

Intruders: Gay Explicit Sex in Queer Movies

Diego Santos Vieira de Jesus
ESPM-Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The aim is to analyze the use of sexually explicit material in queer movies, particularly in the short film “Intruders”. The movie takes place amid political upheaval in Brazil and brings an intersection among class, privilege and sex. The main argument indicates that many queer movies face the ongoing political normalization of same-sex desires in the society and bring alternative forms of relationality, which may be framed by the location where they develop and characterized by the fluidity of the relationships among the characters. The explicit sex aims to examine alternative forms of relationality, which question the normalization of specific actions and sexual behaviors. Based on a different perspective from the traditional pornography, “Intruders” understands sex as a political act, so that it is neither the consumption of bodies, nor the pursuit of desire at any cost, but the construction of new possibilities of relationships.

Keywords: gay sex, explicit sex, queer movies, pornography

Introduction

The cinema incorporated, reflected and constructed explicit, veiled or censored images and discourses about sex. The image of sex is not necessarily obscene, as the concept of obscenity is cultural and changes over time. The obscene effect of a work can only be measured by subjective perceptions of what would be considered immoral according to its cultural specificities and historical moment (Gerace, 2015). In many countries, critical objections to sexually explicit material tend to be political or aesthetic rather than moralistic. Commercial cinema still prefers to address sex and sexuality tangentially in erotic thrillers, in part because the studios have not wanted to alienate moral and religious lobbies and produce movies which could jeopardize their access to large and heterogeneous audiences. However, sexually explicit art movies have gradually been developed. Particularly after “In the Realm of the Senses” (Dauman & Oshima, 1976)—a movie that broke a range of Japanese taboos for its disturbing and graphic content and conceived sexual activity very far from being a private affair—, many art movies started to challenge more taboos. Nevertheless, the differentiation between sexually explicit art cinema and pornography—which gained immensely from libertarian movements and the slackening of social taboos and brought an answer to the problem of authenticity of desire—is still murky, and questions of categorization and borders are frequently present in academic debates. These questions became more intense in the context of the dissemination of sexually explicit material in the internet and the deregulation of media industries, since many interest groups do not adopt a nuanced approach to the subject. Even when they do, distinctions seem to be arbitrary. The cinematic sex is often intended to produce strong reactions, and controversy has been an excellent marketing tool. Many specialists agree that sexually explicit art movies usually bring non-simulated sexual behaviour as a way of asking probing questions of intimacy

(Barker, 2013; Krzywinska, 2006; Smith, 2015).

According to Williams (1999), pornography brings the visual representation of bodies engaged in explicit sexual acts with the primary intent of arousing viewers. Best & Crowley (2007) argue that pornography shattered the barriers between the object of art and its spectators and refused the distance of contemplation and reflection. In contrast to porn, the sexually explicit art cinema has often been legitimized by its intellectual intent. Krzywinska (2006) argues that explicit imagery in sex-based art films has a more ambiguous and complex status than pornography, because the combination of psychological realism, sex and desire became a source of dramatic and existential enigma. Barker (2013) states that moving sex from the margins of pornography to narrative cinema is a way to interrogate what may be deemed normal and traditional. In her analysis of the French queer cinema, Smith (2015) says that some sexually explicit art movies may bring the questioning of the sexual politics, which ostensibly desexualize gay and lesbian modes of desire. The explicit sex scenes are not gratuitous, and queer films remain a key critical lens through which to analyse the shift towards the unpredictable social, sexual, and political implications of oppressive sexual politics (Smith, 2015). A pornographic scene typically restricts the representation of the sexual act to its mechanical components. Usually, it does not consider the psychological and emotional implications of a relationship. While pornographic material would have the practical use to excite, sexually explicit art cinema could be aimed at criticism or aesthetic appreciation, whose values are defined in historical, cultural and ideological terms (Gerbase, 2006).

In the light of this discussion, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the use of sexually explicit material in queer movies, particularly in the short film "Intruders", directed by Travis Mathews (2018) and starred by Ronaldo Serruya and Bruno D'Ugo. The movie takes place amid political upheaval in Brazil and brings an intersection among class, privilege and sex. A male character (interpreted by Serruya) lives a lonely, exquisite lifestyle in his large, empty apartment. He hears the noise of a young man (D'Ugo) stumbling through the window in his bedroom. The intruder has a gun and shakes while he holds it. In line with Smith's (2015) analysis, the main argument indicates that many queer movies face the ongoing political normalization of same-sex desires in the society and bring alternative forms of relationality, which may be framed by the location where they develop and characterized by the fluidity of the relationships among the characters. The explicit sex aims to examine alternative forms of relationality, which question the normalization of specific actions and sexual behaviors. Based on a different perspective from the traditional pornography, "Intruders" understands sex as a political act, so that it is not the consumption of bodies, nor the pursuit of desire at any cost, but the construction of new possibilities of relationships.

Explicit Sex in Film

In the 1920s and 1930s, some mainstream movies, outside the underground circuit of stag films, began to work on the representation of nudity and erotic desire. In the 1950s and 1960s, underground films existed on the margins of Hollywood narrative cinema and the traditional exhibition circuit and claimed their marginality in the way they were made and also in their ideologies, which defied laws that restricted the treatment of prohibited themes, such as explicit sex, homosexuality, lesbianism, transgender people, profanity, blasphemy, drug use, violence and crime. Some underground films articulated a predominantly gay male camp aesthetic that would later influence queer movies. The approach to homosexuality became clearer not only in experimental cinema, but also in the mainstream. The 1960s and 1970s counterculture movements influenced

discourses about sexual freedom and the representation of sex and sexualities in the mainstream cinema, which began to question the tradition of romantic and bourgeois love, monogamy, marriage and heterosexuality as norms (Gerace, 2015).

However, gradually during the 1970s, some sexually explicit films have either been confined to the “X” rating and thus marketed as pornography to limited audiences or re-edited to receive an “R”. However, the “home entertainment revolution” beginning in the early 1980s—led by video and cable channel networks—allowed straight-to-video and straight-to-cable sexually explicit filmed narratives not to meet the general public morality criteria because they were sold or rented directly to customers or delivered to subscribers only. However, for the movie industry, the fundamental issue had become not only moral, but economic, since explicit sex movies would not be available to teenagers, for example (Barker, 2013).

Denmark was the first country in the world to liberate pornography in 1969, and mainstream Danish films incorporated the transgressive potential of sex and pornography during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The country even attracted filmmakers from abroad. Many incorporated and commercialised the transgressiveness of sex and pornography not only in actual porn films, but also in documentary-like films and sex comedies. However, the initial wave of liberation which had pushed borders even further to bring more transgressive material into the mainstream was doomed. This material returned to the closed circles of private homes upon the advent of home video and, more recently, new technologies privatized the consumption of explicit sex (Gerace, 2015; Thorsen, 2016). While consolidating the adult film industry, the popularization of video has made films aesthetically and narratively simpler. Regarding the way women were portrayed in adult movies, some feminist authors claimed that pornography eroticized hierarchy, sexualized inequality between men and women, institutionalized male supremacy and fused the eroticization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1985). Porn films established themselves with a profit market logic and standardized narratives, bodies and sex itself. They established narratives based on heteronormative models, in which every image about the female body was intended for the male gaze. Sex became an expression of the uniformity of desires (Best & Crowley, 2007).

The death of the initial wave of liberation may also be explained by massive distinctive features of disciplinary control, which include hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination. In this context, sexuality—which is a constructed category of experience with historical, social and cultural, rather than simply biological, origins—may be mobilized as a means of control within society. Specific techniques for the confession of personal desires were followed by classification and interpretation. They were something to be regulated and administered by systems of power and knowledge, rather than a natural activity to be enjoyed by all (Foucault, 1986). The power created a kind of sex that, in the practice of bodies, had to be restricted to their reproductive function, within the monogamous marriage (Gerbase, 2006).

However, Foucault (1986; 1996) indicated that male homosexual culture provided a space of creation for new types of relationships. The flexibility of homosexual relationships offered a greater space to create oneself, but, when medicine and psychoanalysis have made extensive use of the notion of “desire”, they tried to establish the intelligibility of sexual pleasure, standardize it in terms of normality and qualify or disqualify specific desires. According to him, the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures. He rejected the normalized relations among individuals and sought to widen conceptions of sexual and social relations. As homosexual relationships have been excluded from normative traditions, Foucault argues that homosexual culture has provided a potential place for

the creation of new types of relationships (Foucault, 1986; 1996).

Explicit Sex and Queer Movies

The ideological and intellectual work of sexually explicit art movies shows the aim to override the inauthenticity of “acting” and the euphemistic aspect of “intimacy” (Barker, 2013). Movies may have the potential to normalize certain standards surrounding sex and sexuality, but they may also serve as opportunities to explore potential deviations from such norms (Smith, 2015), as many queer movies do. According to Halberstam (2005), the word “queer” refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. Smith (2015) argues that the “queer cinema”—which started to have more visibility in the early 1990s—renegotiates subjectivities, rejects heteronormativity, gives voice opportunities to marginalized groups—specially LGBT + people—and challenges cinematic conventions. The queer movies gave voice to non-straight pleasures and explored alternative forms of sexuality. Some of them used multiple depictions of explicit sex as spaces to explore new relational possibilities and defy dominant ideologies and values regarding the role of the individuals in society and institutions such as the family and the state. The conditions that lead to the legitimization of sexually explicit scenes in queer movies are related to their purpose and intent, mainly connected to the critique of the traditional use of the human body and the gender dynamics. With the prejudice and the blaming of gays for the spread of AIDS, gay-themed films sought resistance through the “new queer cinema”, an attempt to deconstruct the negative image linked to the LGBT + population. These films sought to celebrate this population and refused to assume stereotypes that had been spread until then. The new queer cinema directors clearly state that explicit sex in many of their productions would not be exclusively dedicated to sexual excitement (Gerace, 2015).

Rather than mirroring the political normalization, contemporary queer movies such as Alain Guiraudie’s “Stranger by the Lake” (2013) explore both explicit sex and multiple forms of relationality, which suggest alternatives to the couple and family and question aspects of politics, such as the republicanism of contemporary French politics in the case of the movie. The queerness of Guiraudie’s cinema is tied to its presentation of a literal space for the exploration of gay sexuality, cruising subculture and homoerotic relationships. The generic space of the lake—which could become a place for several things, such as family interactions or childhood memories—becomes the place for gay cruising and the creation of alternative forms of queer relationality, such as friendship across generational gaps, casual hook-ups and peeping toms. The figures of authority, especially the police inspector, functions to police normalcy. The explicit non-simulated sex challenges the nature of traditional social intercourse—and cinematic conventions—within the space of a rural French landscape (Smith, 2015). The proposal of movies such as “Stranger by the Lake” goes in line with Warner’s (1999) argument that gay social life—which has been historically positioned in opposition to the framework of normative institutions and ordinary social obligations—is not necessarily as ritualized and institutionalized as straight life and each new sexual relation is potentially an adventure in nearly uncharted territory.

Gay Explicit Sex in “Intruders”

Just as in heterosexual porn films, sex and bodies in gay porn movies have the function of simply arousing the desire of the viewer. This proposal differs from what most queer movies intend. Such films seek to understand sex as a political and performative act and consider other forms of pleasure and experiences in addition to those produced by the traditional porn industry. In this sense, queer movies typically aim to confront,

deconstruct and even redefine the current sex-political imaginary by bringing the representation of historically marginalized bodies, genders and sexual identities, in addition to the dismantling of aesthetics and languages created by the traditional, white and heterosexually-oriented capitalist porn industry (Sarmet, 2014).

Mathews—who is a self-taught filmmaker based in San Francisco—had his feature narrative debut “I Want Your Love” (2010) about a group of gay San Francisco friends and collaborated with James Franco in “Interior. Leather Bar” (2013). In the short movie “Intruders”, shot in Brazil in the context of emerging conservative groups in politics, a young man—who wears simple clothes and a bandit mask—breaks into the home of a rich, executive-type man to hold him at gunpoint while he robs him. The older rich man—who smiles and shows tranquility after seeing the thief breaking into his home—is ordered by the intruder to take his clothes off, while the thief—who seems to be insecure—drinks a bottle of wine and points a gun to the older man. While the rich man gets naked, the intruder takes his bandit mask off and smells the rich man’s shoes. When the executive-type man is totally naked, the intruder holds the other man’s face and smells his armpit. In the following scene, the intruder licks, sucks and stimulates the rich man’s anus. In the sequence, the executive-type man—sat quietly in a chair eating a piece of cake—allows the thief to suck his penis. He even gives a portion of the cake icing on his finger for the intruder to lick. After sucking the thief’s erect penis and putting a condom on it, the rich man has anal sex with the thief, and there are explicit scenes in which the young intruder penetrates the rich man’s anus with his erect penis. They have sex next to the window of the apartment and in bed. The camera shows the tattoos in their manly bodies, as well as the rich man having pleasure and punching the thief’s chest during the sex scene. In a moment during the sexual act, they both kiss. There is no orgasm scene. They appear lying in bed after sex, while the thief seems more relaxed and asleep. The rich man even shows some affection for the young intruder. While they are cuddling naked in bed, the older man’s cell phone rings and he says he forgot his plans for dinner. He gets out of bed and only his voice is heard. He calls the police saying that he needed to report that he had an intruder in his apartment. He identifies himself as Ricardo Silveira and says the intruder is still there. He gives his address to the police, while the intruder is still lying in bed and drinking a bottle of wine.

The movie shows a clear intersection among class, privilege and sex. The young intruder represents a poor man trapped in an elitist system that prevails in Brazilian society, while the executive-type man represents the elite that controls the wealth in an economic logic who puts the low-income population in an unprivileged position. When the young intruder invades the rich man’s home and roughly penetrates him with his penis, the moral compass that the elites evoke for themselves—their natural feeling that makes people know what is right and wrong and how they should behave—is broken. The rich man—who is the bottom in the sexual act—is not limited to giving pleasure to the top (the intruder), which differs from the predominant logic of the Brazilian gay porn industry. Serruya’s character has the pleasure of being penetrated by a criminal man and, after sex, shows affection for him, which contrasts to the loneliness in his huge, classy and empty apartment in the beginning of the movie. However, he seems to reassume his privileged class position—in opposition to the intruder—and calls the police to arrest the man he has just had sex with. The movie shows non-straight pleasures and alternative forms of sexuality. The depictions of explicit sex show spaces to explore new relational possibilities between the two men and defy dominant ideologies and values regarding the role of the individuals in society. However, the figure of authority—represented critically in the movie by the police—is called by the rich man after giving in to his desire to bring life back to its normal way. In line with Smith (2015) analysis, it is possible to say that the movie shows distinct sexualized bodies who desire each other despite their

differences regarding age and social status, as well as the existence of figures of authority which create barriers to the lasting expression of pleasure. However, when this authority is not evoked as a means of control, the movie works with a broader exploration of queer relationality that do not conform to the social expectations of a heteronormative order, in a context in which the meeting of a criminal, low-income and young man with an executive-type, high-income and older man involves temporary intimacy and affection, and the pleasure they feel with their interaction is shown in their explicit sex scenes, although the movie also critically reveals how the mechanisms of power operate to interrupt this kind of relationality—which is different from the one expected in traditional normalized human interaction—to preserve the established order. Serruya’s and D’Ugo’s characters are “intruders”: while the young thief invades the older man’s home, the executive-type man invades—although temporarily—a life of “forbidden” pleasures with a lower-income young man that defy the normalcy of behaviors expected from his privileged class position.

Conclusion

According to Foucault (1996), the homosexual culture created spaces for a multiplicity of new expansive modes of relationality that resist the normalizing effects of power. In many queer movies such as “Intruders”, these new modes of relationality question the presumed stability of the self. These alternative relations with multiple intensities cannot be validated by rigid institutional codes. According to Smith (2015), the queer relationality brought by explicit sex in movies such as “Intruders” becomes a space potentially free – at least temporarily – from the normalizing discourses of heterosexuality – which defines what is “good and natural” – and, thus, a place to create new queer relationships, destabilize the relationship between politics and sex and question the relationship between normal and good, correct and natural.

References

- Barker, A. (2013). On Not Being Porn: Intimacy and the Sexually Explicit Art Film. *Text Matters*, 3(3), 186-202.
- Best, V., & Crowley, M. (2007). *The New Pornographies: Explicit Sex in Recent French Fiction and Film*. New York, NY and Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dauman, A. (Producer), & Oshima, N. (Director). (1976). *In the Realm of Senses* [Motion Picture]. France, Japan: Argos Films.
- Dworkin, A., & MacKinnon, C. A. (1985). *The reasons why: essays on the new civil rights law recognizing pornography as sex discrimination*. New York: Women Against Pornography.
- Foucault, M. (1986). *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1996). Friendship as a way of life. In S. Lotringer (Ed.), *Foucault Live: Interviews 1961-1984* (pp. 308-313). (L. Hochroth & J. Johnston, Trans.). New York: Semiotexte.
- Franco, J., Jolivet, V., Lannan, M., Mathews, T., Torres, I. (Producers), & Franco, J., Mathews, T. (Directors). (2013). *Interior: Leather Bar* [Motion picture]. United States: Strand Home Video.
- Gerace, R. (2015). *Cinema explícito: representações cinematográficas do sexo*. São Paulo: Perspectiva e Edições Sesc São Paulo.
- Gerbase, C. (2006). Imagens do sexo: as falsas fronteiras do erótico com o pornográfico. *FAMECOS*, 31, 39-46.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: University Press.
- Keith, M., Nana, C., Shamama, J. (Producers), & Mathews, T. (Director). (2010). *I Want Your Love* [Motion picture]. United States: Naked Sword.
- Krzywinska, T. (2006). *Sex and the Cinema*. New York: Wallflower Press.
- Lust, E. (Producer), & Mathews, T. (Director). (2018). *Intruders* [Motion Picture]. Spain, Brazil: Erica Lust Films.
- Pialat, S. (Producer), & Guiraudie, A. (Director). (2013). *Stranger by the Lake* [Motion Picture]. France: Strand Home Video.
- Sarmet, E. (2014). Pós-pornô, dissidência sexual e a situação cuir latino-americana: pontos de partida para o debate. *Periódicus*, 1(1), 258-276.
- Smith, J. K. (2015). *Contemporary French Queer Cinema: Explicit Sex and the Politics of Normalization*. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 3113. Retrieved 12 April 2020 from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/3113>

- Thorsen, C. I. (2016). Incorporation of the Transgressive: Sex and Pornography in Danish Feature Films of the 1970s. *Cine-Excess*, 2, 99-117.
- Warner, M. (1999). *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York: Free Press.
- Williams, L. (1999). *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "frenzy of the visible"*. Berkeley: University of California Press.