

# Blinding Lights: the Creative Queer Geography of Daniel Nolasco's *Dry Wind*

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The aim of this paper is to examine the creative queer geography of Daniel Nolasco's movie *Dry Wind*. The main argument indicates that, instead of representing countryside cities exclusively as places of repression and denial, the movie shows part of the countryside gay culture. The realism of the fertilizer factory and the aridity of the city of Catalão are opposed to the extreme stylization of vibrant colors and blinding neon lights of the main character's fetishist imagination, which indicates how he increasingly surrenders to his desires. Beyond the pornographic representation of homoerotic desire, *Dry Wind* also proposes alternatives for affective expressions of masculinities that do not conform to the prevailing moral standards.

*Keywords:* *Dry Wind*, Daniel Nolasco, queer cinema, queer geography, fetishism, homoeroticism, masculinity

## Introduction

The movie *Dry Wind* (*Vento Seco* in Portuguese), released in 2020 and directed by Daniel Nolasco, takes place in the arid countryside of the Brazilian state of Goiás—more precisely in Nolasco's hometown, Catalão—, where a love triangle is triggered by the arrival of a mysterious stranger, disturbing a fertilizer factory employee's quiet routine called Sandro, played by Leandro Faria Lelo. The movie follows the character's routine and presents the world from a gay fetishist perspective (Carmelo, 2020). Sandro is a quiet and solitary man, shows little commitment to union agendas, and is comfortable in his work routine. He has breaks to smoke cigarettes with his best friend Paula (played by actress Renata Carvalho), trips to the market and evenings putting together jigsaw puzzles. He has secret sexual encounters with Ricardo (played by Allan Jacinto Santana), a younger coworker. The film's turning point is the arrival of Maicon (played by Rafael Theophilo), a blond slim-bodied biker that constantly wears leather clothes. His presence materializes Sandro's desires and undermines his relationship with Ricardo. Maicon develops a relationship with Ricardo and awakens obsessive feelings in Sandro. The height of his jealousy takes place when Maicon starts to offer Ricardo the kind of public relationship that Sandro fears to assume. In response, Sandro wants to punish both with violence (Marques, 2020).

Nolasco explores the geography of the Brazilian cerrado and the homofetishist imaginary. He appropriates, in his unmistakably Brazilian way, camp elements explored by essential names in queer cinema and elaborates a torrid and daring dialogue with melodramatic codes. The dryness of the state of Goiás and the LGBTQIA + culture have always been two fundamental ingredients for Nolasco's work. In *Dry Wind*, he works with

references to the US vintage pornography and the neon aesthetic linked to Brazilian cinema between 1970 and 1990. For the leather culture, there are elements of Tom of Finland's work. For the fetish cinema, there are references to Rainer Fassbinder's and Jean Genet's works. *Dry Wind* took over the excesses, with a dialogue with pornography and melodrama. Although Catalão is a conservative city, Nolasco shows that there are many other sexual experiences there, and people who do not know either Catalão or Goiás do not usually have this perspective (Carmelo, 2020) and think that the expression of creative spaces—including creative queer spaces—cannot take place outside the main cities of the country (Figueiredo, Jesus, Robaina & Couri, 2019; Jesus, 2017a). The director questions the assimilationism of Brazilian society that consolidates homophobia. At the same time, he shows how LGBTQIA + people may be equally free within this context (Jesus, 2014a, 2014b, 2017b), which is also a challenge with the strong political persecution to LGBTQIA + film production in Brazil by federal authorities (Jesus, 2017a, 2020a; Jesus & Kamlot, 2016, 2017; Jesus, Kamlot & Dubeux, 2020).

The aim is to examine the creative queer geography of *Dry Wind*. The main argument indicates that, instead of representing countryside cities exclusively as places of repression and denial, the movie shows part of the countryside gay culture. While *Dry Wind* establishes a direct dialogue with melodrama and reflects on the daily life of workers in a fertilizer factory, the realism of the factory and the aridity of Catalão are opposed to the extreme stylization of vibrant colors and blinding neon lights of the main character's fetishist imagination, which sometimes makes it difficult to understand what is real or not and indicates the greater disconnection between the protagonist and the world and how he increasingly surrenders to his desires. Beyond the pornographic representation of homoerotic desire and the fetishization of male bodies, *Dry Wind* also proposes alternatives for affective expressions of masculinities that do not conform to the prevailing moral standards.

### **The Countryside Culture and Homofetishism of *Dry Wind***

In Catalão, the dry wind and low humidity of the air dry out the skin of its residents. The city has limited political and social relevance within the national scene, in addition to having a history characterized by crimes connected to political reasons and homophobia. Like the entire state of Goiás, the city has a strong countryside culture, with an economy based on agribusiness that occupies the entire territory of the municipality, with immense crops of corn, soybean, and other grains. This scenario helps to make believable the stories of people—usually with lower level of formal education (Jesus, 2017c; Jesus & Dubeux, 2018; Jesus, Kamlot & Dubeux, 2019)—who leave the countryside towards urban centers in search of a different life or a new job. The Brazilian countryside cities are often seen as places of boredom, suffocation, repression, and denial, as well as other places where other traditional economic activities are established (Jesus, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b, 2013b). However, *Dry Wind* shows part of the countryside gay culture and focuses on the representation of homoerotic desire. *Dry Wind* seeks a dialogue with films that sought to think of a form of representation that breaks with the attempt to frame homoaffective ties within prevailing moral standards. Films such as *Phantom (O Fantasma* in Portuguese) by João Pedro Rodrigues and *That Old Dream That Moves (Ce vieux rêve qui bouge* in French) by Alain Guiraudie—which was the main inspiration for the construction of the factory space and the affective relationship among Sandro, Ricardo, and Maicon—as well as the work of filmmakers such as Wakefield Poole (particularly *Bijou*, in which erotic scenes take place in the protagonist's fetishist imagination) serve as aesthetic and narrative references for *Dry Wind* (Cine Esquema Novo, 2020). There are also explicit references to Tom of

Finland's hypersexualized drawings, which, at times, are almost re-enacted. Nolasco mixes these elements with Brazilian references, such as an agricultural fair and a show of Brazilian country duo Jorge & Mateus (Guerra, 2020).

The realism of the scenes in the factory and the aridity of the state of Goiás are opposed to the extreme stylization of vibrant colors of Sandro's fetishist imagination. He tells Paula that he has been having strange and recurring dreams about a figure dressed in leather. After a while, one may even doubt between what is real or not, which indicates the greater disconnection between the protagonist and the world and how he increasingly surrenders to his desires. The humidity of the air in Catalão is often displayed on screen, and as the fantasies become more intense, the warmer the temperature becomes. Nolasco does not hide anything from Sandro's sexual fantasies and fetishes. Every act is filmed with enormous frontality, such as the scene in which Sandro and Ricardo have sex at a cruising spot in the Brazilian cerrado—which is shown in details by the camera, as Ricardo spits on Sandro's face, licks Sandro's armpit and anus, and penetrates him—and the oral sex scene between Sandro and Ricardo that is approximated by a zoom movement, in which Sandro ejaculates in Ricardo's mouth and they kiss sharing Sandro's semen (Gutwilen, 2020). While the sex scenes involving Sandro and Ricardo have a more natural manipulation, Sandro's dreams present a more performative scenario full of fetishes, causing the protagonist to constantly flee from his opaque reality (Molina Neto, 2020). In one of his sexual fantasies, Sandro ends up at a sadomasochist club. Sandro watches a highly performative oral sex scene, the culmination of which is the ejaculation in the eye of the character kneeling on stage. The queer face smudged with a thick sperm tear becomes a metaphor for LGBT suffering. Sandro voraciously approaches that face and, in a more symbolic than properly fetishist gesture, licks the viscous fluid. What was once suffering is now pleasure (Ghetti, 2020).

The film shows how the population of the Brazilian countryside is exposed to situations of precarious work. Paula is a security technician who seeks better working conditions for her colleagues and believes that the strength of the collective action can attract the attention of businessmen. One of Paula and Sandro's friends loses his life in an accident, but this event brings Sandro even closer to Ricardo and Maicon, who hug Sandro collectively in solidarity for the death of their colleague, even though Sandro had previously told Maicon's homophobic brother about the place where Ricardo was having sex with Maicon. Maicon's brother has beaten Ricardo, who still appears with injuries in the scene. At the end of the film, Sandro, Ricardo, and Maicon meet at the cerrado cruising spot, where they have an intense sexual intercourse, and Sandro gets to have the two men he desires outside the patterns of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Riuler, 2020).

### **Dissident Masculinities in the Creative Queer Sites of *Dry Wind***

*Dry Wind* challenges the pervasive character of patriarchy and subversively plays with gendered meanings to show how they could be redefined (Butler, 1988, 1990, 2003). Along with Rubin (1975) and Foucault (1980), Butler (1988, 2003) suggests that sex, gender, and heterosexuality are historical products which have become reified as natural over time. Nevertheless, Butler (1988) argues that performative acts may either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation and break conventions down. Nolasco's movie shows the viability of other masculinities which confront the imaginary of the countryside men—usually associated with violence and the appreciation for barbarism—with the exploration of their alternative desires. If Brazilian cinema's social realism typically turns to the working class to discuss the dynamics of labor relations, *Dry Wind*

brings a portrait of a worker with an almost hedonistic bias in the pursuit of pleasure. Sandro desires what is abject, such as spit, sweat, urine, and sperm. He sniffs leather jackets, sucks on objects touched by Maicon, and licks the seat of Maicon's motorcycle. The right to desire ceases to be a bourgeois privilege. The discretion of the sexual acts performed by Sandro, which always take place in public places, is part of a refined system of fantasies, in which hidden sex drives desire, not a denial of it. In scenes of delirium, Sandro seems comfortable with his fantasies inhabited by archetypes of gay culture, figures that mix makeup with beards, drag queens, and sadomasochists (Marques, 2020). The movie's audience sees what Sandro most desires in other men's bodies. The soccer sequence, for example, deconstructs and reframes the sport associated with heteronormative masculinity with a visual delight of sweaty bodies and male genitalia swinging inside the players' shorts. When Maicon is introduced, there is a bottom-up camera movement. These cinematographic artifices allow Sandro to express his desires and share them with the audience (Gutwilen, 2020; Jesus, 2011b, 2011c, 2014c, 2018b).

Beyond the pornographic representation of gay sex and the fetishization of male bodies, *Dry Wind* also proposes alternatives for affective expressions of masculinities. The movie destroys the binary notion that separates dissident sexuality from the manifestation of romanticism. The film has several moments of affective exchanges among men, such as the hand that caresses the lover's face after a melancholic confession, the collective embrace of Sandro, Ricardo, and Maicon that brings comfort in the moment of mourning, and the slow dance between Ricardo and Maicon in a public space. In an amusement park, Sandro and Maicon are alone in the private compartment of a machine. Maicon is frightened, screams, and holds tightly to Sandro's hand. Sandro, in turn, looks tenderly at Maicon's vulnerability. The affectionate exchanges inscribe the possibility of masculinities that are built through desire, but without denying affection, which is traditionally denied to men. The subversion of traditional perspectives of masculinity also takes place when the protagonist occupies a melodramatic position. The film highlights Sandro's pain, anger, jealousy, and anguish with close-ups of his face in moments of intensity and love songs, such as Thiago Pethit's *Me Destroi (Destroy Me)* and *Orfeu (Orpheus)*, and Maria Bethânia's *Negue (Deny)*. These melodramatic codes expose Sandro's emotions (Marques, 2020).

### Final Considerations

Nolasco's films work with the reformulation of an imaginary for the male homoerotic body, built from the cinematographic incarnation of a fetish aesthetic which mixes 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 nonnormative practices (Gerace, 2015; Halberstam, 2005; Smith, 2015). In the case of Brazilian cinema, most movies remain predominantly shaped by the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999), but Nolasco creates a gay gaze, which focuses on the exposure of the male body (Marques, 2020). The creative queer spaces he explores in his movies—such as *Dry Wind*—reveal stigmatized people who develop creative forms of integration that aim to resist oppression and guarantee the manifestation of their desires (Jesus, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2013a, 2018a, 2020b; Perlongher, 2008; Rodrigues, 2016). In line with Foucault's arguments (1986; 1996), Nolasco indicates that male homosexual culture brought new types of flexible experiences and relationships, which offered greater spaces to create oneself beyond the disqualification of specific desires (Jesus, 2014a, 2014b, 2017b).

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