indistinguishable.

The setting, ambiance, color scheme, performances, and feelings are highly different in the first and second halves. The magical atmosphere of the second part creates the impression that there might be a surfacing of the latent emotional tides of the first part in a parallel universe. It is as if Keng's desire to sensually possess Tong in the first part becomes the hunt in the second part, and Tong's elusiveness, his peasantry, take the shape of a wild and uncontrollable tiger, who is fascinated by the soldier's strangeness. The mythical world of the jungle also represents the dark depths of wilderness that Keng was not ready to face in the first part, and that he is now forced to confront in order to survive.

The handling of narrative time in *Tropical Malady* is confusing. For instance, towards the end of the second part, the soldier begins to crawl on the ground as he

gradually transforms into a tiger, and the film cuts to an earlier phase in which the soldier was seen sitting half-asleep in the dark at the top of a branch; in this earlier scene his face was covered with a balaclava, and he was kept awake by the creepy rustling around him. Now just before the soldier's transformation into a tiger, the same scene is repeated, this time with his former self on the branch is alerted by the rustling made by his present self crawling on the ground. Two different selves from two different time periods coexist in the same space (they do not see each other because of darkness), which probably suggests that time is not linear in the jungle.

In addition to the non-linear representation of time in the jungle, the sounds are also otherworldly. Vehicles, machines in the ice cutting factory, the ambient sounds of the commercial sites and public spaces, and the upbeat music in the first part are not heard in the second part. There is almost no speech, and the only things heard are the voices of the jungle including the tiger's snuffles and roaring that at times echoes everywhere terrorizing the soldier. However, the soldier begins to communicate with those voices as he gradually becomes a part of the wilderness and the spiritual interconnectedness it entails. A baboon, whose speech is translated in subtitles, tells the soldier that he will soon need to make a tough choice: "Kill [the tiger] to free him from the ghost world, or let him devour you and enter his world" (*Tropical Malady*). Overwhelmed by fear and exhaustion, in a final encounter with the tiger, the soldier chooses the second and surrenders "his spirit, his flesh, and his memories" (ibid.) (Fig. 3.15). The final confrontation and the surrender to the tiger, which is represented in a still shot of a wood-cut, seem like an allegorical withdrawal from the material world, and the unification of the lovers. Thus, as usual the queer lovers are united only in fantasy and death.

The spiritualism in the film does not mask its stake in class inequality. Just like *Amphetamine* and *Weekend*, *Tropical Malady* hints that it is only the economically privileged character, Keng, who is comfortable with his homosexuality, and it is again Keng who conceives of sexuality more like a practice of having. The utopianism in the film subtly advocates the eradication of class hierarchy and commodity fetishism along with heteronormativity.

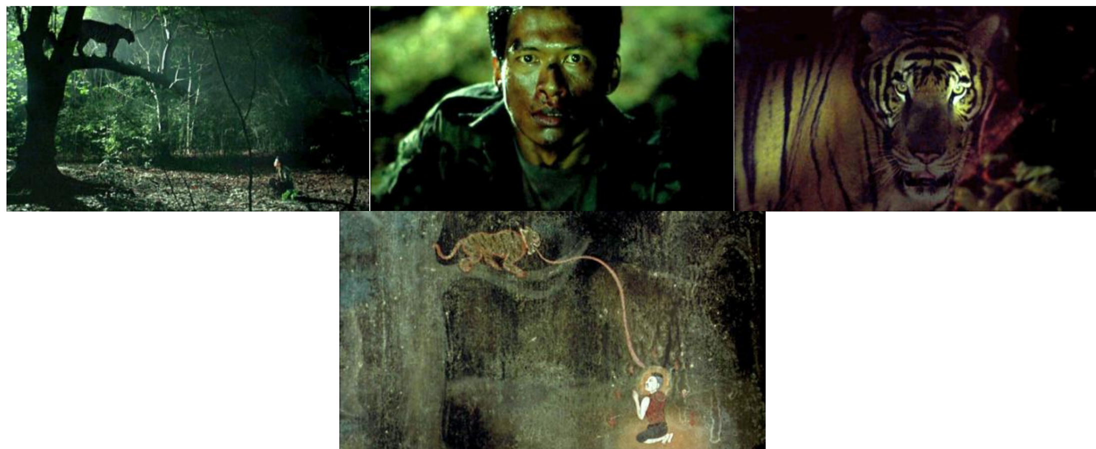

Figure 3.15 Screenshots. The final confrontation. *Tropical Malady*. © 2004 Anna Sanders Films / GMM Grammy PCL / Kick the Machine / Thoke + Moebius Film / Downtown Pictures.

3.4. Conclusion

The selection of films in this chapter has given the opportunity to examine some of the non-linear qualities and recurring themes in queer cinema, which go beyond national boundaries. It also brings together some seemingly opposite poles: the extreme (*Frisk*) and the modest (*Paris Was A Woman*); the white-cast (*The Living End*, *Edward II*, *The Hours and Times*) and the black-cast (*The Watermelon Woman*,

Tongues Untied); the occidental (*Mulholland Dr.*) and the oriental (*Tropical Malady*), and of course the gay and the lesbian.

What makes these films different than the general of mainstream examples is their complexity in form and content. They avoid clean-cut characters, sexual uniformity, sameness, and narrative resolutions. They blend genres, and undermine continuity and realism in most cases. The first group of films are also intertextual as they make allusions to queer or heterocentric narratives that came before them. The queer films in this chapter use their medium as a channel for passionate self-expression, a defiant queer visibility, and an articulation of a collective memory. More significantly, they prioritize time and image over action. In each film the spectators are "obliged to reflect on what is seen rather than merely experience it" (Burch 1986 [1979]: 504). Consequently, the films invite the spectators to perceive the cinematic image beyond preconceived "economic interests, ideological beliefs, and psychological demands" (Deleuze 1997 [1985]: 20), to which one must add sexual orientation, race, gender, and class. Their general characteristics extend to a vast array of queer films. Other notable films that present a strong engagement with time, memory, and visibility by employing at least one of the counter-narrative strategies of fantasy, sexual excess, abject, camp, genre-blending, parody, pastiche, narrative intransitivity, or revisionism include: *Blue* (1993), *Dry Kisses Only* (1990), *Flaming Ears* (1992), *Go Fish* (1994), *Grapefruit* (1989), *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000), *Jollies* (1990), *L is For the Way You Look* (1991), *Lilies* (1996), *Mano Destra* (1986), *Meeting of Two Queens* (1991), *Poison* (1991), *R.S.V.P.* (1991), *Sebastiane* (1976), *The Hours* (2002), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), and *Zero Patience* (1993).

It should also be kept in mind that in many of the films from the 1990s, the AIDS crisis and the subsequent devastation of lives may have played a direct or indi-

rect role in the disruption of narrative time and narrative space; so to speak, as Monica B. Pearl (2004) claims, a defiance of death and trauma has possibly informed the less narrative forms of queer cinema as a way of claiming control over time and history. Yet the earlier works by pioneering filmmakers such as Jean Genet, Kenneth Anger, Barbara Hammer, Paolo Pasolini, and more recent queer films that have been mentioned so far would affirm that the queer film strategies discussed in this chapter are not specific to a post-AIDS era or the 1990s; they can be observed to a certain degree also in the films made in different time periods and different parts of the world. Therefore, a broader picture of queer narrative spaces, unbound from period and place, underpins a universal attempt to create queer utopias that will surpass social, economic, geographic, ethnic, racial, sexual, and finally artistic boundaries.

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDIES FROM THE QUEER CINEMA OF THE USA

From 1996 to 2014

The case studies in this chapter provide the opportunity to take a closer look on fantasy, setting, and narrative space in the queer cinema of the United States from 1996 to 2014. Each film employs fantasy, alternative settings, or non-linear elements. The films contain themes and motifs that are specific to North American context, and they are discussed in relation to a social, historical, and theoretical background.

The first case study features *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) and *Brother to Brother* (2004) as exemplars of a common tendency in queer cinema: a revisiting of history to reclaim undermined identities, which has been discussed in the preceding chapter on the basis of world cinema. The reclaimed identities in this case are African-American gays and lesbians. *The Watermelon Woman* mixes comedy-drama and mock-documentary structures to create a cinematic utopia by challenging racial, sexual, and economic boundaries. *Brother to Brother* uses fantasy scenes and an alternative setting where the oppressed characters can find refuge and realize their ambitions outside heteronormativity as well as race and class consciousness of white and black societies. Both films are concerned with a narrative construction of a collective

African-American queer history through memories and recollections. They are involved with exposing social, economic, and professional obstacles that black queers are forced to go through. *Brother to Brother* also deals with family and peer violence as well as one inter-racial and one inter-generational relationship. More significantly, both films provide an answer to a chronic dilemma: Which comes first, blackness or queerness? They insist that the two identities are inseparable.

The Watermelon Woman and *Brother to Brother* contain multiple narrative levels, and they are perfect examples of Deleuze's notion of "crystal-image" in the sense that they blend the present ("the actual image") with the past ("the virtual image") by making two different time periods "indiscernible" through particular narrative techniques (Deleuze 1997 [1985]: 69–70). Since the narrative structure of *The Watermelon Woman* is a bit more intricate, the related discussions make a very partial use of a structuralist terminology, which is borrowed from Gérard Genette's narratology, for practical purposes. Additionally, the discussion of the subway scenes in *Brother to Brother* makes a reference to Marc Augé's arguments about non-places of supermodernity, the places that are marked with speed, transience, consumption, alienation, and anonymity, which have been explained in Chapter II.

The second case study, which focuses on *Shortbus* (2006) and *Appropriate Behavior* (2014), scrutinizes the representation of inter-personal contact in New York metropolis within a theoretical framework that draws a bit more effectively on Marc Augé's arguments as well as Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. *Appropriate Behavior* relies on a non-linear narrative structure, which is shaped with personal memories and recollections in accordance with Deleuze's notion of time-image. *Shortbus* employs a style that could be defined as magical realism, and uses a carnivalesque underground salon as a site of transgression in a similar way to *Brother to Brother*.

The main characters' inability to maintain a healthy social and sexual connection with their partners and others, and their entrapment in oedipal familialism are highlighted in the discussions of both films. In addition, the issue of cultural hybridity is at stake in *Appropriate Behavior*.

Finally, each of the four films offers ways for a breakthrough. They are also marked with hope for a better future, which is in line with José Muñoz's notions of critical utopianism and queer futurity (2009).

4.1. Black Queer Archeology in *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother*

Having the same innovative engagement with time, memory, visibility, and the shared critical utopianism of many queer films, *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother* intend at once to rewrite an undermined past, sketch out a complicated present, and imagine a promising future. The strong preoccupation with history manifests itself mostly through a curative nostalgia in both films. Archival photographs and footages of historic places of importance for African-American queers and African-American community in general are juxtaposed with present-day images and footages of the same places in both films. Accordingly, these spaces acquire an identity through memory and remembrance, and in turn they become a purveyor of collective identity through narration.

In the shadow of standard histories in which half the population of the country is missing (Zinn 2005 [1980]: 103) the filmmakers Cheryl Dunye and Rodney Evans reconstruct the past and invent their own histories by using the powerful medium of cinema to give voice and visibility to the multiple-oppressed African-American les-

bians and gays of the United States. Both films are designed to induce hope and inspiration for future generations. The filmic reconstruction of the past in these two films is to a notable extent fictional. The films' narrative space provides a realm for self-expression and regeneration in the face of repression and obliteration. They also utilize settings in certain ways that counterpose alternative spaces to segregated areas and commodity spaces. In *Brother to Brother*, the Niggerati Manor in Harlem, which was a rooming house that hosted a camaraderie of young bohemian black artists and intellectuals during the 1920s and 30s, is reenacted as a site of breakthrough with its steamy party scene and intellectual richness. The setting functions as a kind of "Guattareuzian" (Genosko 2012) territory where the characters strip off from bourgeois expectations, gender roles, race consciousness and homophobia of black and white societies. In *The Watermelon Woman* similar transgression is maintained at large by the practice of filmmaking itself. It is a cheerful mockumentary with a multilevel narrative structure, witty dialogues, and a well-crafted fake archival material.

The Watermelon Woman won the Teddy Award for best feature film in 1996 at the Berlin International Film Festival as well as several audience awards at different film festivals. *Brother to Brother* holds several jury and audience awards in different categories from international film festivals including Sundance, New York, San Francisco, and Outfest.

4.1.1. *The Watermelon Woman*

The Watermelon Woman (dir. Cheryl Dunye) centers on Cheryl (played by the director), a clerk at a video rental store in Philadelphia, who also makes home movies with her best friend and colleague Tamara (Valarie Walker) for extra money. Apart from their usual working schedule and cruising at lesbian cafés, both Cheryl and Tamara make fake tape orders under customer accounts to enjoy films of their interest while avoiding their overseeing boss. While Cheryl collects Hollywood films from the 30s and 40s that cast African-American actresses, Tamara, who says that she can barely stand today's Hollywood films "let alone that nigger mammy shit from the thirties" (*The Watermelon Woman*), is interested in films such as "Bald Black Ballbusters" (ibid.).

Cheryl's life changes one day when she comes across the most beautiful black lady in one of the films. She is a supporting actress in an old film titled *Plantation Memories*, and she is credited only as "The Watermelon Woman" (Lisa Marie Bronson) for her "mammy" role similar to that of Hattie McDaniel in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Having been upset with the fact that black women's lives are never told in history, and getting very curious about The Watermelon Woman, Cheryl decides to start a video project and document whatever she could find out about this unknown film actress to achieve her greatest ambition — to be the first black lesbian filmmaker. Working like a detective, she obtains information, archival photographs and footages from several different sources, which she shares with the spectators throughout the film. She finally manages to build up a more or less concise biographical footage, which is shown at the end of the film.

According to the biography, before getting into her first film, The Watermelon Woman, or with her real name, Fae Richards, worked as a maid while at the same time she danced at a night club at South Street, Philadelphia in 1920s. Fae met the white film director of *Plantation Memories*, Martha Page (Alexandra Juhasz), supposedly at one of the clubs, and they began a lesbian relationship. Soon Martha managed to enter Hollywood, and Fae took part in several of her films in the roles of maid or cook. Meanwhile she also starred in Cheryl's favorite film, *Plantation Memories*, as the Watermelon Woman in 1937. Fae tried to bust out of mammy roles but, of course, that was impossible for an African-American actress in those years. In 1939, she split up with Martha and moved back to Philly where she worked hard to become a film star. She did not use the name Watermelon Woman anymore, and in all her new films, she went by the name Fae Richards. She starred as a lead in all kinds of black-cast films including comedies, melodramas, and even gangster pictures. Unfortunately, she never got her chance to be a big star since black-cast films were in decline. So in the 1940s Fae started to sing again all over Philly at major clubs, and she had quite a following especially among the lesbian audience. After she stopped performing in 1957, she met June Walker (Cheryl Clarke[13]) and they lived together for twenty years until the day she died. The biggest twist of the film comes in the end credits on a title screen: "Sometimes you have to create your own history. The Watermelon Woman is a fiction. Cheryl Dunye, 1996" (*The Watemelon Woman*).

The fictional Fae Richards character and her life story constitute only a part of *The Watermelon Woman*. The film also recounts a slice of Cheryl's life, her struggles

[13] Kara Keeling (2005: 222) writes that Cheryl Clarke is "a writer whose theoretical and creative work during the late 1970s and early 1980s were part of a movement that provided a vocabulary through which a political articulation of 'black lesbian' as a critique of 'black,' 'lesbian,' 'woman,' 'patriarchy,' and 'capitalism' emerged."

to become the first black lesbian filmmaker, her fluctuating friendship with Tamara, and the failed blind dates Tamara arranges for her — one with an overly idealistic black feminist and another with Yvette (Kat Robertson), a drama queen who messes at a karaoke bar. Cheryl has also a short affair with a white lipstick lesbian named Diana (Guinevere Turner), a customer Cheryl meets and befriends at the video store. Their relationship parallels the one between Fae and Martha, and Dunye in a way compares and contrasts the experiences of two black women from two distant time periods.

The Watermelon Woman uses at least two different types of camera for different purposes. Cheryl uses a video camera, which she borrows from Tamara, to recount the life story of Fae Richards, and to shoot interviews with people who know or may not know about her. The fake archival material, which include Fae Richard's video footages and the video extract from *Plantation Memories*, and the collection of Fae's fake personal photographs, which have been created by the photographer Zoe Leonard and have been exhibited later at New York's Whitney Museum Biennial (Stockwell 1997: 53), are either shown to this video camera by Cheryl's hand or they intercut as still shots. Other than this video camera, a 16 mm camera, which is easily recognized for its better image quality, is used to capture a larger narrative context that includes Cheryl's hypothetical actual life, her funny or memorable encounters, and her struggles to make a documentary about the Watermelon Woman.

As a result, *The Watermelon Woman* consists of three narrative levels that are in tune with the principles mapped out by the French structuralist critic Gérard Genette (1980 [1972]). In the first level, which Genette calls a *diegesis*, Cheryl narrates the life story of Fae and her relationship with Martha Page; she gives information about her research progress, and she expresses her feelings and thoughts to the cam-

era. The second level, a *meta-diegesis*, in which Cheryl actively participates as the central character, revolves around Cheryl's daily activities, her social circuit, and the love affair she has with Diana. And in the third level, a *pseudo-meta-diegesis*, the spectators watch Fae's life story through still shots, photographs, video footages, and Cheryl's voiceover. (Figure 4.1)

Figure 4.1 Screenshots. (From left to right) Cheryl in the first narrative level; Diana and Cheryl in the second narrative level; Fae and Martha in the third narrative level. *The Watermelon Woman.* 1996 © Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

Unlike the first and third narratives, the camera or the point of view in the second narrative level does not belong to Cheryl (the video store clerk who tries to make a film about the Watermelon Woman); it rather belongs to a third person omnipresent narrator, the real Cheryl Dunye, or the maker of this mock-documentary. The relationship between Cheryl and Diana in the second narrative level also plays a complementary role as it gives clues about what might have happened in the less known inter-racial relationship between Fae and Martha in the third level. Finally, the three narratives culminate in a utopic time and space in which the past, the present, and the future intersect and are crystallized. The past is represented in Fae's monochromatic life narrative, which pays homage to underrepresented black women and their unfulfilled career goals; the present is represented in Cheryl's short experi-

ence that bears similar complexities but with more hope; and the future is represented through Cheryl's ambition to be the first black lesbian filmmaker in which she succeeds with her mockumentary, *The Watermelon Woman*.

As the threefold narrative structure unfolds it is seen from the beginning to the end that Dunye deliberately weaves certain racial and class-related antagonisms into her film, often in a humorous way. The first instance of this occurs in the pre-title scenes which make a spatial contrast between a wedding ceremony and Philadelphia streets. The film begins with an intertitle that reads, "Bryn Mawr, PA," an affluent suburban district west of Philadelphia, while Mozart's "Rondo from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*" plays in the background. Tamara appears with a light reflector, and Cheryl's voice is heard from behind the video camera giving directions to Tamara and warning people to not cut in while shooting. The following shots reveal that they are making a home movie of an outdoor wedding ceremony that hosts well-dressed, middle to upper class guests of different color. The families of the black groom and the white bride seem to be standing in distant parts of the yard without making any contact. When the video recording finishes, the camera shifts to the 16 mm, and Sheryl and Tamara are seen sharing the revenue. In the meantime, Cheryl asks Tamara whether she could use the equipment at the weekend for her project. Tamara reminds her that she wants it for the third time in a row without shooting anything, then they begin to argue as Tamara finds out that her cut is fifty dollars short.

> CHERYL: You remember what Rose and Guin said in the *Go Fish* book? "If you wanna make a film, you gotta make some sacrifices." And besides, we have to make money payments on the camera. Ticket to Hollywood baby!
> TAMARA: Excuse you. I'm not like into making some sacrifices for some quote unquote future alright? I wanna take Stacey out this weekend for dinner, and for that I need cash today.
> CHERYL: I will lend you some money.

TAMARA: You won't lend me ma own damn money like you are some white people in a bank. […]
(*The Watermelon Woman*).

After a wipe transition, the scene cuts to the streets of Philadelphia. This time jazz rhythms ("Hot Music" by SoHo) are heard in the background, and from the voices it is understood that Tamara is shooting with the video camera from the front seat of a car, which again causes an argument between the two as Cheryl thinks that the wedding people will not want such a "mess" in their video. Tamara tries to justify her point by claiming that the "urban realism" will be a nice contrast. She is actually right as the blurry and canted framing of the streets, the chaotic appearance of pedestrians, commercial and residential sites of the metropolitan Philadelphia indeed make a contrast with the neat camera perspective and the bourgeois decorum in the *mise-en-scène* of the wedding scene at Bryn Mawr, which represents a domain of "segregation" and "familial reproduction" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 104, 71). Cheryl's objection is understandable too since Tamara's footage would surely be incongruent within the video of the wedding ceremony, which is meant to be a celebratory memorandum. (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Screenshots. The wedding scene at the top, and the Philadelphia streets at the bottom. *The Watermelon Woman.* 1996 © Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

This kind of spatial contrasts occur in other scenes as well; for instance, between Cheryl's apartment and Diana's spacious residential loft (Figure 4.3–4.4). Also in the public library and C.L.I.T. (Center for Lesbian Info and Technology) in New York, where Cheryl does research for her project, the materials related to African-American people are stored in a separate place. They are not even properly referenced in the library's computer database, and in C.L.I.T. they are kept in a bunch of boxes in a highly disorganized fashion. Both places, by the way, are parodied through the characters of the tactless librarian and the archivist "sister" at C.L.I.T. who talks about irrelevant things in a silly diplomatic manner, and throws Cheryl out for recording "confidential material" (*The Watermelon Woman*). And in another scene Cheryl gets arrested in the street by two policemen (one is white, the other is black) who, by looking at her color and butch outfit, assume that she is a boy, and that her video camera is stolen.

Figure 4.3 Screenshot. Diana's loft. *The Watermelon Woman.* © 1996 Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

The real racial differences arise, though, after Diana joins the narrative. The sub-story of Cheryl and Diana basically functions to make the spectator dwell upon

Diana's privileged whiteness. During a dinner party at Cheryl's place, Diana acts in a snobbish way in front of Tamara and Tamara's girlfriend, Stacey (Jocelyn Taylor) (Fig. 4.4). She grabs Tamara's cigarette from her hand without asking for permission; she likes to talk about herself, and be the center of attention. As a daughter of a diplomat, she has travelled all around the world, and she has come to Philadelphia, "the city of brotherly love" (*The Watermelon Woman*) because she is tired of pursuing several degrees and of her bourgeois lifestyle in Chicago. She also gets herself involved in Cheryl's project by arranging an interview with Martha Page's younger sister, Mrs. Page-Fletcher (Patricia Ellis), via her contacts in a casting agency. However, the meeting in Mrs. Page-Fletcher's luxurious place becomes a disappointment as Mrs. Page-Fletcher looks down on Fae and all the other African-Americans her sister employed. What is more, although her sister's lesbianism was a known fact, Mrs. Page-Fletcher denies it and gets mad when Cheryl mentions the subject. Diana, in the meantime, remains silent. Diana's relationship with Cheryl also causes a coldness between Cheryl and Tamara, which comes onto the surface during a scene in which the two sit on the stairs and chat about their personal lives while sharing a roll of joint (Fig. 4.5):

> TAMARA: We have been going out for a while [with Stacey] and I don't even have the keys to her place.
> CHERYL: Really??? Diana gave me the keys to her place last week.
> TAMARA: I did not invite you over here to talk about your wannabe black girlfriend.
> CHERYL: Tamara, Diana doesn't wanna be black. I mean I'm getting into her, can't you see that?
> TAMARA: All I see is once again you are going out with a white girl acting like she wants to be black, and you are being a black girl acting like she wanna be white. I mean what's up with you Cheryl, you don't like the color of your skin nowadays?

CHERYL: Tamara, I'm black. And who is to say that dating somebody white doesn't make me black? I mean who is to say anything about who I fuck in the goddamn first place?
TAMARA: Stacey says Diana is into chocolate. Come on Cheryl, she lives in that big loft all by herself, and volunteers — *vol-un-teers* — acts like some agency that works for not only poor kids but poor black kids, what's up with that Cheryl?
(*The Watermelon Woman*).

Figure 4.4 Screenshots. (From left to right) Stacey, Tamara, and Diana during the dinner party.

Figure 4.5 Screenshot. Tamara and Cheryl. *The Watermelon Woman.* © 1996 Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

Tamara actually implies that Diana is not intimate in her feelings towards Cheryl, and her interest in Cheryl only conceals a sexual fetish for black bodies. For Diana, Cheryl may be representing an exotically "different type of sexuality, perhaps more

libertine and less guilt-ridden" (Said 1978: 190), which is also outside the "web of legal, moral, even political and economic obligations of a detailed and certainly encumbering sort" (ibid.). In this regard, for Tamara and Stacey, Diana's perception of Cheryl is probably similar to the male European colonizer's perception of the oriental woman. Possibly, if one may venture to put it that way, she regards Cheryl as "less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity" (ibid.) despite the fact that Cheryl's personality is exactly the opposite — she is very articulate, selective, and sensitive to depth and intimacy.

In fact, one does not need to go as far as the orientalist writings to make assumptions about Diana's unconscious motives. While sharing her personal experiences as a black woman about how she has struggled to ward off sexual abuse almost in her entire life, Toni Bell, a web content writer, notes:

> Black women and our bodies were hypersexualized to justify white men raping us on the slave ships, on the plantation, and during Jim Crow. In fact, as in any war-torn country, rape was used [as] a method to terrorize black women and their families well through the Civil Rights era. What was natural to our bodies — our hair, our lips, our hips, our thighs — was deemed dark and lascivious and worthy of plunder. Black women were the original poster children for slut shaming. (Bell 2015: online).

Black women have been decrying oppression for a long time through rallies, boycotts, college sit-ins against violence, and milestone acts of civil disobedience such as the Rosa Parks event and the occupation of a Montgomery rape trial, all of which have played a pivotal role to ignite the Civil Rights Movement (McGuire 2011). Still, there is a considerable body of stereotypical images in Hollywood, which causes controversy among critics. While some people such as the above web writer sternly reject such images by saying that they do not represent black women at all, some

others including Sheri Parks (2013) and Dunye reclaim and rewrite one of these Hollywood stereotypes, the mammy.

In the black-and-white *Plantation Memories* clip that Cheryl shows on a TV screen, Elsie, the mammy character who is played by the Watermelon Woman, is worried about her mistress, who is weeping under a tree for a missing Master Charles (Fig 4.6). Elsie tries to console her mistress by telling that she is sure Master Charles is coming back because she prayed to god all night long and in the morning a little angel has told her that he is coming. According to Parks, the representation of mammy as a subservient, caregiving, and consoling figure "was made to fulfill the wishes of white slave owners for happy, loving slaves" as part of their pro-slavery propaganda (2013: 9); however, Parks adds, "there are few historical instances of women like her" (ibid.). And unlike the stereotypical mammy type that is defined against the white female lead character, "[h]istorical Mammies [*sic*] were a varied lot" (ibid.: 111). In relation to the bandana worn by the mammy figure, Parks writes that far from being a symbol of subservience, "the head cloth was an African vestige, like the Yoruba head tie, and black slave women wore it as a symbol of status" sometimes with "meanings of revolutionary resistance" (ibid.: 79) (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.6 (Left) Behind the scenes of the fake "Plantation Memories" clip. © 2015 Cheryl Dunye. (Right) Screenshot. The finished version that Cheryl shows in the video player during the film. *The Watermelon Woman*. © 1996 Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

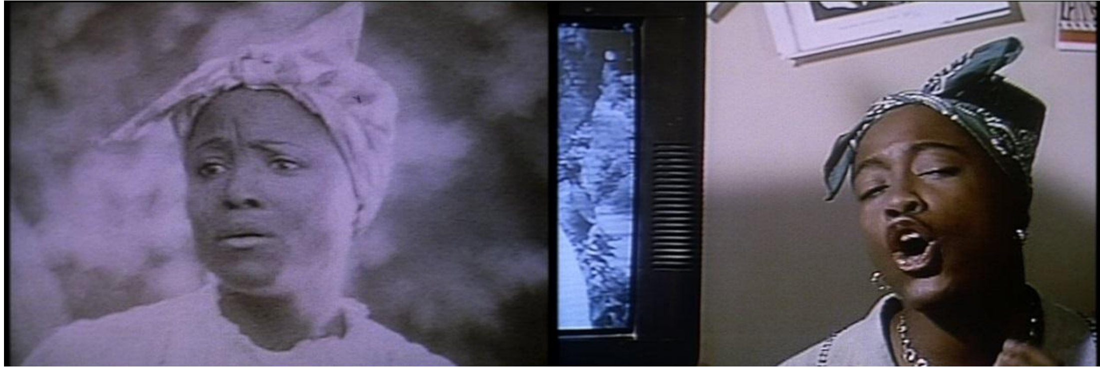

Figure 4.7 Screenshots. (Left) The Watermelon Woman in the fake *Plantation Memories* clip. (Right) Wearing the same front-tied bandana á la Rosie the Riveter, Cheryl playfully lip-syncs the Watermelon Woman as she plays the clip on the TV set next to her. *The Watermelon Woman.* © 1996 Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

Accordingly, in another b/w clip that Cheryl plays, the Watermelon Woman slaps a mulatto girl who denies her black heritage and wishes to fit into the white people's world. Fae's impersonation of the mammy in this other clip is not necessarily stereotypical. At this point, Cheryl gives the floor to the academic Camille Paglia who reinterprets the mammy in an intercutting mock-interview:

> I really am distressed a lot with the tone of recent African-American scholarship. It tries to say about the mammy that her figure is desexualizing, degrading, dehumanizing, and this seems to me so utterly wrong. Large woman is a symbol of abundance, fertility; it is a kind of goddess figure. Even the presence of mammy in the kitchen, it seems to me, has been misinterpreted: the woman in the kitchen is a slave, a servant, a subordinate. My Italian grandmothers never left the kitchen; in fact, this is why I dedicated my first book to them, and Hattie McDaniel is a spitting image of my grandmother in her style, her attitude, her voracity, so it brings tears to my eyes. The Watermelon Woman, it seems to me, is another image that has been misinterpreted by a lot of black commentary. The great extended Italian family get-togethers I remember as a child ended with the men bringing out a watermelon, and ritualistically cutting and distributing the pieces to everyone, almost like the Communion service. And I really dislike this kind of reductionism of a picture, let's say, of a small black boy with a watermelon, smiling broadly over it, looking at that as negative. Why is that not, instead, a symbol of joy and pleasure and fruitfulness? After all, a piece of watermelon has the colors of the Italian flag — red, white and green. I think that if

> the watermelon symbolizes African-American culture rightly so, because look what white middle class feminism stands for, anorexia and bulimia. (*The Watermelon Woman* 1996).

And when Cheryl mentions Fae's affair with Martha Page, Paglia is very surprised considering the impossibility of an interracial, let alone a lesbian relationship at the time.

What happened between Fae and Martha remains a mystery in the context of the film; however, it is still possible to make inferences about it by examining certain dynamics in the present-day relationship between Cheryl and Diana. From what Cheryl tells to the camera it is understood that she is a bit confused about her feelings towards Diana after their first sex:

> I'm still in shock over the whole "having sex with Diana" thing. I've never done anything like this before, let me assure you. The hip-swinging lesbian style is not my forte. [*A cheerful, slow motion video of Diana and Cheryl cuts in*]. I'm just an old-fashioned girl trying to keep up with the times but Diana just threw me for a loop, I mean she is not my type but I liked it. Maybe it will all have to do with this film project, with this finally coming together — Hollywood, the Watermelon Woman, Fae Richards, and Diana. (*The Watermelon Woman*).

The sex scene between Cheryl and Diana, which Jeannine DeLombard from the *Philadelphia City Paper* has described at the time as "the hottest dyke sex scene ever recorded on celluloid" (1996: online), manages to be artsy, lesbian, and sensual at once.[14] In a series of tracking close-shots the hands of different colors join, the legs are entwined, the tongues touch, and the two bodies fuse into each other while "Skin," a song by Leslie Winer, plays in the soundtrack: "I ain't afraid of where you

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[14] Yet in an update note DeLombard writes that her description has been taken out of context and cited everywhere providing an excuse for the conservative journalists and politicians to launch another attack on the National Endowment for the Arts, which partially funded Cheryl Dunye's film (DeLombard 1996: online).

come from / I ain’t afraid of where you’ve been / I ain’t afraid of what you’re getting at / I ain’t afraid of your skin” (*The Watermelon Woman*) (Fig. 4.8).

Figure 4.8 Screenshot. *The Watermelon Woman*. © 1996 Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

However, a dialogue, which takes place later in the film between the two when they are playing a game in bed, makes one think that Tamara’s judgment about Diana might be true to some extent:

> DIANA *is singing in a low soft voice*.
> CHERYL: What’s that, *The Sound of Music*?
> DIANA: No, it’s “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.”
> CHERYL: Sing another one.
> DIANA: I can’t just sing something off the top of my head.
> CHERYL: Come on, I love the way you sing.
> DIANA *sings another one*.
> CHERYL: Wait wait wait… Where did you learn that one?
> DIANA: Wasn’t it the theme song at your prom?
> CHERYL: Diana darling, remember I’m black? And the theme song at my prom was… “Sail On” by Commodores.
> DIANA: My boyfriend was black, and he knew all the words.
> CHERYL: You had a black boyfriend?
> DIANA: I had two… no actually three black boyfriends.
> CHERYL *in surprise*: What did your parents say?

DIANA: Nothing, they are liberal hippie types. Actually my father's sister's first husband was an ex-Panther, his name was Tyrone Washington.
CHERYL *laughs mockingly*.
DIANA: What is so funny?
CHERYL: You are such a mess.
DIANA: What does that mean?
CHERYL: Nothing. I have to go and work on the project.
DIANA: Project can wait Cheryl, first tell me what you meant by that?
CHERYL: I don't know what I meant. I just have to go work on the project, OK?
DIANA: This project is really becoming a crutch.
CHERYL: Diana, if you want me to stay, you don't have to mention the project.
DIANA: Just go, I'll talk to you later.
(*The Watermelon Woman*).

The dialogue affirms that Diana is "into chocolate," and it also hints that she takes pride in her philanthropic interaction and sympathy with African-Americans, which maybe functions to highlight her distinguished upbringing. Her attitude, which is probably familiar to minorities all around the world, is an extension of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls "color-blind racism," a contemporary way of preserving the white privilege. What makes this new socially humanistic ("I had two black friends in the past, and they were excellent"), and economically liberal and meritocratic ("blacks can have the same opportunity as long as they work hard") post-Civil Rights racism different than the earlier Jim Crow era is that the white actors are not even aware of being offensive.

Nevertheless, Cheryl's positive attitude towards Diana does not change even after they break up. And Dunye, by the way, does not skip to show the other side of the coin: Tamara's unfriendly treatment of Annie (Shelley Olivier), a non-black co-worker who joins the film later on, and her insistence to fix Cheryl up exclusively with black women are presented as signs of prejudices against non-blacks. The same excluding attitude is also observed in June Walker, Fae's long-term companion after

Martha Page (Figure 4.9). By tracking down a signature, which Cheryl discovers behind one of Fae's photos in the C.L.I.T. archive, she manages to make contact with June, and arranges an interview. However, they cannot meet up since June is hospitalized leaving a box of photographs and a letter for Cheryl at her next door neighbor. In a voiceover message she tells Cheryl that she should not include Martha Page in her film, because she was a mean white woman, and that she should only be giving the history of her own people before they disappear. After all, June tells Cheryl, "Fae is the one who paved the way for kids like you to run around making movies about the past, and if you are really in the family, you better understand that our family will always only have each other" (*The Watermelon Woman*). This is actually the attitude which Dunye criticizes in her film. She gives her response to June in the next scene by speaking to the camera:

> I know she [Fae] meant the world to you but she also meant the world to me, and those worlds are different. But the moments she shared with you, the life she had with Martha on and off the screen, those are precious moments, and nobody can change that. What she means to me, a twenty-five-year-old black woman, means something else. It means hope, it means inspiration, it means possibility, it means history. And most importantly what I understand is that I'm gonna be the one who says "I am a black lesbian filmmaker" who is just beginning but I'm gonna say a lot more, and I have a lot more work to do. (*The Watermelon Woman* 1996).

Figure 4.9 Screenshot. Fae and June. *The Watermelon Woman.* © 1996 Cheryl Dunye / Dancing Girl.

What Dunye aims to do here is actually reversing the white filmmaker and black actress hierarchy by putting herself as an underrepresented individual in the privileged position. Cheryl's affair with Diana is a phase, a memory, albeit a valuable one, and it is also a pretext. When she describes her affair with Diana, Cheryl lightly tells the spectators that although Diana is not her type, she liked it. When it is thought in combination with the third narrative level, it is easy to assume that Martha would probably describe her relationship with Fae in the same way. As a result, in addition to playing with conventional documentary structures, Dunye reverses the racial and sexual hierarchies in the film industry, and she also entertains certain dynamics that are likely to occur in an interracial relationship.

4.1.2. *Brother to Brother*

Brother to Brother resembles *The Watermelon Woman* in many ways. The same ambition to construct a future upon the past, and the same need to express the ordeals of black queer experience are determining factors in the story and narrativization. Just like *The Watermelon Woman*, *Brother to Brother* is occupied with the past and the future. In this regard, it, too, runs counter to the sense of time in non-places: "what reigns in non-places," Augé argues, "is not past or future, but actuality, the urgency of the present moment" (Augé 1995: 104).

The black and white archival material of *The Watermelon Woman* gives way to intercutting period-style movie segments in *Brother to Brother*, which recreate an important era in African-American queer history, the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to creating a queer narrative space, *Brother to Brother* contains a utopic setting

as a site of transgression for the queer characters. It differs from *The Watermelon Woman* also in terms of genre as it falls into the category of drama.

Brother to Brother (dir. Rodney Evans) chronicles an uneasy period in Perry's (Anthony Mackie) life, a twenty-seven-year-old art student who lives in Brooklyn. Perry is rejected by his parents because of his homosexuality, and he is also subject to homophobia from his black peers except his straight best friend, Marcus (Lawrence Gilliard Jr.). Amid all the difficulties in his daily life, and his occasional hook-ups, Perry is in search of a meaningful relationship to break out of his isolation. His short affair with Jim (Alex Burns), a white classmate, ends in the same way as Cheryl's affair with Diana in *The Watermelon Woman*. He gets up in a hurry and abruptly leaves the room during a bedroom chat when Jim makes a racist remark that is meant to be a compliment: "I love your skin. It's so smooth. And your lips. You are so fucking beautiful. And you have the sweetest black ass that I have ever seen" (*Brother to Brother*; Fig. 4.10).

Figure 4.10 Screenshots. Perry and Jim. *Brother to Brother*. © 2004 Brother to Brother Productions, LLC.

However, Perry finds a new type of connection to the outside world thanks to his chance encounter with the writer and painter Richard Bruce Nugent (Roger Rob-

inson and Duane Boutté [young Bruce]), who is now old and living in a homeless shelter where Perry works as a receptionist. (Fig. 4.11). The two stroll the streets of Harlem to which Perry has not been exposed before, and they spend time together in the dilapidated building of Niggerati Manor, which was once the meeting point for the rebellious African-American *poètes maudits* of the Harlem Renaissance including Wallace Thurman (Ray Ford), Langston Hughes (Daniel Sunjata), Zora Neale Hurston (Aunjanue Ellis), Aaron Douglas (Leith M. Burke), and Bruce Nugent. While Nugent takes pleasure in being reminded of the glory days of the Harlem Renaissance and his intimate friendship with the writer and editor Wallace Thurman, Perry discovers the hidden treasures of the past, which he is unknowingly a part of.

Figure 4.11 Screenshots. Perry and Bruce. *Brother to Brother*. © 2004 Brother to Brother Productions, LLC.

The fictional encounter between Perry and Bruce Nugent in the final days of Bruce's life culminates in a remembrance of the past as well as an exchange of hope and inspiration between the two black gay men from different generations. Bruce's retelling of his memories is visualized with black-and-white reenactments of the roaring 20s, and they are juxtaposed with color shots that center on Perry's present-day experiences. Since they face similar hardships and have similar ideals, a symbi-

otic relationship is established between the two characters. At certain moments of the film when Perry is carried away with Bruce's memories and begins to see the past through the eye of Bruce's mind, the film blends the past and the present with shot/reverse-shot sequences and smooth transitions between monochrome and color.

The black-and-white shots also open up a crack in the narrative time. The nostalgic flashbacks and archival footages present an alternative world in which friendships are more intimate, the life is more meaningful, and art is not commodified. They also make a stark contrast with the subway scenes and the fast-motion time-warp shots in the subway station. The ghost-like images of commuters in rush hours in this non-place depict a world "surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Augé 1995 [1992]: 78). In addition to the subway shots the film opens with a view of Manhattan skyline taken from the train window while Perry is passing through the Brooklyn Bridge, and the same view, this time at night, is repeated towards the end. Paula Massood argues that in films such as Spike Lee's *Clockers* (1995) "the train references the related tropes of mobility and entrapment, two of the most recurrent themes in African American cultural production in the twentieth century and in African American films from this time period" (Massood 2003: 200 quoted in Christian 2010: 191, n.5). (Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12 Screenshots. Subway scenes at the top. Harlem and Niggerati Manor at the bottom. *Brother to Brother*. © 2004 Brother to Brother Productions, LLC.

Brother to Brother opts for a narrative strategy similar to *The Watermelon Woman*; the film creates a utopic past and heroes for role models. The main bulk of the screenplay is thus reserved for the queer characters' struggles to survive in a homophobic, patriarchal, racist, and classist society. At this point, art and writing become a lifebuoy, a theme that is also employed in the 2011 film, *Pariah*, which is about a black lesbian teenager who is expelled from her parents' home like Perry, and who achieves self-realization through writing as Perry does. Concomitantly, the close circuit of artists in *Brother to Brother* resists the surrounding hostility and financial insecurity to be what they really are and to express themselves in the way they want to. Together they prepare *Fire!!*, a literary magazine, on a very low budget, which helps to exhibit their artistic and political stance. (Fig. 4.13). Their ambition, which becomes a guideline for future African-American queer intellectuals, is succinctly expressed in the film by Wallace Thurman in the wake of the first and only issue of *Fire!!*:

> We of the younger generation are like all other human beings in a period of transition. We are eternally discovering things about ourselves and our environments which our elders have been at pains to hide. They have been so busy justifying their presence in a hostile, racist environment that they've ceased to be human beings. With the new magazine, we will cease to look for respectability in the white person's eyes. We will express the beauty and ugliness of our individual selves for ourselves. If anything is deemed disturbing or pornographic, then so much the better. (*Brother to Brother*).

As if to dump Du Bois (1903b) and Alain Locke's (1986 [1925]) well-educated, dignified, and militant "New Negro" prototype, they give primacy to representations of "queers and whores," which Langston and Bruce describe as "two types of people that upstanding Negroes want no part of" (*Brother to Brother*). By the same token, even the works of Carl Van Vechten, a white patron of the Harlem Renaissance

Figure 4.13 Screenshots. *Brother to Brother*. © 2004 Brother to Brother Productions, LLC.

whose homoerotic photography has fetishized nude black bodies under a colonialist gaze, is reenacted during a party scene, and it is embraced as a cultural heritage from an alternative perspective. According to Leon Coleman, Vechten "viewed the Negro lower class as unaffected by the oppressive weight of hypocrisy and sham which characterized white civilization and inhibited white enjoyment of life" (1998: 115–6).

The main motive behind the group's progressive outbreak is a refusal of seeking ingratiation with what Zora calls "white folks and bourgeois Negros" (*Brother to Brother*), both of which are stricken by elitism and color hierarchy (Billingsley 1968: 129–30, Graham 1999: 377). In other words, they reject to follow what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls "politics of respectability" (1993). Higginbotham's arguments focuses on black Baptist women's strategy of seeking equality by a strong adherence to white and middle-class values to show that black women are also worthy of rights. However, politics of respectability has in fact a more widespread presence among black liberation struggles. Kali Gross writes:

> Historically, as a form of resistance to the negative stigmas and caricatures about their morality, African Americans adopted a "politics of respectability." Claiming respectability through manners and morality furnished an avenue for

> African Americans to assert the will and agency to redefine themselves outside the prevailing racist discourses. Although many deployed the politics of respectability as a form resistance, its ideological nature constituted a deliberate concession to mainstream societal values. The self-imposed adherence to respectability that permeated African American women's lives, as well as African American culture, also later impacted African American activism and the course of scholarship in African American Studies. This strict adherence to what is socially deemed "respectable" has resulted in African American scholars' confining their scholarship on African Americans to often the most "heroic," and the most successful attributes in African American culture; it has also resulted in the proliferation of analyses which can be characterized as culturally defensive, patriarchal, and heterosexist. (Gross 1997: online).

Politics of respectability also lays the foundation for the heteronormative construction of blackness inside the African-American community, and hence for the disavowal of black queers in African-American history and scholarship. In his foundational essay, "Brother to Brother: Words from the Heart," to which the film owes its title (just like the musical refrain in Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied*), Joseph Beam discusses the disavowal of black queer reality by putting the notion of home in the center of his argument:

> When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community: the Black press, the Black church, Black academicians, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where is my reflection? I am most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or I am tolerated if I am silent and inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply. (Beam 1986: 231).

As can be inferred from Beam's words, with respect to the politics of respectability, the notions of home and family play a central role in the crucifixion of queers within the African-American society. While for an heterosexual African-American, home is more likely to be "a place of refuge and escape" (Holland 2005: xii), for an African-American queer home is painfully a site of repression and closet. In this regard, it is

no surprise that when Essex Hemphill defiantly criticizes the erasure of homosexuality from the African-American history in his satirically titled essay "Loyalty," he chooses "home" as his primary destination:

> We will not go away with our issues of sexuality. We are coming home. […] I can't become a whole man simply on what is fed to me: watered-down versions of Black life in America. I need the ass-splitting truth to be told, so I will have something pure to emulate, a reason to remain loyal. (Hemphill 2000 [1992]: 70).

Dwight McBride notes that Hemphill's defiant expression "coming home" posits the fact that the heterosexist construction of blackness depends upon the separation of black queers from the location of home. "This rendering of home as a site of contestation," McBride writes:

> as opposed to the "welcome table" or "comforting" characterization of home associated with the most dominant, public, and politically salient renderings of the African American community—signals the terms of the relationship of black queer subjectivity to African American identity for Hemphill. (McBride 2005: 70).

The separation of black queers from the location of home and family also resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's arguments about Oedipus, a name they adopt to define the principle repression behind the formation of social and economic structures of modern civilization. Deleuze and Guattari note that Oedipus depends on nationalistic, religious, and racist sentiments, which surpass familial ties: being grounded upon a segregation principle, Oedipus entails "an enormous archaism, an incarnation of the race in person or in spirit: yes, I am one of you" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 104). Therefore, the dismissal of queerness from the domain of nuclear family, and the violence against black homosexuals in the name of racial solidarity are

preconditions for the construction of blackness. The Harlem group and Perry are expelled from home because they reject to partake in oedipal familialism. They occupy "those regions of the orphan unconscious—indeed 'beyond all law'—where the problem of Oedipus can no longer even be raised" (ibid.: 81–82). Instead of a hierarchical and segregating familialism, they form "extended filiations" and "lateral alliances" (ibid.: 160) like the families of the Harlem drag ball scene in *Paris is Burning*. In a symbolic scene of *Brother to Brother*, when the Harlemites are cornered and spat upon for betraying their family by a mob of middle-class blacks, who burns a copy of *Fire!!* calling it smut and filth, Zora responds by saying, "don't talk about my family, because we are family" (*Brother to Brother*, 2001). Consequently, as Kara Keeling explains,

> 'official' representations of black subjectivity insist that 'black' is essentially macho, masculine, heterosexual, and ultimately, amenable to functioning smoothly as part of the moral fabric of a nation held together in large part by the ties that bind the nuclear family (2005: 216).[15]

In other words, non-heteronormative "desire is shamed, stupefied, it is placed in a situation without exit, it is easily persuaded to deny "itself" in the name of the more important interests of civilization" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 120). Perhaps an even more damaging outcome of the patriarchal and heterosexist construction of blackness is that it incidentally perpetuates certain stereotypes of straight black men: "heterosexually deviant (overly sexual; potential rapists) and heterosexually irresponsible (jobless fathers of children out of wedlock)" (Carbado 2005: 199).

The film touches upon the same problem in a clever way by designing a fictional conversation that brings two important figures of the Civil Rights Movement

[15] Frances Negrón-Muntaner claims that a partly similar masculine discourse is at work in Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied*, too (1995: 264).

face-to-face, James Baldwin (Lance Reddick), an openly gay black writer, and Eldridge Cleaver (Chad Coleman), a chief member of the Black Panthers. (Fig. 4.14). The heated debate is presented as a video project that Perry shows in class, and it is intercut with archival footages of anti-racist demonstrations, police brutality, and segregated public spaces.

> BALDWIN: I picked up a newspaper in Paris and your face was there. And I looked around at this French café and thought, "what the hell am I doing here?" Struggles going down and I'm thinking about white America's race problem from overseas. I bought a plane ticket the next day.
> CLEAVER: We wanted fundamental irrevocable liberation. I looked closer at your words, and I knew you weren't with it, man. You hated black folks.
> BALDWIN: Some of the very people whose liberation I was fighting for did not want me there. I was spat upon because of something I could not control, because I'm a homosexual. When white people criticized me, it sent me into heated, clear articulation. But when black people criticized me, it really made me want to break down and cry.
> CLEAVER: The relationship between black and white in America is a power struggle. It's there every day, in each interpersonal relationship.
> BALDWIN: I know about white men and black men. I've been menaced by both.
> CLEAVER: That's right, and the psychic distance between love and hate is the same as the physical distance between a smile and a sneer.
> BALDWIN: What did I ever do to you?
> CLEAVER: You let the white man fuck you in the ass! Now, what does that make you? Huh? That makes you the lowest scum on the earth.
> BALDWIN: And who gives you the right to judge?
> CLEAVER: I'll show you my right, motherfucker.
> (*Brother to Brother*).

The confrontation terminates with Cleaver throwing a chair and coming at Baldwin. The impersonation of Cleaver, who is apparently chosen to represent the masculine vein in the Civil Rights movement, is particularly interesting. Other than his leadership in the Black Panther Party, which made him "a symbol of black rebellion in the turbulent 1960's" (Kifner 1998: online), Cleaver is also known for his biting autobi-

Figure 4.14 Screenshots. James Baldwin (Lance Reddick) and Eldridge Cleaver (Chad Coleman). *Brother to Brother*. © 2004 Brother to Brother Productions, LLC.

ography, *Soul on Ice* (1968), which he wrote at Folsom state prison, where he was doing time for rape. Although at the time of its publication Soul on Ice “was hailed as an authentic voice of black rage in a white-ruled world” (ibid.), the kind of masculine discourse that Hemphill, Baldwin, and several other scholars have criticized can be felt throughout Cleaver’s memoir. “We shall have our manhood,” he writes in the end of Part I, “[w]e shall have it or the earth will be leveled by our attempts to gain it” (Cleaver 1991 [1968]: 84). In one of the most jolting passages of the book, where he admits and regrets his past wrongdoings, the masculine tone is even more accurate:

> I became a rapist. To refine my technique and *modus operandi*, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto—in the black ghetto where dark and vicious deeds appear not as aberrations or deviations from the norm, but as part of the sufficiency of the Evil of the day—and when I considered myself smooth enough, I crossed the tracks and sought out white prey. I did this consciously, deliberately, willfully, methodically—though looking back I see that I was in a frantic, wild, and completely abandoned frame of mind.
>
> Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women—and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge. (Cleaver 1991 [1968]: 33).

Despite the masculine tone, Cleaver shares the same desire for self-expression through writing with Perry and the real Baldwin. While Perry says, "with words and images, I could convey the truth of my experience, putting it down and passing it on" (*Brother to Brother*), Cleaver writes in *Soul on Ice*, "[m]y pride as a man dissolved and my whole fragile moral structure seemed to collapse, completely shattered. That is why I started to write. To save myself" (1991 [1968]: 34). Writing for Cleaver is an act of purgation, and a restoration of manhood while for Baldwin and Perry it is a matter of survival, and a defiant utterance of existence. Baldwin has effectively used homosexuality in his literary works such as *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962), and *Just Above My Head* (1979). His fiction has fueled critical readings that pose a challenge to the construction of American masculinity and nationality that are based on binarisms, and as Mae Henderson tells, on "illusions, deceptions, stereotypes, and hypocrisies that many Americans accept without question" (2005: 319).

Hence, the film constructs a polarity between the two figures. The fictional conversation is meant to be a confrontation of direct opposites, and a clash of discourses. When Perry mentions earlier that Baldwin was silenced in the movement, two black men in the class responds by saying that Baldwin's sexuality had nothing to do with black political struggle; and in parallel with what Cleaver tells in the fictional conversation, one of them, Rashan (Billoah Greene), also adds, "we're talking about activism and political struggle, not what people do with their sex organs. If you like to take it up the ass, that's your business" (*Brother to Brother*). (Fig. 4.15). Later, Rashan leads a mob that ambushes Perry in the street at night beating him almost to death.

Figure 4.15 Screenshots. *Brother to Brother*. © 2004 Brother to Brother Productions, LLC.

However, this sterile characterization in the film may not quite match the reality. Although Baldwin's outing and works have certainly been a significant step in African-American queer activism and scholarship, he had a somewhat complicated relation to queer sexuality. As an African-American spokesperson and intellectual, Baldwin has arguably invested more in his blackness and maleness than "his specificity, his sexuality, and his difference" (McBride 2005: 77). At times he even succumbed to the heteronormative discourse inherent in black anti-racist movement at interviews and public speeches, because after all "in order to be the representative race man, one must be both heterosexual and male" (ibid.). Sexuality for him, on the other hand, was an insignificant difference, a matter of love (ibid.: 76), which belonged to the domain of private bedroom (Wallace 2005: 277). Of course this is not to deny Baldwin's significant contribution to the recognition and visibility of black queers. Yet, he may not be the ideal candidate for a leading black gay activist (and maybe Cleaver's personality is not that sterile either). As a result, filmmaker Rodney Evans creates his own heroes just as Cheryl Dunye does. Both filmmakers create their own histories, that is, a quintessentially black queer history.

Baldwin and the Harlem group's choices and experiences parallel Perry's in many ways. For instance, just as Wallace and Zora turn down a white publisher's

demand to include marketable elements in their fiction such as drugs, danger, sex, and violence, or to write in plain English rather than African-American dialect, Perry turns down a white gallery owner's request to make his paintings more accessible. They all reject to make concessions to what the public wants. As a result, they cannot have their works published. This way the film also highlights a still-present problem that puts pressure on the spreading of queer related artwork. Jewelle Gomez calls attention to this problem in her article "But some of us are brave lesbians" (2005), in which she discusses how small companies that publish lesbian-related fiction are forced to shut down one by one because of incompatibility with market demands. Gomez writes:

> Marketing executives at commercial publishers are interested in black queer characters who are singular, whose sexuality is marginal or ambivalent, and who are in transition, or tragic, or even better—comic. […] [T]his approach not only makes black lesbians one-dimensional but also ensures that the stereotypes about lesbian life and culture are reinforced. The world of social organizations, literary magazines, cultural events, political actions, and music festivals that black lesbians have helped to create remain invisible. (Gomez 2005: 293).

The Harlem Renaissance group face similar demands from the publishers, but they do not collaborate. Besides, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) prevents *Fire!!* to be displayed in the newsstands because of public complaints. Despite everything they are never discouraged. Even the negative reviews they receive from authoritative critics following the publication of *Fire!!* do not stop them. Instead of moaning, they mock and laugh at the high-brow gibberish and labelism written by the critics. Then they go and celebrate the publication of the first issue of *Fire!!* by singing and reading out each other's work amid the disapproving looks of black middle-class diners at a restaurant.

The Harlem group and Perry's decisiveness to protect their art from turning into business is not shared by Perry's straight best friend, Marcus, who is an amateur poet and performer. When a white spectator comes to congratulate Marcus after his performance in Nuyorican Poets Café, he gives him the cold shoulder, and calls him "Caucasoids" behind his back. However, Marcus is unusually kind to the white gallery owner who tries to arrange a meeting with Perry. It seems that Marcus is on good terms with "Caucasoids" as long as they provide job and opportunity; but now it is Perry who gives the cold shoulder since he does not want his work to be turned into commodity. A similar self-interestedness is observed in Langston in the black and white storyline. When he gets mad over discovering that Wallace adopts Bruce's work without permission and that Bruce puts up with it, Bruce reminds him that their works are meant to be collective, not personal.

> LANGSTON: He's taken two entire chapters from you, and he's sending it out.
> BRUCE: So what's your point?
> LANGSTON: How can you be taking this so lightly?
> BRUCE: We both decided that all of us living together in this house is what we're interested in writing about.
> LANGSTON: So that gives Wally the right to take credit for your work and get paid for it?
> BRUCE: Maybe some of us don't do it for the credit. This isn't school. There's no teacher to impress.
> LANGSTON: You are full of shit, and you know it. If we can't trust each other, then who can we trust? No one, exactly. It means the people you think are your friends will stab you in the back in the blink of an eye if it serves their purpose, and then DuBois and Locke have won. We've become the vermin that they think we are.
> BRUCE: We're his family, and he's crying out for help. It's all in the manuscript, for Christ's sake. [*Bruce recites a passage from the manuscript that hints at Wallace's deep frustration in his actual life*].
> LANGSTON: Look, I am a real writer, and I am trying to build a career. I don't want to have to worry about my friends stealing from me. When we started this, we wanted to say something important. What happened to that? Where's this going? We wanted to make it.

> BRUCE: No. "You" wanted to make it. That wasn't on anybody else's agenda. (*Brother to Brother*).

Langston leaves, and the camaraderie falls apart after Wallace commits suicide by cutting his wrists in a bath tub, which is depicted with a color transition that reveals the water turning red. And the economic depression of the 1930s strikes the final blow at the queer utopia. Bruce tells Perry about the past:

> Times changed. The Depression set in, and people really thought our excesses was what brought it on. Well, the idea was that we weren't out being good, productive workers because we were too busy giving in to our base desires. And blacks and queers were the vices that needed to be cleaned up to get the country back on its feet. White people ran back downtown almost as quickly as they'd come up. It never really was the same. That sense of risk and magic was gone. (*Brother to Brother*).

4.1.3. Conclusion

Black artists and intellectuals of a younger generation in the 1920s did not endorse artistic pretensions to prove a racial dignity or a cultural eligibility. Authenticity and personal expression were deemed central to their work. Yet there was an unavoidable race problem, which troubled figures like Thurman. "It is as if," in Nathan Huggins's words, "it were defined in the eternal constitution of things that to be a Negro artist in America one must, in some way, be a race-conscious artist" (Huggins 2007 [1971]: 195). Part of the desire to portray the past and the present side by side in films like *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother* comes from the fact that the same problem is still intact, and it continues to occupy the black queer artist.

Interracial queer desire, the major excess in *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother*, mount resistance to white and black prejudices. Although both films are queer in form and content, they are marked with a race consciousness. For this reason, the interracial affair in both films (Fae and Martha in *The Watermelon Woman*, and Perry and Jim in *Brother to Brother*) has to fail and be replaced by a more stable and "truer" intraracial relationship (Fae and June, and Perry and Bruce). However, both films render this replacement somewhat incomplete. In each film one partner dies in the end because of old age. Moreover, the final pairings are presented like a friendship rather than love; passion is out of stock.

On the other hand, the construction of alternative histories serves the reclamation of an unacknowledged black queer identity. In the end, Perry and Cheryl take the role of cultural mediators by transmitting what they inherit from Bruce and Fae to future generations. Perry sends a biography manuscript titled "Richard Bruce Nugent and the Rebel Spirit of the Harlem Renaissance" to a black publisher, and Cheryl completes her documentary. Filmmaking and writing become "revolutionary means of escape (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 134) from "the Oedipal apparatus" (ibid.: 94), "the system of social and psychic repression" (ibid.: 136).

In the final analysis, by stressing an intersectionality of multiple identities, and by utilizing revisionism, utopic spaces, and fantasy elements to surpass various forms of oppression both films coincidentally sidestep certain arguments in queer theory that reject collective action and queer kinship, and that denounce the rhetoric of future and hope in queer politics such as those offered by Lee Edelman (2004) and Leo Bersani (1995). José Muñoz regards this kind of "antirelational" theses (2009: 11), which are based upon self-centered politics and hedonism, and completely uncon-

cerned with identity-based politics, as “romances of the negative” (ibid.). Muñoz writes:

> Yet I nonetheless contend that most of the work with which I disagree under the provisional title of “antirelational thesis” moves to imagine an escape or denouncement of relationality as first and foremost a distancing of queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as the contamination of race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference. In other words, antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference. (Ibid.).

The problem with antirelational arguments is that they undermine the experience of non-white, non-male, non-gender-conforming, and economically or physically disenfranchised queers. Such arguments consider some bodies as “expendable” as Cathy Cohen puts it (1999: 90). Instead of an antisocial politics and an endorsement of here-and-now, Muñoz asserts that “queerness is primarily about future and hope” (2009: 11). Accordingly, the schizophrenic breakthrough, which comes into existence by the creation of alternative histories and queer spaces, is first thwarted by Fae’s mischances in *The Watermelon Woman* and Wallace’s suicide in *Brother to Brother*. Then the breakthrough is restored and pushed further through Cheryl and Perry’s struggles for survival. Both characters represent future, hope, and the possibility of utopia, which is, in this case, black and queer.

4.2. Supermodernity and Oedipal Entrapment in *Shortbus* and *Appropriate Behavior*

While *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother* are concerned with exposing various channels of oppression that black queers face in their professional and personal lives, *Shortbus* (2006) and *Appropriate Behavior* (2014) lay the groundwork for examining how inter-personal desire is arrested in various facets of contemporary life in New York City, one of the major centers of queer lifestyle. Both films present characters who cannot maintain a proper way of communication and sexual contact with those around them.

The primary hinge pin that connects *Shortbus* and *Appropriate Behavior* is the characters' inability to cast off the yoke of "the daddy-mommy-me triangle" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 51). Details from their personal lives, especially their relation to their partners and family, suggest that they suffer from at least one of the adjacent psychological impasses of guilt, self-pity, egocentrism, fear of intimacy, and more conspicuously "the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied" (ibid.: 28): it is as if they are entrapped in the "[n]eurotic territoriality of Oedipus (ibid.: 136).

What is more, the characters' subjectivity in both films seems to be affected by a toxic supermodernity. A seemingly distant and complicated network of anxieties negatively shape their lives, including "the extreme internalization of the capitalist field" (ibid.: 268), which is mostly "represented in the privatized family" (ibid.: 304), the transformation of sexuality into consumption, and the intervention of advanced technology in sexual and social life, which only provides an experience of "solitary individuality combined with non-human mediation" (Augé 1995 [1992]:118).

Shortbus also contains several allusions to the recent trauma of international terrorism. For instance, when one of the characters, Justin Bond, is asked why so many young people started flocking to New York City in the last few years despite the fact that it is a very expensive city to live in, he gives a wry answer: "9/11. It's the only thing real that's ever happened to them" (*Shortbus*). It is as if the people in the film are so desperate to feel anything that even the threat of a terrorist attack is regarded as a remedy for their paralyzed affective capacity.

Shortbus and *Appropriate Behavior* offer different ways to help the alienated characters find a "line of escape or schizoid breakthrough" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 283). *Shortbus* uses a grandiose setting, which is quite similar to the Niggerati Manor in *Brother to Brother*, as a source of motivation for the flustered characters' recovery. On the other hand, *Appropriate Behavior* plays on a non-linear narrative structure like *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother*. It makes use of encounters and recollections as plot twists, which is reminiscent of Deleuze's concept of time-image. Although they undertake serious issues, both films are comedy.

Shortbus has won the audience award at 2006 Athens International Film Festival, and the Golden Eye award for best film at 2006 Zurich International Film Festival, and two other awards at 2006 Gijón International Film Festival. *Appropriate Behavior* holds the Grand Jury Prize from 2014 San Diego Asian Film Festival and the Tangerine Entertainment Juice Award from 2014 Provincetown International Film Festival.

4.2.1. *Shortbus*

Shortbus (dir. John Cameron Mitchell) imagines a utopic salon named Shortbus in NYC, which is teeming with polygamous sexual activity, social exchange, ordinary types of entertainment, and more. The salon hosts a post-queer, mixed-sex, and pan-sexual community whose members are there to socialize, make friends, share their thoughts and feelings, and realize their sexuality unbound from the bourgeois dictum of bedroom privacy. In the cozy and familial atmosphere of the club everyone can find an activity of his or her liking: a heated orgy room stuffed with lascivious action, a home cinema that shows a three-hour Gertrude Stein documentary, a live acoustic concert, and a lounge where people gather for a friendly conversation or play games, are all under the same roof (Fig. 4.16). The attendants are also meant to be beyond generational, physical, and racial standards of beauty by means of token representations including overweight, elderly, or black figures (although they appear and disappear in the blink of an eye). Thus on the outset *Shortbus* presents a heterogeneous community for whom sexuality means intimacy, love, and friendship.

Figure 4.16 Screenshots. *Shortbus*. © 2006 Safeword Productions LLC.

There are also the outsiders who cannot fit into the liberating premises of the salon. The three main characters of the film, James (Paul Dawson), Sophia (Sook-

Yin Lee), and Severin (Lindsay Beamish), suffer from similar psychological problems that hinder them from making an intimate connection with their partners and others. As is revealed later in the film, James, who works as a lifeguard at a gym jacuzzi, cannot let his partner penetrate him during sexual intercourse although they have a loving and caring relationship. James and his partner Jamie Mitchell (PJ DeBoy) think that opening up their relationship to sex with others might help solidify the bond between them. Hence they visit Sophia, a Chinese-Canadian marriage counselor or a "sex therapist" as her consultants refer to her, to seek impartial advice about their plan. What they do not know, however, is that Sophia has her own secret problem: she cannot have orgasm. During their consultation a meaningless dispute strikes up between Sophia and Jamie, which ends with Sophia slapping the latter in a fit of anger. Feeling sorry about what she has done, she confesses her predicament. James and Jamie advise her to visit Shortbus assuming she might find a cure for her problem. There the three meet Severin, a professional "dominatrix," who earns a living by beating and insulting men that seek sexual and emotional fulfillment in sadomasochistic roleplaying. Severin's problem is that she can have orgasm only when she is alone. She cannot develop an intimate sexual and emotional relationship with others; she cannot even articulate her real name. Shortbus, where people come "to find the right connection" as the mistress of the salon, Justin Bond (himself) tells, becomes a crossroads for the desperate characters.

From the description given by Bond, who is a flamboyant queen acting as a go-between and an ice-breaker for the newcomers, it is understood that the name "shortbus" is a reference to the school busses that are used for the transportation of children with special needs. The word is possibly chosen to evoke connotations of a commu-

nal transgression, passage, and breakthrough for the "challenged" and "gifted" ones, as Bond puts it. The challenged ones in this case are James, Sophia, and Severin.

The opening scenes, which introduce the main characters through a series of intercutting sequences, give a snapshot of the characters' situation prior to their transformation. The film opens with tracking close-ups of a CGI model of the Statue of Liberty, and in the following shots a flying camera starts to hover over a cartoonish CGI model of NYC while a slow jazz tune is heard in the soundtrack. Similar bird's-eye-view animations cut in throughout the film adding a surreal, fairytale quality to the depiction of the city. The flying camera stops by at certain buildings and breaks in through the windows, and the animation shifts to the film stock to introduce the characters inside. First, James is seen lying in a bathtub and filming his penis with a hand-held camera as he pisses inside the water in a depressed state of mind. In the following shots he films himself while he is performing an autofellatio by rolling his legs over his head in an awkward position. At the same time Caleb (Peter Stickles), a voyeur in the adjacent building, is seen peeping on and recording him through the window. The flying camera's next stop in the intercutting animation sequence is the ground zero, which is one of the few references to 9/11 in the film. As the animation shifts to the real, Severin is exposed near the window of a hotel room that overlooks the ground zero. She is arranging some adult toys, and she is about to whip her rich client, Jesse (Adam Hardman). Judging from the talk between them, the specific location of the hotel room is probably part of the client's (or the slave's) sexual fantasy. Finally, the flying camera visits an apartment near Central Park. Sophia and her husband, Rob (Raphael Barker), are caught in the middle of a rough yet funny sexual intercourse; they are trying out bizarre positions. As James, Rob, and Severin's slave approach orgasm, the cross-cutting speeds up. After they have or-

gasm, the main characters become silent and immobile. James begins to cry, Severin's eyes are fixed upon a piece of post-modern art on the wall, which is sprayed with the slave's semen, and Sophia wears a discontented look on her face. The orgasmic breakthrough gives way to frustration and isolation.

The film is daring in terms of graphic sexuality. Genitals, penetration, ejaculation are fully exposed during the sex scenes. Yet the non-simulated sex in the film is never without humor. With upbeat music, funny dialogues and acting performances, *Shortbus* parodies and demystifies sexual taboos. In a scene, for example, James, Jamie, and Ceth (Jay Brannan), whom the couple befriends at Shortbus, engage in a threesome in which they sing the National Anthem while Ceth holds James' penis as a microphone, and Jamie sings into Ceth's bottocks. The issue of HIV and safe sex, in the meantime, is brought up very briefly. James gives Jamie a condom that has a smiley on it, and the two smiles at each other.

In the context of the film, sexuality means reaching and connecting with other people on a humane basis. When Sophia asks a group of lesbians at Shortbus about what their best orgasm felt like, the answers she gets are all about connection. "I felt like I was shooting out creative energy into the world and it was merging with other people's energy," tells one of the women, while another one explains, "we had this incredible connection, and I felt like I was finally not alone" (*Shortbus*). Sophia's own experience with sex, on the other hand, is quite the opposite: "it feels a little bit, kinda like, um... like somebody's gonna kill me. And I just have to smile and pretend to enjoy it" (*Shortbus*). Similarly, for Severin, who is equally estranged, orgasm is great to the extent that she feels completely alone.

In the later stages of the film it becomes clear that part of the characters' anxiety owes to a feeling of inability to satisfy their partners' needs. James opens up the

relationship to sex with others to find the right person who would take care of his lover, Jamie, after he commits suicide (throughout the film, James is seen preparing a suicide video to leave a message for Jamie). And Jamie puts up with James' plan for fear of losing him. Similarly, Sophia fakes her orgasms for fear of losing Rob. She keeps her pre-orgasmic status as a secret in case her husband might think that it is his fault. However, it turns out that Rob already knows his wife has been faking her orgasms, and he has been trying to do his best lest she breaks up with him. Moreover, he accuses himself; "I feel really small," he utters after a quarrel, "I feel like I can't take up enough space. I feel like my cock isn't big enough for you. I can't bring home any money. I feel like I'm not contributing. I can't even give you an orgasm" (*Shortbus*). (Fig. 4.17).

The logic behind the characters' motive in this case rests upon Lacan's formula, "man's desire is the desire of the Other [*sic*]" (1998 [1973]: 38). They are trapped in a feeling of deprivation and inadequacy. The satisfaction of the characters' demand — love — is constantly deferred; and they sustain themselves at the level of a vanishing desire (Lacan 2005 [1961]: 207). However, the real reason of their predicament is their "impermeability" (*Shortbus*), or their "love blockage" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 293), which prevents them from transgressing "the Oedipal impasses of the couple and the family" (ibid.), and from connecting with the universe. "The persons to whom our loves are dedicated," Deleuze and Guattari write, "including the parental persons, intervene only as points of connection" (ibid. 294); they are not meant to cut us off from the rest of the world. On the contrary, the beloved ones must open us up "to more spacious worlds, to masses and large aggregates" (ibid.).

Figure 4.17 Screenshots. (From left to right, top row first) James, Ceth, and Jamie. Severin. Sophia and Rob. *Shortbus*. © 2006 Safeword Productions LLC.

The issue of impermeability is brought up during a conversation between Ceth and Tobias (Alan Mandell), the ex-mayor of NYC. Tobias tells Ceth that the most wonderful thing about New York is its being "one of the last places where people are still willing to bend over to let in the new… and the old [he makes a naughty remark at himself]" (*Shortbus*). New York is "where everyone comes to get fucked" (*Short-bus*). For Tobias, what makes New Yorkers distinguished from the rest of the world is the fact that they are "permeable and therefore sane" (ibid.). Making an allusion to the haunting memory of 9/11, he adds that, consequently, they are the target of the "impermeable and the insane" (ibid.).

Interestingly, though, it is neither in New York City nor at Shortbus that the impermeable characters of the film begin their transformation. Their initiation to connection with others first occurs in other, smaller, and darker places of refuge that

is sheltered from the crowds of supermodernity. James expresses his inner feelings only when he and Severin get into a dark closet during a truth-or-dare game. Severin and Sophia, too, articulate their predicament to each other only when they get inside an isolation tank, a dimly-lit and warm salt water tank used for floatation therapy (Fig. 4.18). James tells Severin that his first sexual experience in the small town he grew up was through hustling after watching *My Own Private Idaho*, which probably made him identify with the character of Mike, a sentimental small town boy who hustles for a living. James cries and tells that he never lets anybody penetrate him including Jamie, apparently because of the traumatic experience of maltreatment in his youth. And in the uterine space of the dark water tank, which perhaps serves to recreate a state of infancy, Sophia mentions to Severin her over-indulgent parents as a possible reason for her frigidity. Each character utters a wish to return to innocence. "I look back to things that were when I was 12 years old," James tells, "I'm still looking for the same things now" (*Shortbus*). In another scene, Sophia tells Justin Bond that maybe somebody who is just starting to explore his/her sexuality can help her. And Severin reveals her longing for a house, a pet, and a stable relationship. The characters' wish to return to innocence might signal their entrapment in the oedipal territoriality or "the incurable familialism" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 (1972: 92). Yet their impermeability or their physical and emotional alienation also says something about the condition of humanity in the present age.

Shortbus aims to present a post- sexual revolution, post-AIDS, and post-9/11 utopia in which the outsiders or the ones who cannot merge with the others, the city, and the *zeitgeist* fail. However, the film incidentally highlights the present era in which people suffer from feeling unable to receive or give enough pleasure either sensually or emotionally. Justin Bond's remark that "it's just like the 60s, only with

Figure 4.18 Screenshots. *Shortbus*. © 2006 Safeword Productions LLC.

less hope" (*Shortbus*) is in fact misleading. Unlike the 1960s or before, in the context of the film sexual desire is blunted as there is nothing arousing: no secrecy, no taboos, and no closet. One could even claim that it is the characters that create their own oppression for there is not a real one except the lack of self-assurance and reciprocal intimacy.

The characters are also living in the age of cybersex: they constantly record, watch, and edit their and others' sexual activities, surf the internet for sexual fulfillment, use electronic gadgets to find automatically matched nearby dates, and use remote-controlled vibrators to stimulate their partners, like the one Sophia smashes down when she gets mad after Rob misplaces the remote with the TV remote at the lounge in Shortbus, which gets her into a real trouble. Interaction with these electronic devices replaces a humanly connection with the outside world. They provide virtual and ephemeral pleasures, and more isolation. (Fig. 4.19).

This technological post-queer mecca, or the supermodern NYC, however, is as fragile as the postmodern NYC in Paul Auster's 1985 novel, *City of Glass*. Throughout the film lights occasionally dim due to brownouts, which coincide with moments of crisis. At a climactic scene the electricity goes off in entire city, which is shown

Figure 4.19 Screenshots. *Shortbus*. © 2006 Safeword Productions LLC.

with an animation sequence. The blackout coincides with the three main characters' nervous breakdown that is shown through intercutting sequences: Sophia fantasizes lying and masturbating at a seashore under a red post light until she begins to scream for not having an orgasm; Severin loses her control and begins to cry in the middle of an S&M session while she is whipping Rob; and James tries out and fails at an anal intercourse with Caleb, who previously saves him from suicide. Following the black-out, having been temporarily relieved from the burden of high-tech supermodernity, the characters unite in a carnivalesque gathering at Shortbus under candle lights and acoustic music. Only after the main characters "unplug themselves" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 315) and are left in a temporary darkness can they merge with the crowd at Shortbus. Upon the arrival of an orchestra the party turns into a festival in which everyone sings in unison and make love with each other. The scene is reminiscent of a remark in *Anti-Oedipus*: "Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand" (ibid.: 296). James and Jamie get to-

gether again while Ceth and Caleb make out. Sophia mingles with a couple under Rob's approving eyes. As the three make love, the camera zooms in Sophia's panting convulsing face, which finally lights up with orgasm. An animation sequence cuts in, the electricity is back on, and the entire city glitters with light. The alienated characters become integrated and the fantasy is fully restored. (Fig. 4.20).

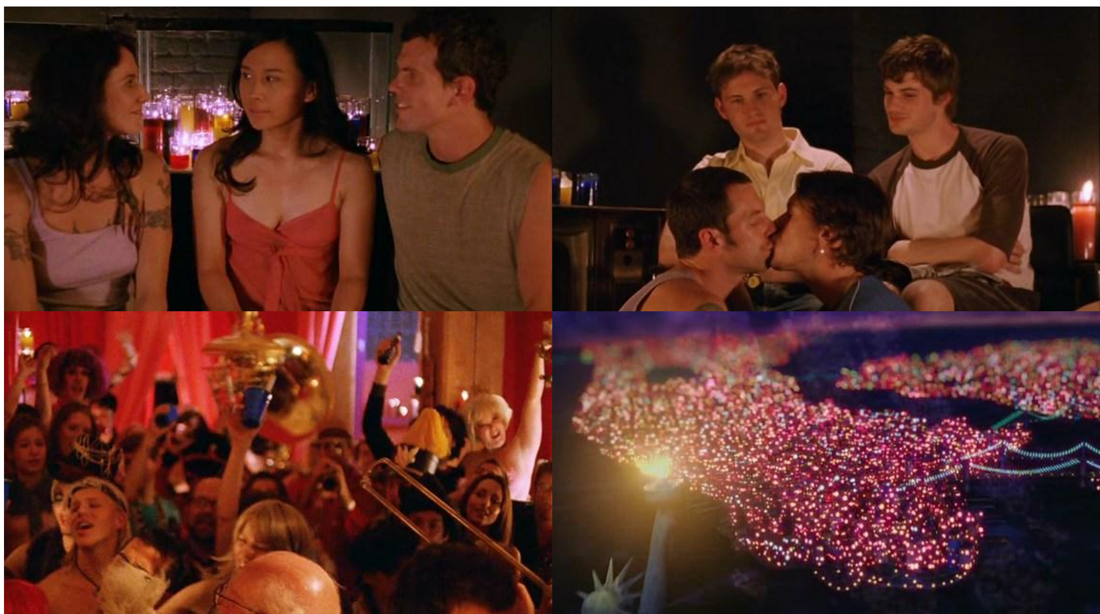

Figure 4.20 Screenshots. *Shortbus*. © 2006 Safeword Productions LLC.

4.2.2. *Appropriate Behavior*

Appropriate Behaviour has a lot in common with *Shortbus*: the lack of intimacy, the need for approval by others, the insatiable emotional emptiness, and the immediate consumption of desire in the present-day New York City are at stake in both films. There is also a parallel between Sophia and Shirin, the main character of *Appropriate Behavior*. Just as Sophia's upbringing in a conservative Chinese family had an im-

pact in her adult sexual life and marriage, Shirin's strong ties with her Iranian family becomes constraining in her relationship with her girlfriend, Maxine, in certain ways. Thereby, the problems of coupling and familialism are again in question. However, since this time the focalization is on a single character, Shirin, the issues of familialism, cultural hybridity, and in-betweenness, and the problems they entail for the main character are much more visible and controlling aspects of the narrative. And when it comes to the main difference, *Appropriate Behavior* does not rely on a utopic setting like *Shortbus* and *Brother to Brother*, or on a reconstruction of a collective history like *Brother to Brother* and *The Watermelon Woman*, which, as a result, prevents Shirin from escaping and finding refuge in an alternative space. Instead, the film relies on personal memories and recollections for the same purpose. Therefore, the centrality of time and memory in queer film narratives, which has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter, applies here, too.

Appropriate Behavior (dir. Desiree Akhavan) presents a tumultuous phase in Shirin's life (played by the director), an Iranian-American bisexual woman in her late twenties, who has just broken up with her lover, Maxine (Rebecca Henderson). (Fig. 4.21). Having lost also her home and job, she struggles to adjust to the new circumstances. She sleeps at her best friend, Crystal's (Halley Feiffer) place, finds a new job as a teacher at a nursery school although she has a master's degree in journalism, and she seeks casual hook-ups. But the memories of her ex-relationship haunt and keep her in a state of anxiety. The progression of Shirin's life is interrupted with memories. As the things, people, and events that Shirin encounters in the present time trigger memories of the past again and again, Shirin keeps experiencing the kind of emotional deadlock or psychological impasse that the female tourist in *Journey to Italy* experiences (Deleuze 1997 [1985]: 2). Each time she encounters a disappointment

and frustration in the course of her new life, the burden of the past revisits her. Hence, the narrative linearity of the film is regularly disrupted by flashbacks.

Figure 4.21 Screenshot. Maxine and Shirin. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

By means of the flashbacks the reasons behind the failure of the ex-couple's relationship become clear in later stages of the film. Shirin and Maxine are like opposite poles. Maxine is a dedicated queer activist; her lifestyle and worldview are grounded upon her political stance; she is honest about her sexual identity to the point of cutting her ties with her homophobic family. She is always politically correct in her speech. She is interested in intellectual stuff such as Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993). And she is a bit shy in urban social circuits, and kind of vanilla in bed. Shirin, on the other hand, takes things less seriously. She is funny, spontaneous, and gauche. She likes to party, and she is naughty. Her relation to gay culture is limited to drinking and dancing. And her literary and artistic taste is more on the side of *Sex and the City* and the *Twilight* series. Meanwhile, she does her best

to hide her bisexual orientation from her conservative Iranian parents to maintain her ties with them. Yet what brings these two distant personalities together is the same aversion to the surrounding pretentiousness in Brooklyn, which they find out the first time they meet during a party. When the two see each other on the entrance stairs during a break, they quickly fall into an intimate conversation, which is followed by a kiss. When Maxine explains what she is doing after having been let down by her ex-girlfriend, she tells:

> MAXINE: Just having trouble dealing with, like, Brooklyn parties and everyone talking about their kickstarter campaigns, and did you see that guy with the waxed Dali mustache? I mean, what the fuck is that guy's problem? Who the fuck does he think he is?
> SHIRIN: I find your anger incredibly sexy.
> MAXINE: Really?
> SHIRIN: I hate so many things too.
> MAXINE: Wow.
> (*Appropriate Behavior*).

There are several cases in the film which make a parody of pretentious or disinterested attitudes. For instance, when Shirin tells her boss, Ken (Scott Adsit), that she is not good at teaching and she does not know what she is doing, Ken responds by telling that he has three kids and he does not know what he is doing either: "It's just," Ken tells, "fake it 'til you make it" (*Appropriate Behavior*). Ken is always stoned and goes around with a roll of joint behind his ear. According to what he tells he lost his kid at least four times. He keeps misremembering Shirin's name, and judging by the aloofness on his son's face, he possibly misremembers his son's name too. There are other caricatured representations as well such as Shirin's new boyfriend, Jon Francis (Cody DeFranco), a "hunky rebel with a cause" (ibid.), with whom she tries to make Maxine jealous when they come across at a party. Other than

merely standing aloof and showing his chest tattoo, Jon is "spearheading a campaign to bridge the gaps of gentrification in Brooklyn through mass Kombucha brewing" (ibid.). Contemporary art is also parodied with a performance artist who tritely says "my art defies labels" (*Appropriate Behavior*), and also with Crystal, whose stage performance consists of, according to what Shirin tells, dressing up like a farm animal and touching herself.

The classy Middle Eastern community, in which Shirin and her family partake, is not exempt from such pretentiousness either. When Shirin and Maxine join the Persian new year party, or *Noruz* ceremony, in New Jersey, they meet an ostentatious group of women, who communicates basically through gossiping and false flattery (Fig. 4.22). The greeting is followed by a silly exchange of compliments between Shirin and an acquaintance named Meenu (Daniella Rabbani):

> MEENU: Oh, my god, you look amazing.
> SHIRIN: Right. Next to you, I look like a busboy from Chili's.
> MEENU: Oh, no way. You're practically a model.
> SHIRIN: Yeah, you're right. Like a "before" model for Accutane.
> MEENU: Uh, I would kill for your height.
> SHIRIN: And I would sell my firstborn for your skin.
> MEENU: Stop it.
> SHIRIN: You stop it.
> (*Appropriate Behavior*).

And when Shirin begins to talk sincerely about her family issues, the women in the group become disinterested and slip away in the middle of Shirin's sentence.

Figure 4.22 Screenshot. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

In the context of the film, sexual contact is afflicted with a similar kind of volatility, which is akin to the insincere communication in social relations. Shirin hits it off with her dates a bit too fast. In her contacts with Maxine, BrooklynBoy82 ([James C. Bristow] a man that she finds on a dating website), and Ted and Marie ([Chris Baker and Robin Rikoon] a swinger couple who picks Shirin from a bar), it takes only a brief exchange of words before they spring into steamy action and then fall apart. Even though the verbal exchange is on a seemingly honest and friendly basis, things develop as if the usual course of a relationship is condensed into minutes. Each of these cases, however, ends with disappointment. Shirin stares at the ceiling with a confused look on his face while BrooklynBoy82 falls asleep next to her. And at Ted and Marie's place, Shirin gets uncomfortable since she is unaccustomed to a threesome. She is also turned off by Ted. As Shirin and Marie fall into a more humane and intimate conversation, Ted feels left out and annoyed. Eventually, he makes Shirin leave; this is also one of the moments in the film in which the anti-male overtone is most clearly felt. (Fig. 4.23).

Figure 4.23 Screenshots. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

After she leaves Ted and Marie, Shirin desperately walks in the street until her eyes become fixated on an empty bar, which recalls a memory of her ex-relationship. When she stops and looks inside the bar for a moment, she is reminiscent of the *flâneur* in Baudelaire's "To a Passerby," who experiences a feeling of loneliness at the quickly vanishing prospect of an attractive passerby. Shirin's frustration, however, is not exactly for the sight of a never-to-be-attained object of desire. It is rather for the rapid consummation of desire. What Shirin repeatedly experiences in her hook-ups is truly a "love—not at first sight, but at last sight" (Benjamin 2007 [1939]: 169). (Fig. 4.24).

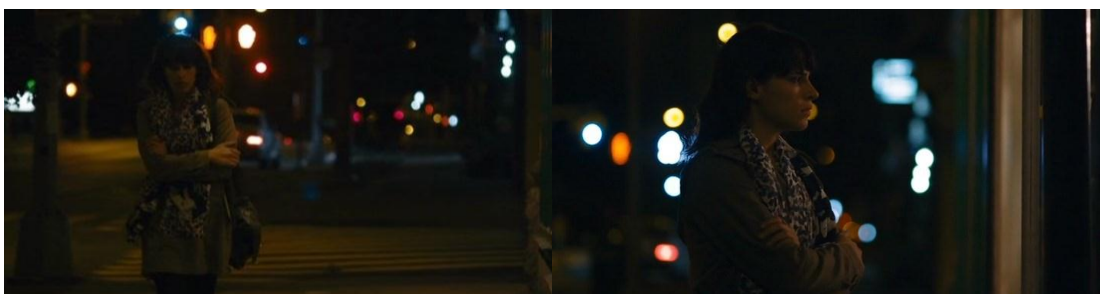

Figure 4.24 Screenshots. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

There is one character in the film, though, who does not seem to be interested in the rapidly developing and consummated affairs. Shirin meets Sasha (Aimee Mullins), a law professor at New York University, while she is chasing Maxine with the hope of fixing her broken relationship. She joins a group discussion about the criminal justice system and its bias against the queer community, in which Sasha is the moderator and Maxine is a speaker. When her attempt to make up with Maxine blows back, Shirin tries out one last chance on a whim; she tries to make Maxine jealous by proposing to take Sasha out for a drink although she does not know her at all. Just having been cornered by the guests, who utter their dissatisfaction with the scope of the discussion, the professor accepts the much unexpected invitation of the stranger. In a later scene, Shirin and Sasha appear sitting in a bar. During their short conversation it turns out that Sasha takes things slowly. She is fair and well-mannered. Shirin, on the other hand, makes a fool of herself. She acts like a buffoon; she talks nonsense, spills wine on herself, and rushes to invite Sasha over. In response, the latter excuses herself by saying that it is getting late, and kindly takes a rain check. Still she does not dismiss Shirin; she wants to keep in touch but the latter ditches her. Apparently, their expectations are not mutual.

Each sex scene is intercut with or followed by an instance of recollection when the memories of Maxine revisit Shirin. In a sense, the memories are like a resistance to the fast pace of life and transient nature of human relations in supermodernity. Despite their fights and the differences between them, the moments that Shirin and Maxine have shared are real and intimate. Their relationship makes a contrast to the surrounding swamp of insincerity. Yet their love is not immune to it. The scene in which they decide to break up right after Maxine’s birthday party is notable since

they let the chips fall where they may. The long-repressed tension quickly turns into a fight.

> SHIRIN: God, I hate your friends.
> MAXINE: My friends are my family. You don't know what that's like to have to choose your own family because the one you were born into—
> SHIRIN: Oh, come on, enough of this lesbian orphan propaganda. You know, we're all born into shit families. We deal with it.
> MAXINE: What is your problem?
> SHIRIN: My problem is I haven't been fucked in like three weeks.
> MAXINE: I am not gonna talk about this on my birthday.
> SHIRIN: On your birthday? What are you, eight? So you happened to be born, big fucking deal.
> MAXINE: Oh, I'm sorry, all attention must revolve around you 100% of the time. I forgot.
> SHIRIN: No, that's not true. I'm not like that.
> MAXINE: I don't know why I get so shocked when you do shit like this. You're a grown woman in a creepy, co-dependent relationship with your parents.
> SHIRIN: It's totally normal, and you have no idea what you're talking about because you completely abandoned your family.
> MAXINE: It wasn't a choice!
> SHIRIN: Of course, it's a choice!
> MAXINE: Says the closet case!
> SHIRIN: They know I know they know. I'm waiting for the right time to bring it up, out of respect for them.
> MAXINE: I think you and I see the world totally differently.
> SHIRIN: We do. You know, you think that I'm a bad person because I'm not coming out on your terms, and I don't agree with that.
> MAXINE: That is not true. I didn't say that.
> SHIRIN: That's totally true.
> MAXINE: You're not listening to me.
> SHIRIN: I'm listening to you, and everything you're saying is pissing me off and completely inaccurate.
> MAXINE: You are ruining my birthday.
> SHIRIN: You're ruining my twenties.
> MAXINE *clenching her hands*: I can't... I don't have the patience to deal with you.
> SHIRIN: That's fine. Let's break up.
> MAXINE: Fine.
> (*Appropriate Behavior*).

The quarrel follows with Maxine cutting up the panties she got for Shirin, and in turn the latter smashes the booze bottles she got for the party, and then Shirin leaves. From their speech and also from the earlier signs in the script, it is possible to discern that two major problems strain their communication. One of these problems is buried in Shirin's expression, "you're ruining my twenties" (*Appropriate Behavior*). Shirin wants to be part of the rapidly changing nature of contemporary life and all the instant pleasures it promises. She is stricken with the typical anxiety of lagging behind the pace of modern world, "the urgency of the present moment" (Augé 1995 [1992]: 104). She wants her demands be satisfied; and she wants it now. She "seeks only [her] own center and is incapable of seeing the circle of which [she herself] is a part" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 21).

The other problem that breaches their relationship is Shirin's unwillingness to come out to her parents, which bothers Maxine probably because she suspects that her lover is not serious in her feelings, and that she is just having a phase in her life. As a matter of fact, Maxine's last words are, "I know you, and the more that I think about it, this is probably just a phase. God, this was such a waste" (*Appropriate Behavior*). What Maxine is missing, however, is the fact that Shirin's social position and her attitude towards her family cannot be the same as Maxine's. In addition to her bisexual identity, Shirin comes from a minority, which makes things harder for her. She is an involuntary representative of a culture that is often demonized or at best disdained in the western hemisphere. She struggles to be herself in a world that is two times more hostile to her than it is to Maxine, and she is liable to face the pressures of heteronormativity and ethnic segregation together. Home and family in her case are neither readily disposable nor unconditionally welcoming. Her situation resembles that of the African-American queers. Sharon Holland writes that "our

quareness [‘quare’ is a variation of ‘queer’ in southern African-American dialect] exploded upon the ordinary life of childhood and made family and friendship all the more difficult, morphing them into the bittersweet tonic that many of us now refer to as ‘home’—a place of refuge and escape” (2005: xii). Therefore, it takes more courage and time for Shirin to come out to her family.

Although it is not easy to locate a rhetoric of oppression behind the bantering tone of the film, certain moments subtly hint at Shirin as an outsider. The first of these moments is the first pre-title scene in which Shirin is seen sitting on a train, a familiar setting, which connotes “mobility and entrapment” in African-American cultural production (Massood 2003: 200 quoted in Christian 2010: 191, n.5). Her shoulder rests on the window. The close-up exposes her stressed, uneasy, and desperate face. In the following medium shot, she is positioned right behind a chattering group of non-Caucasian children. Shirin casts a furtive glance at them. In the next scene, she is seen packing his stuff at Maxine’s place after their breakup. With respect to the retrospective narrative structure, this is possibly an event that chronologically comes before the train scene, and it also reveals the reason behind Shirin’s uneasiness in the previous shots. When the two scenes are thought together, it seems as if Shirin’s loneliness as a bisexual woman (after the breakup) is intricate with her loneliness as an Iranian-American person. She feels socially and romantically isolated. (Fig. 4.25).

Another instance, in which Shirin is made aware of her ethnic difference, is the job interview with Ken. When he learns that Shirin is Iranian, Ken’s eyes become wide-open. He asks what Shirin thinks about “that whole situation” (*Appropriate Behavior*). After wavering over what to say for a second, Shirin decides on a flexible answer: “It’s a mixed bag. A lot of very good-intentioned people dealing with some

Figure 4.25 Screenshots. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

difficult circumstances" (ibid.). Expecting an enthralling answer, Ken asks whether Shirin is a part of Tehran's underground hip-hop scene, which he has recently read about in an article. Shirin merely says, "unfortunately, I spend most of my time in Iran watching Disney videos with my grandmother while she untangles jewelry" (ibid.).

Her feeling of otherness also causes Shirin to resign from her previous job. When Shirin explains to Crystal why she has quitted her previous job, she says, "the only reason they hired me in the first place is cause they wanted a Middle Eastern person on staff. Now that Yavah's in editorial, everyone's gushing over how Syrian she is" (ibid.). Likewise, when Maxine learns for the first time that Shirin is not out to her parents, the first thing she does is questioning Shirin's nationality:

> MAXINE: They have no idea you're bisexual? I'm sorry, what country is it that you get stoned to death if you're convicted of being gay?

SHIRIN: Oh, yeah. Wait, I know. It's Iran, the country that my entire family comes from.
MAXINE: You can't keep playing the Persian card every time we have an argument.
SHIRIN: You need to see for yourself how difficult it is to be the child of immigrants.
MAXINE: I would love to.
SHIRIN: Great. Then you're coming to a Persian new year party this weekend in New Jersey.
MAXINE: Am I coming as your date?
SHIRIN: God, no. You're definitely coming as my white friend. Do you think I have a death wish? You know you're gonna have to wear a dress.
MAXINE: No.
(*Appropriate Behavior*).

Another thing that people in the film do not seem to be getting is the fact that Shirin is also an American, which she feels obliged to remind at certain points. For instance, when her brother, Ali (Arian Moayed), announces his decision to propose to his girlfriend, Layli (Justine Cotsonas), Shirin tells that the age of thirty-three is too early to get married. Her mother (Anh Duong) reminds her that she was only nineteen when she married their father (Hooman Majd), to which Shirin responds with a playful remark: "well, this isn't the Islamic Republic of Iran, mom. Do you see a hijab on my head?" (*Appropriate Behavior*). Yet there are various mannerisms and codes of appropriate behavior that Shirin must conform to if she wants to be a part of the Iranian community. For example, when Maxine gets just a little bit loose while she is dancing at the Iranian new year party, Shirin immediately warns her: "shh, don't do that" (ibid.).

In this regard, maybe Shirin's playful flippancy and her sardonic sense of humor are ways to cope with those restraining social and familial rules. There is a clear sign of this in the last pre-title scene which follows Shirin's departure from Maxine's place with her personal stuff. In the last pre-title scene Shirin is carrying a box of

present along with her personal stuff, which she has previously given to Maxine. Since they have broken up now, Maxine gives the present back. Shirin takes the things out in the street, and throws them away into a dumpster. In the following shot, the camera shoots the inside of the dumpster, and the content of the present box is revealed in a close-up: it is a giant strap-on dildo. The camera focuses on the object for a few seconds until Shirin returns with a change of mind and picks it up. Next, she is seen from behind, walking away with the dildo in her hand, and the title, "Appropriate Behavior," appears right next to her. There is an obvious irony here since the image of a woman who is walking in the street at midday with a giant strap-on dildo swinging in her hand would not generally be described as an appropriate behavior. It would inevitably be considered as an act of impertinence. (Fig. 4.26).

Figure 4.26 Screenshots. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

No matter how recalcitrant Shirin might seem in this and other scenes, Maxine is not utterly wrong in her judgment when she describes Shirin's family relationship as creepy and co-dependent. Shirin's parents are a bit over-indulgent; they check where their daughter is living, who she is living with, where she is moving to, and what she is doing, and Shirin puts up with it. Although this is surely understandable to a certain degree since their close-knit family is a cultural difference (no matter how unusual it is for Maxine), certain dynamics in their nuclear family structure seem problematic. For instance, Shirin and Ali act like little children who compete with each other to be their parents' favorite. They are jealous of each other. They impishly try to disparage each other in their parents' eyes by making covert remarks. It seems as if the two siblings are doing their best to secure their place in the oedipal triad: "if you don't follow the lines of differentiation daddy-mommy-me, and the exclusive alternatives that delineate them, you will fall into the black night of the undifferentiated" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 (1972): 78). They dwell in "the factitious unity of a family and an ego" (ibid.: 86). (Fig. 4.27).

Figure 4.27 Screenshot. Shirin at her parents' home. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

Shirin eventually comes out to her family, and as expected, she is not well received. She first speaks to her brother at his wedding ceremony. Ali tells her to not talk about the issue with their parents since Shirin and Maxine are not together anymore. And when she says that it is a pretty big thing to not be honest about, Ali tells her to wait until after the wedding. Shirin laughs and calls her brother a dick, to which Ali responds by saying, “well, at least I’m not a sexually confused narcissist” (*Appropriate Behavior*). The same night Shirin comes out to her mother who remains surprisingly calm and disinterested. With a vague, reassuring smile on her face, she acts as if she has not even heard her daughter, then she silences her:

> SHIRIN *with watery eyes*: Mom, I’m a little bit gay.
> MOTHER *speaks in Persian*: No. You’re not.
> SHIRIN: Yes, I am. And I was in love with Maxine.
> MOTHER: Shh.
> (*Appropriate Behavior*).

Her mother’s disinterested silence contains an unspoken message: “Don’t worry, it’s just a phase, and soon it will be over.” She does not even deem it necessary to discuss the issue. Late at night, Shirin is not able to sleep; she gets up and goes to her mother’s bedroom. She stands in the doorway, and gazes at her mother as if she wants to say something. However, she does not say anything, and turns away. In the morning, she is seen walking in the street, again with the giant strap-on dildo in her hand. She throws it away into a pile of trash, and this time she does not return and take it back, which suggests that she has made up her mind to behave herself; she will continue to be her mother’s good little girl, at least for the time being.

However, the film offers an exquisite twist in the end. Shirin and Crystal are travelling on the F train. Unlike the first pre-title scene, it is now daytime, and as the train moves past the steel columns, the NYC skyline is seen through the window

right behind their heads. The train motif in this scene has an important presence. (Fig. 4.28). As has been discussed earlier, Marc Augé counts trains among non-places of the contemporary world along with many other transportation vehicles (1995 [1992]: 84). Just like every other non-place, train is seemingly a social space but "it does not contain any organic society" (ibid.: 112). It provides speed, acceleration of time, shrinkage of space, and maybe a temporary breakthrough from the ordeals of daily life. But it does all of these at the expense of freedom of movement. For a daily commuter or a high-speed rail passenger, train journey does not have anything related to memories, histories, identities, or local differences. Most of the time, it only means an experience "of solitary individuality combined with non-human mediation" (ibid.: 118). Train is a space of transition, mobility, and anonymity. What it provides is, at best, "something resembling freedom" (ibid.: 116). It is a nice coincidence that while Crystal and Shirin sit on the train under the passing skyline of NYC, they start a chat about their recent affairs, and it somehow dawns on Crystal that the nature of inter-personal contact they engage in their lives are always trivial, which, in a sense, recall travelling on a commuter train:

> SHIRIN: There's a party at the loft on Saturday. You should bring that waiter, Brendan.
> CRYSTAL: Um, I would, but I kinda want to see if Jacques and Felicia try to seduce me.
> SHIRIN: It's never gonna happen. I don't know why you think they're swingers.
> CRYSTAL: I just get that vibe. You should invite that gay lawyer. Did you guys touch tongues?
> SHIRIN: No, we didn't, and it actually hurt my feelings.
> CRYSTAL: No, you know, there are people in this world who go on first dates that are perfectly great, and then they wait a while before they engage in sexual contact.
> SHIRIN: That's disgusting.
> CRYSTAL: I know, I think it all happens outside of New York.

SHIRIN: Maybe you’re right.
(*Appropriate Behavior*).

Figure 4.28 Screenshot. Crystal and Shirin. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

Right at this moment, the unexpected happens. When the train stops at Smith and 9th Streets Station in Brooklyn, which is in Maxine’s neighborhood as is evident from the iconic Kentile Floors sign in the background in the title screen (Fig. 4.26), Maxine appears on the platform; she is talking on the phone. When their eyes meet, they are taken aback for a moment. Then Shirin raises her hand in hesitation, and Maxine does the same in return. As the train moves, Maxine vanishes. A vague smile remains suspended on Shirin’s face while she stares into space. Amid Crystal’s muttering, train announcements, and the sliding view of the suburbs in the background, an upbeat tune starts to play in the soundtrack. Shirin’s face lights up with happiness. The screen fades out. For Shirin, the chance encounter means that there is a hope to reunite with Maxine. In a larger context, it means that it is still possible to hold on to memories, and find hope for the future even in New York City, the capital of supermodernity. (Fig. 4.29).

Figure 4.29 Screenshot. *Appropriate Behavior*. © 2014 Parkville Film 2013 Ltd.

4.2.3. Conclusion

Shortbus and *Appropriate Behavior* deal with characters who are somehow stuck in oedipal territorialities. Sexuality has negative unconscious associations for the main characters. For Shirin and Sophia sexuality means guilt; for Severin it means vulnerability; and for James it means trauma and being fetishized. Moreover, there is a discrepancy between what the characters really feel and how they act in the face of those who are close to them. The characters in *Shortbus* pretend to be happy. Similarly, Shirin leads two different lives, and she neurotically wears two different identities. In the domain of her middle-class nuclear family her sexuality is reduced to a "dirty little secret" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003 [1972]: 269). And in the outside world of pretensions and instant pleasures she gets lost as she chases temporary fulfillment in fleeting encounters.

In *Appropriate Behavior*, time has a substance only in the recollections of moments that Shirin and Maxine have shared; and it is only through the recollections that Shirin is truly alive. On the other hand, what provides a refuge from the oedipal

territorialities in *Shortbus* is not memories; it is a fantastical setting. From one point of view, Shortbus as a setting conforms to the definition of non-place: "[A] person entering the space of non-place" Augé writes, "is relieved of his [her] usual determinants. He [she] becomes no more than what he [she] does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver" (Augé 1995: 103). However, what is different in this case is that when the characters in the film get on Shortbus for a transgressive ride, they do not "taste for a while — like anyone who is possessed — the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (ibid.). On the contrary, during their journey on Shortbus, the characters find the opportunity of being who they really are. Within the fantastic space of the salon the boundaries between sexes, sexualities, and to some extent races and physical differences blur; the barriers that separate people are torn down. Yet, class remains as a missing factor. It is as if this fantastic utopia is constructed at the expense of the reality of class differences. Perhaps total eradication of class hierarchies is a prerequisite to the realization of a utopia.

On the whole, the characters in *Shortbus* and *Appropriate Behavior* try to open themselves up to the outside world, to "the wide open spaces" where "the dirty little secret" is replaced by "the drift of desire" (ibid.: 270). But again this world is not the world of supermodernity, images, capitalism, or segregation. It is a world of connection and intimacy. In this regard, *Shortbus* and *Appropriate Behavior* together with *The Watermelon Woman* and *Brother to Brother* are better to be read as a critique of the present. Each of these four films yearns for a utopia, which, in José Muñoz's words, "lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity" (Muñoz 2009: 35).

Like every other queer utopia, they offer us “a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what *can and perhaps will be* [sic]” (ibid.).

CONCLUSIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE STUDY

Queer films that are analyzed in this study create alternative spaces. Films such as *Three Dancing Slaves* and *Shortbus* construct sheltering spaces for disenfranchised queer characters. Other films such as *Paris is Burning, The Living End*, and *Stranger by the Lake* adopt some already existing spaces as sites of breakthrough but they never cease to question the safety and reliability of these actual spaces. On the other hand, films such as *The Watermelon Woman*, *Brother to Brother*, *Appropriate Behavior*, and *Un Chant d'Amour* also make use of history, memory, or imagination other than alternative settings as a means of escape. The symbiosis between cruising scenes and commodity spaces are often challenged. Hegemonic and segregated areas, institutions of discipline and punishment, and the domain of nuclear family are shunned or parodied.

The queer films in this study also utilize unconventional narrative strategies. More experimental forms are preferred over the trite methods of mainstream cinema, which has always disavowed queer identities and desires. Escape and at times fantasy again provide the major impetus in diverse forms. Nostalgia and futurity take precedence over actuality. An unapologetic queer visibility, a desire for self-expression, historical revisionism, or non-linearity shape the narrative structures of films such as

Edward II, *The Hours and Times*, *Tongues Untied*, *The Watermelon Woman*, *Brother to Brother*, and *Appropriate Behavior*.

Aside from alternative settings, fantasy elements, and counter-narrative structures, factors other than sexual orientation often intervene in characterization, and they render a homogenous queerness impossible. In *Weekend* and *Tropical Malady*, for instance, economic discrepancy comes between the lovers; and in *Brother to Brother*, *Watermelon Woman*, and *Appropriate Behavior* race or cultural differences also tamper with relationships. Intersectionality in these films proves that various channels of oppression are interlocking. Interpersonal contact is governed by a logic that is similar to consumption and commodity fetishism in *Frisk*, *Stranger by the Lake*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Weekend*, *Tropical Malady*, and *Appropriate Behavior*. *The Living End*, *My Own Private Idaho*, and *Paris is Burning*, too, make several references to this logic. *Brother to Brother*, *Shortbus*, *Appropriate Behavior*, and *Paris Was a Woman* also portray and challenge the nuclear family and its pressures on the queer-identified characters.

In queer cinema, the endorsement of alternative spaces and fantasy elements do not entail Freudian or Lacanian motives. Fantasy and the creation of alternative spaces are no longer a sublimation of guilt, repression, lack, or trauma. They do not stand for someone else's desire. They are not a *façade* to hide an emptiness behind, either. Rather, fantasy and alternative spaces in queer cinema are anathema to all kinds of repression that impair sexual desire, a collective spirit, and artistic productions. They are an imperative part of any political and revolutionary filmmaking practice.

In light of these analyses it becomes possible to assert that queer filmmaking is principally about critical utopianism. The queer films in this study can be regarded as

critiques of prevalent social and economic structures as well as mainstream film production: the suppression of sexual diversity, oedipal familialism, racism, class and gender hierarchies, the reduction of desire and sexuality to the level of consumption, the loss of intimacy in the relentless pace of modern life, and above all a vicious and insensible heteronormativity, which hog-ties queers and, maybe straights alike.

Most of the queer film settings in this study deserve much closer attention. The ideas that can be extracted from these settings await to be extended to new horizons. The meaning and function of home, for instance, is likely to acquire a new direction for many queer-identified individuals with the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US and several other countries in recent years. A paradigm shift has already begun to take shape in queer filmmaking: *Cloudburst* (2011) and *Love Is Strange* (2014) are interesting examples, which make the viewers reflect on the Stonewall generation's reception of same-sex marriage.

Small town, which has gained attention in recent scholarship, is another contested setting in queer cinema. Queer experience in non-urban America is often represented in contrasting ways. While films such as *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *The Mudge Boy* (2003) portray small town in a very negative way, others such as *Spork* (2010), *Bumblefuck, USA* (2011), and *Boy Meets Girl* (2014) draw a more positive and utopic picture. All these changing representations and understandings of existing spaces invite new considerations in queer film studies.

Despite their significant contributions to queer thought and activism queer filmmakers are still disadvantaged in film industry, and queer visibility remains largely obstructed. Yet, queer films are evolving with changing circumstances. It seems that the future of queer cinema is even pregnant with new fantasies, settings, and narrative spaces.

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