

Beyond Venus and Mars: The Creative Queer Spaces of Daniel Nolasco's *Uranus*, *Neptune*, and *Pluto*

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The aim is to examine the creative queer spaces of Daniel Nolasco's short films *Uranus*, *Neptune*, and *Pluto*. The main argument indicates that the trilogy unveils geographic landscapes that are not common to current imagination of a typical Brazilian heteronormative space, built by the contrast between the beaches and forests and the density of the city. In the three films, Nolasco explores the deviations from any heteronormative norm in creative queer spaces where alternative experiences and sensibilities of the male homoerotic body are possible.

Keywords: queer movies, queer spaces, Daniel Nolasco, *Uranus*, *Neptune*, *Pluto*, Brazilian cinema

Introduction

Born in Catalão, in the Brazilian state of Goiás, Daniel Nolasco moved to Rio de Janeiro at the time of college and was intrigued by the curiosity of people regarding the fact that he was gay in a city in the countryside, as if gay life only happened in the big urban centers. His movies generally deal with gay men's fetishes and spaces, such as gay nightclubs, bathrooms, and cruising areas (Fischler, 2020). Nolasco's films can be separated into the observational documentaries, with their porosity to the times and established lives in each filmed space, and the movies that work with the reformulation of an imaginary for the male homoerotic body, built from the cinematographic incarnation of a fetish aesthetic. His work combines a fundamental game between the concreteness of everyday life and the desires and fantasies that tear it apart, in a highly queer impulse that extends beyond sexual dissidences and their practices. Nolasco revisits memories in the appropriation and reinvention of references and images from queer cinema and gay pornography prior to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, when pleasures and subjectivities were less confined to the chains of the moralizing capture of the erotic and political power of non-heterosexual experiences. Halberstam (2005) argues that the word "queer" refers to nonnormative logics of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. According to Smith (2015) and Gerace (2015), the "queer cinema" rejects heteronormativity and gives voice opportunities to non-straight pleasures and alternative forms of sexuality.

The aim is to examine the creative queer spaces of Nolasco's short films *Uranus*, released in 2013, *Pluto*, released in 2015, and *Neptune*, released in 2017. The main argument indicates that the trilogy unveils geographic landscapes that are not common to current imagination of a typical Brazilian heteronormative space, built by the contrast between the beaches and forests and the density of the city. In the three films, Nolasco explores the deviations from any heteronormative norm in creative queer spaces where alternative experiences and sensibilities of the male homoerotic body are possible.

The Queer Spaces of *Uranus*

Uranus, released in 2013, was one of Nolasco's first short films. It has scenes that display and capture the beauty and sensuality of the male body at different stages of adult life. The film is divided into chapters: "The happy life of the tropics", "Uranus on the corners", "The civilizing process", "Guilt", and "Epilogue: a wanton in paradise". The chapters are inspired by João Silvério Trevisan's book *Devassos no Paraíso*, which analyses the development of homosexuality in Brazil from the colonial period to the contemporary days (Trevisan, 2000).

In the first chapter, with Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet" as the soundtrack, two shirtless bearded muscular men, wearing Navy caps and sunglasses, hug, kiss, and touch each other's bodies in the "happy life of the tropics", where love and sex between two men do not seem to be censored. In "Uranus on the corners", there are black and white images of different naked male bodies, with the soundtrack of Velvet Underground's "Heroin" instrumental part. The men touch their own bodies, feel the pleasure, and even masturbate in suggestive scenes. In "The civilizing process", a man in uniform smokes and holds the bulge of his pants with his erect penis, again with "Blue Velvet" as the soundtrack. Then suddenly he holds and opens the Holy Bible. In "Guilt", the men that appeared in the previous scenes have their faces exposed to the camera with the soundtrack of Screamin Jay Hawkins "I Put a Spell on You" and start to take their clothes off. Finally, in "Epilogue: a wanton in paradise", the man in a Navy uniform appears with his shirt and pants open, puts his hand inside the pants and touches his hard penis while holding the Bible with the other hand and reading its text.

In the Ancient Greek literature, Uranus was the primal god personifying the sky and one of the primordial deities. He was the son and husband of Gaia, the primordial Mother Earth. Uranus came every night to cover the earth and mate with Gaia, but he hated their children. Uranus imprisoned Gaia's youngest children in Tartarus, where they caused pain to Gaia. She shaped a great flint-bladed sickle and asked her sons to castrate Uranus. Only Cronus, who was the youngest and most ambitious of the Titans and is known as the Roman deity Saturn in classical antiquity, was willing. He ambushed his father and castrated him, casting his testicles into the sea (Hamilton, 2011). The idea of castration—not the removal of the testicles of a man, but the state of being deprived of power, vitality, and desire—is present in Nolasco's movie, but it is subverted by the subjects in the scenes. Although "men in tropics" may initially feel guilty for living their own pleasure with the civilizing process represented by the Bible, they will keep living in sin and perverting the established rules regarding sexuality because this makes them happy and satisfied. In line with Foucault (1986; 1996), the movie indicates that male homosexual culture—which has been excluded from normative traditions—brought the possibility of new types of flexible experiences and relationships, which offered greater queer spaces to create oneself beyond the standardization of the sexual pleasure and the disqualification of specific desires.

The Queer Spaces of *Pluto*

Pluto, released in 2015, works as a documentary in which Nolasco presents a tour guide of Rio de Janeiro's downtown, more precisely the bathrooms and other places where the best sexual encounters and flirtations among men take place. The movie suggests the best occasions for such encounters and the aspects of the men who regularly go to these places. *Pluto* describes these places without ever showing them. In black and white or colored scenes, naked and half-naked men—with different body types—appear in their homes looking

out the window, smoking, bathing, sleeping, or masturbating, while the narrator talks about the places where they usually meet for sex (Ramos, 2017). The movie starts and has other interspersed scenes with two men in police uniforms kissing, touching each other's bodies and having sex on the top of a building in Rio de Janeiro. In other parts, older bearded men wearing leather clothes, typical of the fetishist universe, smoke thick cigars and worship each other's bodies. One of them remembers his sexual experiences with men since the transition to adulthood in Catalão, Nolasco's hometown. The same man seems to report to his own mother—which he defines as a “failure”, just as he also sees himself as a failure as a son—how his sex life was more interesting in the city of the Brazilian state of Goiás than in Rio de Janeiro, where everything seemed to be simpler and more abundant.

In classical mythology, Pluto was the ruler of the underworld. When Jupiter—his brother—shared the Universe, he gave Pluto the empire of hell (Hamilton, 2011). Nolasco's movie explores Rio de Janeiro's downtown's underground and the sexual activities that pervert the original functions of the established places, turning them into “little hells” in the light of the organizing structure of these places. *Pluto* escapes the assimilationist logic of occupation of the city space—in the case, Rio de Janeiro's downtown—by “pink capitalism” (Jesus, 2014; 2017), which expects LGBT people to adjust to the culture and orientations of the dominant heteronormative rules. The creative queer places where men have sex with other men faces the homogenizing policies of the state and the market (Jesus, 2010) with a set of practices of body appropriation of the city amid the reconfigured landscape. The fetishist aesthetic generates the “dream atmosphere”, in a universe based on the notion of satisfaction of the desire. Nolasco works with places in which there are formal rules of organization that limit and oppress the expression of desire and subvert these rules (Garrett, 2018).

The Queer Spaces of *Neptune*

Nolasco brings in *Neptune*, released in 2017, the attraction of an older man for a gay young man, with a mix of dream and reality to try to understand the origins of desire that borders on obsession, in the dynamics among characters and desires (Fischler, 2020). In the winter, the low humidity of the air dries out the skin of the inhabitants of Catalão. On Wednesdays, before work, Sandro (played by actor Norval Berbari) swims in a pool in a city club. He met Maicon (played by actor Leandro José) by the pool. Sandro desires Maicon, but their eyes never met. *Neptune* shows a mature man, who, when swimming in a pool at a local club, finds himself enchanted by a handsome young man, who also swims at the same place. His eyes from then on are always admiring, wishing, and seeking the looks of the handsome Maicon, but it seems that the young man does not notice him. As he cannot fulfill the desire for Maicon, Sandro masturbates watching a porn video. In the club's sauna, there is a men's orgy in which Sandro sees Maicon as a participant, but again the mature man does not get what he wants. Sandro is so obsessive that he enters Maicon's home to lie on his bed and feels his smell. Upon learning of a party at the night club, Sandro goes to the place, but Maicon again does not give importance to him. At the end of the film, Sandro walks desolate along the train tracks and sees two men, one wearing a leather suit and the other, submissive to him, held by a collar and growling like a dog. Both characters are typical of the fetishist universe (Guizzo, 2020).

In classical mythology, Neptune—the brother of Jupiter and Pluto—is the god of freshwater and the sea (Hamilton, 2011). In the movie, Sandro's object of desire comes from the pool, like a god. Sandro's desire is openly fetishist, prone to degrading practices in the eyes of many conservative people, but which, in the film, is shown without fear of sounding reprehensible or even ridiculous. It is an eminently gay and massively cliché

sexuality, as seen in the desire for muscular male bodies and the preference for non-effeminate men. Nolasco demonstrates more fidelity to the drives of the characters than to making an innocuous inclusive film, distancing himself from the assimilationist proposal. Even showing a lot of clichés and reiterating several ideas of what is expected to be seen in the behavior that Brazilian patriarchal and homophobic society classifies as ‘degrading’ and typically associates with homosexuals, Nolasco reveals the humanity of the characters, with no need to sanitize practices or falsify behaviors. The characters are presented exactly as they are, that is, as ordinary people, with the difference of having an imaginary and fantasies composed by socially stigmatized practices (Ghetti, 2020). What a more sanitized look at sexuality seems to miss is that the very discretion of sexual acts practiced by Sandro is part of a refined system of fantasies, where hidden sex is the impeller of desire, and not a denial of it. Sandro’s reading as a man who does not accept his sexuality seems quite wrong for ignoring the very content of his fantasies. In the scenes of dreamlike delusion, Sandro always seems comfortable with his fantasies inhabited by archetypes of gay culture (Marques, 2020).

Conclusion

Decades after Mulvey (1999) conceptualized the male gaze, Brazilian cinema remains predominantly shaped by this masculine look that objectifies the image of the woman and presupposes a male and heterosexual viewer. Until today, there are few films that sexualize male characters and that film their bodies with the desire traditionally dedicated exclusively to women. Therefore, it is refreshing that Nolasco positions his camera in the creation of a gay gaze, which always focuses on the exposure of the male body (Marques, 2020). The creative queer spaces he explores in the trilogy shows that operators of regulatory powers in different locations have sought to suppress and hide non-assimilable patterns of sociability in attempts to moralize or sanitize the urban space. However, segments that were disqualified or stigmatized as promiscuous developed creative forms of integration that aimed to resist oppression and guarantee the manifestation of their desires (Jesus, 2018; 2020; Perlongher, 2008; Rodrigues, 2016).

Smith (2015) argues that queer movies may bring the questioning of the sexual politics, which ostensibly desexualize gay and lesbian modes of desire. The queer films remain key critical lenses through which to analyse the shift towards the unpredictable social, sexual, and political implications of oppressive sexual politics (Smith, 2015). The queer relationality shown by Nolasco’s movies becomes a space potentially free from the normalizing heteronormative discourses—which define what is “good and natural”—and, thus, creates places for new queer relationships which destabilize the relationship between politics and sex and question the relationship between normal and good. Although Brazil changed a lot in the last decades to become a creative emerging power in international politics (Jesus, 2011; 2012; 2013), the internal political practices—particularly the ones involving gender and sexuality—remain conservative. In this context, Nolasco’s films play an important role in addressing the dissenting desire, which allows individuals new ways of relating and expressing their sexualities. The desire becomes, in the creative queer spaces created in Nolasco’s work, a political force, which breaks traditional patterns of affective and sexual relationships by creating shameless fantasies (Marques, 2020).

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