

# Edge of Seventeen: Melodramatic Coming-Out in New Queer Adolescence Films

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*Queer adolescence films in the US and Britain in the 1990s show positive representations of same-sex attraction, romance, and confrontations with homophobia. Films like Beautiful Thing, Edge of Seventeen, and Get Real are primarily targeted at young gay and lesbian viewers who need supportive and optimistic visualizations of eroticized queer politics, struggle and success, agony and happiness. These films are characterized, however, by complicated representations of the queer body, eroticization of physical inequality in same-sex relationships, and the melodramatic coming-out of agonized protagonists, which highly support the notion of a fixed and stable sexual orientation.*

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Youth films often feature such themes as painful adolescence, confrontation with the older generation, the contrast between socialization and selfhood, erotic pubescence, confusing infatuation, and the formation of sexual identity. The cinematic representation of queer adolescence emphasizes and sometimes also sensationalizes these themes, as the rebellious protagonist challenges not only the social order but also the sexual order and its powerful agents: parents, teachers, students, counselors, coaches, neighbors, and popular role models in mass culture.

The literature shows that strict rules of heterocentrist “normal” pubescence and adolescence are enforced upon *all* male and female teenagers. For instance, Ben Gove notes that the insurmountably tricky question of when a “child” becomes a “youth” becomes a “young adult” becomes a fully fledged “adult” is crudely answered with the riddling notion of puberty as a biologically enforced rite of passage from

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childhood erotic ambiguity to adult heterosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Further, Gove points out that those who are accepted into the dominant adult fold must decide whether to disguise their homosexual desires and experiences to match those of the master narrative, or attempt to accept the encouraged belief in the unimportance, even impossibility, of their own sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

Gay males report on developing their gay identity between the ages of 15 and 17 and lesbians between the ages of 18 and 20.<sup>3</sup> Most young homosexuals are not raised in an environment in which homosexual development is even recognized, much less encouraged. It is not unusual for men who have recently identified themselves as gay to have no idea what *being gay* is all about.<sup>4</sup> This combination of sexual misinformation and disinformation, ignorance, prejudice and hostility has tragic consequences. A study in New York City found that half of the homosexual and bisexual teens reporting an assault said that it was related to their sexual orientation, and for two-thirds the assault had occurred within their own families. Further, of those who had experienced assault, 41 percent of the girls and 34 percent of the boys had tried to kill themselves.<sup>5</sup>

According to Gibson's research for the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States, gay and lesbian teenagers are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual teenagers, and homosexual teenagers account for 30 percent of all adolescent suicides.<sup>6</sup> Homosexual identity formation may be less traumatic, however, if some explanation or rationalization of the adolescent's feelings and behavior is provided.<sup>7</sup> Films and television programs about the coming of age *and* coming out of gays and lesbians may often be a youth's *first contact* with issues and sexual desires of a non-heteronormative nature. Rob Cover notes that for many, such media may be the only source of evidence of sexualities that deviate from what is still posited as the heterosexual norm.<sup>8</sup>

### Theorizing Cinematic Queer Adolescence

For decades, mainstream cinematic articulations of queer adolescence have reflected a paternalistic approach that condemns any transgression of the dominant heterosexual order. For instance, the love between two boys in *This Special Friendship* (Jean Delannoy, USA 1964) ends when the younger boy commits suicide by jumping from a speeding train; a boy serves as a sex-slave in a Canadian prison in Harvey Hart's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (USA 1971); a young man introduces his androgynous colored lover to his semi-liberal parents and experiences hypocrisy, homophobia, and racism in *Girl Stroke Boy* (Bob Kellet, UK 1971); a flamboyant, effeminate boy becomes a male prostitute in *The Naked Civil Servant* (Jack Gold, UK 1975) based on the late British gay icon Quentin Crisp's sensational autobiography; another protagonist is abused by his father and by his cruel classmates and teachers in *The Terence Davis Trilogy* (UK 1976–1983); and another gay boy is presented as no less than a vampire and consequently is tortured by other students in a brutal shower scene in Howard Storm's *Once Bitten* (USA 1985).

Whether these films represent gay and lesbian teens as freaks or unfortunates,

perverts or victims, they serve to maintain and reaffirm the oppressing gender and sexual dichotomies reproduced by the straight dominance.<sup>9</sup> In the mid-1980s, there was still a harsh disparity between real-life gays and the popular conception of such people onscreen. According to Keith Hawes's *Broadcasting It: An Encyclopedia of Homosexuality in Film, Radio and TV in the UK 1923–1993*, gay and lesbian teenagers face loneliness, ostracism and guilt. They may also find themselves homeless and/or clinically depressed. Yet they live within the same political system, possess the same range of potential, and house the same impulse systems, the same instincts, and the same fears as their heterosexual counterparts.<sup>10</sup> However, because most gays in real life chose to remain hidden, their sexual diversity remained hidden as well. Purely mythological gays proliferated on the screen, perpetuating menacing stereotypes that appeared to threaten heterosexual society much more than any reality.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the rare treatment of adolescent homosexuality on television until the mid-1990s fell into a few narrow categories. Character types were restricted to the “confused teen,” the “situational homosexual,” and the “assimilated gay.” Each of these types was generally developed around a burning desire of the character to be a part of the mainstream, reflecting a more desperate than affirmational attitude.<sup>12</sup>

The queer body is still perceived as an agonized body even in American and British films of the 1990s that show positive and compassionate attitudes towards their adolescent gay protagonists: *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, USA 1991), *Totally Fucked Up* (Gregg Araki, USA 1994), *Beautiful Thing* (Hettie MacDonald, UK 1995), *Edge of Seventeen* (David Moreton, USA 1998), *Get Real* (Simon Shore, UK/South Africa 1998), *Bedrooms & Hallways* (Rose Troche, UK 1998), *Velvet Goldmine* (Todd Haynes, UK 1998), and *Trick* (Jim Fall, USA 1999). The pubescent body in these films visualizes erotic misconduct and sexual disruption, juvenile nonconformity and libidinal delinquency in the patriarchal and hetero-sexist eye of the beholder.

However, in contrast to mainstream representation of gay coming of age, this alternative queer cinema in the mid-1990s and early twenty-first century politicizes the mechanisms of heterosexualization. Ideologically, this cinema portrays the maturation process as a courageous attempt to escape the dominant erotic regime and to attain same-sex fulfillment. In alternative queer adolescence cinema, homosexuality is not a fashionable trend or the rebellious behavior of an undisciplined juvenile or “wasted” body. It is certainly not a perversion or ridiculed freak show, nor “just a phase.” Rather, this pro-gay cinema (made by gay-identified or, at least, gay-friendly filmmakers) shows same-sex attraction, sex, romance, and difficulties and confrontation with powerful homophobic systems and their mostly unenlightened and/or vicious agents—parents, teachers, students, psychologists, etc.

These new queer adolescence films demonstrate the necessity to provide young queers with some form of representation of their life and possible life choice. However, this representation takes the form of a melodrama. Although this highly popular genre often generates identification and acceptance by wide audiences, it also has its problems and limits. Particularly, the melodramatic form of these movies does not confront adequately the difficulties of coming out, often treating coming

out as medicinal, or at least, better than not coming out, and thus romanticizing an overly dichotomized choice.

This article focuses on three paradigmatic queer adolescence films that combine a romantic affair, coming of age and coming-out: *Beautiful Thing* (Hettie MacDonald, UK 1995),<sup>13</sup> *Edge of Seventeen* (David Moreton, USA 1998),<sup>14</sup> and *Get Real* (Simon Shore, UK/South Africa 1998).<sup>15</sup> This article examines the melodramatization of queer adolescence, its implications for the (re)production of younger queer bodies and subjectivities, and problematic relationships with the protagonists' best female friend, the "fag hag."

### Melodramatic Coming Out and Queer Epistemology

*Beautiful Thing* articulates the love story of two boys who live in a working-class neighborhood in East London: Jamie, a delicate boy who is bullied by his school-mates, and Ste, the football captain who is often beaten by his older brother, a drug dealer, and by his abusive father. *Edge of Seventeen* goes back to the 1980s and portrays the coming of age and coming-out of Eric, a teenager who lives with his family in a middle-class American suburb. Eric is falling in love with an older college student and confronts his parents. He is encouraged by his devoted best (female) friend. *Get Real* presents the complex relationship of two high school students in an upper middle-class neighborhood in England: Steven, a sensitive boy, and John, a spectacular athletic track-and-field school champion.

These new queer adolescent films are based on the powerful and controversial genre of melodrama; they exploit its popularity *and* its subversive potentiality. Notably, Douglas Sirk's classical melodramas of the 1950s criticize the bourgeoisie society and, more specifically, the angst of the bourgeois woman. Sirk had directed a series of weepy dramas produced by Ross Hunter: *Magnificent Obsession* (1954), *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *Written in the Wind* (1956) and *The Tarnished Angels* (1957). Originally dismissed as lachrymose tripe, they have since the 1970s become canonical classics of film history. According to Richard Dyer, one of the characteristics of these classic films is the extraordinary sense of frustration and dissatisfaction in their central female characters. "They move in rich, bland suburban interiors that have all the airless comfort and reassurance of a department store or a mail-order catalogue. They are stifled by the anaemic morality and pat emotional texture of their lives."<sup>16</sup>

In queering this successful genre, the suffering woman is substituted by a different sexual Other: the young gay man. The queer protagonists (and their agonized mothers and sometimes frustrated best female friend) are considered by their straight environment as a sham—and thus as a social and sexual threat—on which real young men would do well to turn their backs. These queer melodramas criticize the mainstream codes of masculinity in the significant phase of puberty, adolescence, and maturation. Like the classic Hollywood melodramas, they do believe in the idea of, and the need for, virility in this critical stage of adolescence. It is just that they do not really believe "real (young) men" exist anymore. These new queer films are thus a tragic view of the situation of men, and not only gay men, who suffer from

chauvinist, misogynist, and powerful oppression within its current sexual and gender regimes.

The protagonists in the new queer youth films of the 1990s overtly challenge and denaturalize (hetero)social institutions in their extravagant and rampageous spectacles of tears, cries, and emotional collapse. In all these films, the boy *and* his parents are represented as victims of an oppressive regime that excludes the queer or the one whose masculinity is even suspected to be not heteronormative. Prominently, both the gay protagonist and his parents are manipulated by the politics of the closet.<sup>17</sup> According to Butler, gender is neither a stable identity nor a locus of agency from which various acts proceed. Rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—through a *stylized repetition of acts*.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, in *Edge of Seventeen*, Eric adopts the unisexual aesthetics of the 1980s pop stars: he dyes his hair blond, puts on eyeliner, dresses flamboyantly, and thus is marked, signified and stigmatized as “less” masculine and thereby as “less” heterosexual. Eric’s heteromascularity (and thus his heterosexuality) is first suspected by his schoolmates when he gets drunk at a party, criticizes the “masculine” musical genre of Heavy Metal, and is confronted by the other youths: “Who done your hair? Boy George?” This homophobic remark refers to the leader of the British pop group “Culture Club” and one of the most influential gay icons of the 1980s. When the music changes to pop, Eric starts dancing in a manner resembling the British pop icon Morrissey, who is admired by many gay men. When Eric touches one of the other boys by accident, the latter responds: “Are you queer or something?” Eric is thrown out. He cries, but soon after he goes to another party that is taking place at the local gay club. There, he meets Angie who had been his boss during his summer job at a restaurant. Angie, a charming butch lesbian who now celebrates her lesbian identity, encourages him: “You’re so handsome. Freddie Mercury, eat your heart out!” In this club, surrounded by supportive new friends, he feels free to express his sexuality.<sup>19</sup> Angie also plays an important role later in the film, when she encourages him in his coming out. Typically, innocence and villainy in melodramas construct each other: while the villain is necessary to the production and revelation of innocence, innocence defines the boundaries of the forbidden which the villain breaks.<sup>20</sup> Here, sexual intolerance is perceived as evil, and Eric’s homophobic school mates are clearly the villains. Angie is his guardian angel.

In contrast to Angie, who never doubts Eric’s gayness, his fag hag, Maggie, finds it difficult to accept his particular sexuality. Although she assures him that he is still her best friend, she is highly disappointed because she is still in love with him. After Eric spends the night with another man, he returns home and is confronted by his worried mother. He tells her that he wears special clothes and make-up just because he wants to be different. His mother replies “People think you’re gay” and adds that she does not want people “to get the wrong idea.” Interestingly, she questions not his homosexuality but his *heterosexuality*; his mother has internalized the idea that he is probably gay, and she does not seem to be convinced when he pretends that he is not. The mother, like her son, is dominated and exploited by the same hetero-sexist misconception. They are both trapped in a discriminative sexual

regime. In this manner, *Edge of Seventeen* resembles the 1950s melodramas that work by touching on sensitive areas of sexual repression and frustration. Laura Mulvey notes that the excitement of the classic melodramas comes from conflict not between enemies, but between people tied by blood or love.<sup>21</sup>

Jamie's coming out to his mother in *Beautiful Thing*, a film apparently inspired by British comedies and American romantic melodramas, takes place after his first sexual intercourse with Ste and certain symbolic acts of coming to terms with his sexuality, like buying an issue of *Gay Times* magazine and visiting a gay bar. The dramatic confrontation happens after Jamie's mother discovers his schoolbooks defaced with homophobic graffiti, finds the copy of *Gay Times* beneath his mattress, and even follows the boys to a drag show in the gay bar. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, no one person can take control over all the multiple, often contradictory codes by which information about sexual identity and activity can seem to be conveyed. Hence, Sedgwick notes that in many, if not most, relationships, coming-out is a matter of crystallizing intuitions or convictions that had already been in the air for awhile and established their own power-circuits of silent contempt, silent blackmail, silent glamorization, silent complicity.<sup>22</sup>

Jamie's mother, Sandra, accuses him of lying to her, and Jamie bursts into tears: "You think I'm too young, you think it's just a phase, you're afraid that I'll catch AIDS." His mother challenges this misconception. She demonstrates a different attitude towards her beloved son's coming-out when she hugs him and whispers: "You think that you know all about me, don't you?" This rhetorical question is an epistemological speech act because she refers to the interrelations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the implicit, the recognized and the denied, the admitted and the repressed, the assumed and the guaranteed. Jamie had not realized that his mother *does* accept his homosexuality (although it is extremely difficult for her), and that her love for him is clearly *unconditional*. Even more unexpected is his mother's young boyfriend Tony's positive reaction. When Jamie cries, "I'm a queer, bender, poofter," Tony replies nonchalantly, "Ok, I get the picture. It's cool. Good night, kiddo."

This spectacle of emotional crisis is typical to the genre of melodrama, which is often articulated as an attempt to intensify the viewer's emotions through excessive reproduction of structural and stylized conventions and to generate unjustifiably tragic feelings by one-dimensional characters that experience personal, social, and family difficulties on their way to romantic unification.<sup>23</sup> Although melodramas are criticized for their lack of authenticity and for their theatrical, exaggerated, and even fabricated visualization of interpersonal conflicts and crisis, it is important to note that authenticity is also formulated and stylized. It is never natural or transparent but instead is designated according to cultural codes of presentation and representation. Further, the melodrama is a powerful cinematic genre that mediates and communicates human experience effectively. It promotes emotional response and compassionate identifications with its suffering protagonists.

Notably, the highly emotional dialogues between Jamie, Sandra, and her boyfriend Tony in *Beautiful Thing* are full of love and compassion and also display quite a

sense of humor because of their (mis)identifications and epistemological device: Jamie had not known that his mother knew he was gay; he did not know whether his mother would come to terms with his sexual “transgression”; he certainly did not know that his mother had already begun the difficult process of accepting her son’s gayness even *before* their dramatic confrontation; Jamie did not know that Tony was open-minded; Tony did not know that Jamie had expected him, for some reason, to be homophobic; and Jamie *and* crying Ste (in a later scene) did not know that Sandra was not angry at them because of their erotic identity but because they had lied to her and *pretended* to be straight. From Sandra’s point of view, honesty is (even) more important than (hetero)sexual conformity. Moreover, Harvey is well aware that some of his viewers would not expect working-class Sandra, a bartender who lives in London’s East End, to be relatively open-minded. In this way, he challenges the viewer’s epistemology as well.

### Public Identification and Glorified Martyrdom

Melodramas usually concentrate on the point of view of the victim, and sometimes even manage to present all the characters convincingly as victims.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the division between alienated antagonists and miserable protagonists is intensified in the queer adolescent melodrama; the youthful protagonist in the coming-out scenes in particular always feels devastated, desperate, and isolated—he feels that any attempt to refute his sexuality is an attempt to refute his whole personality and subjectivity at the critical stage of his coming of age. Significantly, the melodramatic and enthusiastic campaign for coming out during one’s teen years in the new queer cinema does not confront sufficiently the difficulties of coming out, treating coming out as healing, therapeutic, or at least better than not coming out, and thus romanticizing an extremely dichotomized choice. The sequence of Eric’s coming out to his mother in *Edge of Seventeen* begins with her playing a romantic melody on the piano after many years of not having played. Her response to her son’s confession is similar to Sandra’s response to Jamie’s hysterical disclosure in *Beautiful Thing*: “I know.” Like Jamie’s mother and Steven’s mother, Eric’s mother, too, is furious at her son because he did not tell her *enough* about his sexuality and hid the truth from her—not because he is gay. Like the other two mothers of gay sons, Eric’s homosexuality does depress her, but she avoids homophobic statements.

Paradoxically, Eric is pressured to confirm and to refute his erotic identity at the same time. This ambivalent demand is imposed upon him by the homophobic cultural system and its powerful mechanisms of surveillance, discipline, and punishment.<sup>25</sup> When he attempts to challenge his own queer identity and to conform to the privileged sexual majority, he actually becomes an agent of this dominance.

Even more melodramatic is Steven’s coming out in *Get Real*, set in a ceremony where Steven is to be given a prize for his article on a youth’s life at the beginning of this millennium (an article that he had not wanted to submit but which his father had found and sent to the competition without his son’s knowledge). Steven admits in public that he is the anonymous writer who had submitted another article about

a gay teenager's hardship to the school magazine. This article was never published because of the headmaster's moral censorship. Steven explains to the surprised audience that he had written the article because he was sick of feeling totally alone and that he wanted to have friends who would like him for who he was. He adds that he wants to be part of a family who loves him for who he is and not someone he must pretend to be in order to keep their love.

When John, his closeted athletic lover, signals to him not to "frame" him, Steven whispers, "Thanks for proving my point," and adds, "I'm gay. . . . It's only love. What is everyone so scared of?" Steven's courageous spectacle is followed by mannerly applause by the audience who seem to tolerate this nonconformist opinion that challenges straight society's educational and cultural systems, including the headmaster's bigoted censorship. Steven's struggle is politicized in this film—his tears are not only his personal tears but also represent those of many other agonized queer adolescents who cry for more understanding, tolerance, and unconditional love. The message of this film thus appears to be that his coming out is essential and must be performed in public.

In problematizing this massive heroization and glorification of asserting youth's queer identity, Rob Cover points out that the pressure for young people to come out and state a definitive sexuality commonly leads to homelessness, educational and social problems, violence, and—as we have seen fairly recently in the case of murdered University of Wyoming student, Matthew Shepard—death. Cover argues, on the basis of such experiences, that "what should instead be advocated by a lesbian/gay discourse is the idea that a person should state her/his sexuality only in strategic ways, and that there is no *moral* compulsion towards some mythical sense of honesty or social responsibility or necessary visibility."<sup>26</sup> Steven's sensational martyrdom is represented (and purified) with the sort of massive self-revelation and public exposure in which Frank Capra used to revel in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>27</sup> Steven and the other gay protagonists' representation as adolescent martyrs in the new queer melodramas coincides with classic melodramas that side with the powerless while evil is associated with social powerfulness.

Steven's confession is not a rebel without a cause—Steven *is* bullied, isolated, abused, and forced to hide his real identity, and his emotional, physical, sexual and cultural needs. This forced and enforced masquerade is a burden for him. However, his massive simultaneous attack on his schoolmates, his school management, his parents, and his community, melodramatic as it is, will not change the world. Although Steven's speech *is* an impressive emotional protest, it could also provoke even more antagonism towards him and increase the alienation between him and his family and the social order. The process of desire in melodrama interrupts or problematizes precisely the order that the law has established in the face of "lawlessness" and social disorder; melodrama does not suggest a crisis of that order, but a crisis within it, an "in-house" rearrangement.<sup>28</sup> Hence, Steven's coming out guarantees that his community *knows* that he is gay, but nobody knows how this confession will affect his daily life in this highly conservative society that is unlikely to be changed overnight.

### Sissified Bodies and Muscular Desire

Paradigmatically, the protagonists in *Beautiful Thing*, *Edge of Seventeen*, and *Get Real* are all considered sissies by their hostile school environment. They are gentle, delicate, and stylish; they dislike sport activities and invest no time or energy in working out. They all admire, fall in love and have sex with highly masculine boys who “look straight”: well-shaped, athletic, strong and characterized by a spectacular physique that contradicts anti-gay stereotypes of the effeminate, sissy drama queen. The bodies of these masculine objects of desire (and love) do not “frame” their own (homo)sexuality but function as a sort of corporeal “alibi” for their real desires.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the protagonists *are* perceived by straight society as “less masculine” and *are* suspected to be queer.

“Jamie is a bit closer to me, but I’d like to sleep with Ste,” says Jonathan Harvey, the playwright and scriptwriter of *Beautiful Thing*. “Ste is a bit of a stereotype of the ‘straight gay.’ It’s a sort of Cinderella fairytale about the unpopular gay kid who gets the football team’s captain.”<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, it is Jamie, who is slim, delicate, and bullied by his classmates on the football field in an East London working-class neighborhood, who falls in love with Ste, who is muscular, athletic and admired by schoolgirls. In *Edge of Seventeen*, young Eric is slim, pale and smooth, living in a typical middle-class American suburb. He falls in love with Rod during his summer job in a restaurant. Rod is a muscular, hairy, and tanned college student. Similarly, Steven in *Get Real* is a slim, delicate, and pale high-school student in an English upper-middle class town who falls in love with John, the sports champion.

In particular, the first-sex scenes in these gay male adolescent films highlight the erotic tension between the juvenile and the mature, the “twink” and the “stud,” the seducer and the seduced.<sup>31</sup> Jamie first gazes at Ste’s shapely physique, including his fully exposed buttocks, when Ste changes clothes. Then Ste stays the night after he has been beaten by his violent father and older brother. A romantic soundtrack accompanies Jamie’s question of whether Ste would like him to rub menthol lotion on his bruised back. Jamie, who feels empathetic, compassionate *and* sexually aroused, carefully massages his friend’s muscular back. He compliments Ste’s body and asks him if he has ever kissed a guy before. Ste then refuses to turn around, apparently too embarrassed by his sudden erection. He also initially refuses Jamie’s request to lie near him but later agrees.

Notably, the sissy boy is the one who “seduces” his masculine friend, the football team captain. After Jamie has kissed him briefly on his lips, Ste asks him if he thinks he is queer. Jamie replies that it does not matter what he thinks. He turns off the light and gently caresses Ste’s bruised body. The sexual act itself is not shown. The next scene (the following morning) is accompanied by Richard Rodgers’ hit song “Sixteen Going on Seventeen” on the soundtrack, and the image of Jamie’s mother Sandra and her younger boyfriend Tony lying naked in bed is cross-edited, and thus analogized/equalized with Jamie and Ste sleeping naked together in Jamie’s room, with Ste hugging his friend’s back. Ste wakes, dresses, and silently leaves the room.

The absence of any explicit visualization of same-sex intercourse (and/or male

genitalia) in *Beautiful Thing* corresponds to the (mis)representation of (gay) men's sexuality in mainstream cinema. According to the logic of (hetero)sexual difference, in which masculinity and femininity are bound to an active/passive division, to be penetrated is to be placed in the despised position of femininity and, thus, to lose one's claim to manhood. According to Brett Farmer, this is why anal penetration features so prominently in the patriarchal imaginary as the ultimate humiliation of the phallic male subject.<sup>32</sup>

The absence of all-male passionate intercourse is also conspicuous in *Get Real*. When Steven comes home after a party, he takes off his shirt and suddenly sees John standing in his room, holding a (symbolic?) half-full bottle. John asks if he can use the toilet and then kisses Steven on the lips, telling him about an erotic, albeit unfulfilled, encounter he had had with another boy of his age during a school trip. John then cries out, "What's wrong with me?" and Steven comforts him. Interestingly, it is John, the athletic ultra-male, who bursts into tears and challenges hetero-normative formations of masculine conduct. "I'm so scared," he admits, "Don't leave me." Following this intimate confession, they kiss passionately to the soundtrack of a romantic melody. Their first sexual encounter is not shown. Next morning, John awakes naked in Steven's bed (his muscular buttocks fully exposed), while infatuated Steven is making him breakfast. In contrast to *Beautiful Thing* and *Get Real*, the first-sex scene in *The Edge of Seventeen* is much more explicit and extremely erotic, although it does not include any frontal nudity. First, Rod, the college student unbuttons and removes young Eric's shirt caressing his smooth, skinny chest. Then, Eric removes Rod's shirt to expose a muscular, tanned and hairy chest.

This physical and erotic disequilibrium between the same-sex partners reflects the fact that gay men as men live dually within the systems of meaning of the dominant order and within their own constitutive transgressions and betrayals of that order.<sup>33</sup> Further, the eroticization of inequality between gay men is one of the significant features of gay pornography in particular. Tim Edwards notes that the tendency to hierarchicalize competing masculinities is an implicit implication of power over femininity. This makes gay male pornography more similar to straight male pornography in gender terms than it might at first seem.<sup>34</sup> Although *Edge of Seventeen* is not pornographic, the same-sex passionate spectacle in this film does eroticize several inequalities. It emphasizes the tension between initiator and initiated, the adolescent and adult, boy and man. The division between dominant and subordinate is never subverted in this film as Rod is always the active and Eric the passive one. The film also demonstrates a significant differentiation between different masculinities. In mass culture, masculinity is usually defined by what it is not, namely "feminine," and all its associated traits—hard *not* soft, strong *not* weak, reserved *not* emotional, active *not* passive.<sup>35</sup> *Edge of Seventeen* thus reproduces and reconfirms conventional homosexualities: the macho and the queen, the masculine male body and the feminine male body, which never exchange sexual roles.

Furthermore, unlike the masculine characters of Ste in *Beautiful Thing* and John in *Get Real*, Rod never shows any weakness. He never cries and he is never confused

or agonizes about his (homo)sexuality. Guy Hocquenghem notes that “only the phallus dispenses identity; any social use of the anus, apart from its sublimated use, creates the risk of a loss of identity.”<sup>36</sup> Correspondingly, Rod’s queer identity is solid and explicit, and his whole body symbolizes the phallus: it is always hard, stiffened, sexually aroused, invasive and ready to penetrate his young, inexperienced partner. In contrast, Eric still has to come to terms with his own homosexuality. He is represented as an immature (his body is almost hairless) and therefore receptive, amenable, permeable, and porous body, which is, however, unnecessarily powerless. As Susan Bordo points out, it is a macho bias to view the only *real* activity as that which takes, invades, aggresses, albeit a bias that has been with us for a long time, in both straight and gay cultures: “Hollywood is clearly not yet ready to show us a man ‘passively’ giving himself over to another, at least not when the actors in question are our cultural icons. Too feminine. Too suggestive, metaphorically speaking, of penetration by another.”<sup>37</sup> Leo Bersani criticizes the phallogocentric system that is characterized by its phallogocentrism and works hard to maintain meaningful identity. It is not primarily a denial of power to women (though always that) but a denial of the *value of powerlessness*,<sup>38</sup> and of meaninglessness, of nonidentity or *disidentification*, in both women and men.<sup>39</sup>

Hence, *Edge of Seventeen* appears to provoke Hollywood’s conservative rules by showing a same-sex erotic spectacle focused on a man who *is* suggestive of insertion by another man and practices the “condemned” powerlessness on several occasions and variations. On the other hand, this film does preserve the patriarchal division between privileged masculinity and subordinated femininity as the penetrated one is always the sissy adolescent who is inspired by the campy or unisexual performances of 1980s British-oriented pop stars such as Jimmy Somerville, Boy George, Morrissey, Marc Almond, “Depeche Mode,” “Frankie Goes to Hollywood,” and “Duran Duran.” Following these artists and pop groups, Eric challenges hetero-normative aesthetic codes of masculinity and machismo. He celebrates his sissified *and* penetrated body, which is systematically contrasted to Rod’s mature and *never* penetrated body.

The anguished adolescent in the new queer adolescent films problematically (and melodramatically) follows the type of the Sad Young Man, which constituted one of the predominant gay types in twentieth-century hegemonic culture. According to Richard Dyer, the sad young man is neither androgynously in-between genders nor playing with the signs of gender. His relationship to masculinity is more difficult, and thus sad. He is a young man, hence not yet really a real man. Moreover, he is soft; he has not yet achieved assertive masculine hardness. He is also physically less than a man and is represented as a martyr figure.<sup>40</sup> The protagonist’s hardship is visualized empathetically and compassionately in the aforementioned films, as they primarily intend to encourage and fortify the oppressed queer adolescents in the audience—the young martyr who experiences his *via dolorosa* in his school, family, and neighborhood. This cinematic queer body is simultaneously sensational, emotional, outrageous, and courageous; it is significantly melodramatized.

Nevertheless, Eric, Jamie, and Steven *are* proud of their sissiness and make no

attempt to change it. They celebrate their sensitivity; they dislike sports (Jamie and Steven prefer the sportsmen to the sport itself); they are campy, admire muscular physiques, and gradually accept their own (homo)sexuality.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, these protagonists' sissiness, softness and apparent sexual passivity are not represented as debilitating or undermining traits. None of them deny their departure from the straight adolescent group. Even before they come out to their family and straight friends, they *are* aware of their physical, social, and cultural differences; they know that they differ from their schoolmates. Steven's and Eric's best allies are their female best friends, their "fag hags" Linda and Maggie.

### Desperate Gay Boys and Infatuated Straight Girls

The term "fag hag" dates back to the US in the late 1960s, dismissively directed at women who were considered not attractive enough to hang around with "real men." But like so many derogatory terms, it was reclaimed in the 1990s as a stereotypic label to be worn with pride. Gay men introduced their female friends to a world free from sexual harassment by men, where the emphasis was on fun and where more often than not, they would find themselves the center of flattering and unthreatening attention. Hence, "fag haggery was in fashion."<sup>42</sup>

Further, Simon Button notes that a *frisson* of sexual flirtation or some kind of sexual dynamics does in fact often occur between gay men and straight women then they first meet. As Stephen Maddison points out, "If hags and fags are 'sisters,' then we are indeed queer ones. The sistership we have the potential to share by virtue of our mutual oppression within hetero-patriarchal regimes, is 'queered' as a function of the way our identities are circumscribed by the homosocial narratives that uphold those regimes."<sup>43</sup> However, the solidarity between young gay men and straight women in the discussed films takes different directions as there are significant differences between the male-female friendships in the discussed films.

Jamie and Lea in *Beautiful Thing* are hostile to each other at first and then gradually develop a friendship based on their Otherness: Jamie's sissiness and queerness, and Lea's extravagant performance and behavior (including obsessive worship of Mamma Cass and repetitive sleepwalking), in addition to her ethnicity as a black young woman who lives in a white lower class neighborhood. They are both perceived as misconduct characters because they do not conform to the social normative codes of their environment. Hereby, they share an unprivileged status of the marginalized, the detached, living in a permanent exile. They both demonstrate the trouble with normal and the need for democratization of desire and lifestyles.

The relationship between Steven and Linda in *Get Real* is much deeper than the developing friendship between Jamie and Lea. They hang out together; they share erotic secrets (Linda's romance with an older driving teacher, and Steven's sexual encounters with men, including his intimate relationship with John); they share physical dissatisfaction (Linda feels unpopular because of her overweight body, and Steven is marginalized because of his slim and boyish body); and they support and comfort each other (Linda is agonized after she finds out her lover is married, and

Steven is agonized after he finds out John is still having a relationship with his girlfriend). The absence of physical attraction between them seems to be the key for their continuous friendship. The hetero-social relationship between Steven and Linda is portrayed as part of a different type of social community, an alternative social sphere in which the relationships between girls and boys, straight and queer, transgress heteronormative patterns and are constantly revised.

However, the relationship between Eric and Maggie in *Edge of Seventeen* is much more complicated. Maggie is deeply infatuated with Eric, and they even have a single, miserable sexual experience. Typically, mainstream Hollywood melodramas are characterized by psychic destructiveness of the social institutions, often centering on the (heterosexual) couple and resulting in a rampageous representation of ambition and romantic love disquieted through expressions of nymphomania, impotence, suicidal tendencies, obsessions with paternity, and so on.<sup>44</sup> In this case, Eric attempts to prove his masculinity *and* his heterosexuality through sex with a woman, and yet the morning after they are both highly frustrated. Maggie, devastated over her heterosexual romantic expectations having been crushed, becomes a new version of the melodramatic female sufferer.

In his critique of *gay* men's attitude towards women, Dyer notes that heterosexuality is not only the kind of sexuality in which men harm women the most but also where they love them most, with the special intensity that comes with sex. Gay men's distance from heterosexuality allows them to be personal and intimate with women in a way that is rare between straight men and women—but it is a distance. Dyer emphasizes that being a gay man is not the same as being a straight woman, "Yet when we get together, we often talk as if it were—which means we often don't really listen to what women say and may even seduce them into casting their lives in our terms."<sup>45</sup> This tension is intensified in *Edge of Seventeen*. The morning after Eric sleeps with Maggie, he feels like a pretender, and she feels abused. Maggie feels like she was manipulated and exploited by her male beloved who tried to solve his sexual dilemmas through her body. It is not very clear if Eric is more bothered by his best (female) friend's agony or if he is more disappointed to realize that he does not enjoy straight sex and thus cannot escape his homosexuality.

However, this sequence shows both of them as victims of powerful heterosexualization. Their heterocentric cultural environment regards male–female sexual relations as the necessary and ultimate proof of normal adolescence. This oppressive environment with its powerful mechanisms of discipline causes Eric to prove his masculinity *and* straightness by initiating sexual intercourse with Maggie—penetrating a female body instead of being penetrated by another male body. In this respect, Eric is not an exploiter but an exploited subject as well. He is also manipulated by powerful sexual hegemony based on unequal gender relationships.

### **Getting Real on the Edge of Seventeen Is a Beautiful Thing**

According to the deterministic approach of the discussed melodramas, the protagon-

ist's (homo)sexuality is not a matter of choice but is instead his *destiny*, and hence it cannot—and should not—be changed by his parents or by his bullying school-mates or by himself, no matter how hard he or she tries to oppress and masquerade this same-sex desire. In his discussion of an adolescent's first contact and sexual identity in "mainstream" films like *In & Out* (Frank Oz, USA 1997), Cover refers to two disturbing elements in those mainstream products. The first is the "thoroughly preached insistence" that non-heterosexual characters have a responsibility to be "honest" about their sexuality in a highly public way. The second is that these mainstream products promote the rigid dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality that is contrasted to any notion of *real* or *latent* bisexuality or, alternatively, of a *sexual fluidity* or a sexuality that might be understood along lines *other* than gender-object-choice.<sup>46</sup>

The radical politics of coming-out and the overemphasized differentiation between hetero- and homosexualities also characterize *Beautiful Thing*, *Get Real*, and *Edge of Seventeen*. John's sexual *and* romantic relationship with his girlfriend Christina in *Get Real* and Eric's sexual *and* romantic relationship with his best friend Maggie are represented as just a phase. Alternatively, it may be perceived as a pitiful masquerade for their real *homosexuality* which is hard for them to accept. These boys are not represented as bisexual; their sexuality is not undefined, but instead it is uncovered and manipulated by their fears and anxieties. In representing them as attempting to renounce their true gay identity, these films expose the premise that there *is* a distinction, perhaps even an essentialist dichotomy, between straight and gay sexualities and that one should realize what one is and live one's true erotic identity properly. Although this notion may sound too essentialist, too rigid and narrow, and too solid, it has its benefits.

Larry Gross suggests that many teenagers and even adults, who are confronting the choice between the stifling agony of the closet and the possibility—even certainty—of familial and societal rejection, are living in pathological circumstances and do not have the option of authentic relationships with anyone who can help them deal with their emotional crises.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the first important message of these coming-out films of the 1990s is that it is not homosexuality that is the problem, but rather homophobia. The second message is that coming-out *is* difficult and painful, but staying in the closet is much worse. Coming-out is presented as the only way for a queer teenager to achieve his/her personal, social, cultural *and* sexual liberation.

Butler notes that identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested, and, on occasion, compelled to give way.<sup>48</sup> However, confused queer adolescents who suffer from the forced socialization demanded by their family, school, and community desperately need a stable identity that can locate them in a certain position in regard to themselves, their families, friends, and institutions. Their formation of a distinguished gay identity will enable them to enjoy their desires,

loves, and devotions. The radical notion of sexual fluidity and misidentification with any particular sexual identity is not always liberating. It can sometimes aggravate a youth's agony in his search for self and social definition—knowing who he is, what he wants, and what kind of sexual, social and cultural life style to choose or to seek. All three films introduce their viewers to the queer community and aspects of its alternative life styles. All three protagonists—Jamie, Steven, and Eric—realize they are not doomed to permanent displacement but can indeed find their place in a supportive and enjoyable environment.

Significantly, melodramas are known for the inadequacy of their attempts at restitutive closure.<sup>49</sup> The strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, a cloud of over-determined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled in the last five minutes.<sup>50</sup> Correspondingly, *Beautiful Thing* ends in a touching scene: Jamie and Ste and Sandra and Mamma Cass' fan, Leah, in their working-class neighborhood, dancing to the sounds of a romantic song. Eric in *Edge of Seventeen* goes to the local gay club where he meets his true love John, and Angie dedicates her song to him: "Nothing but blue skies from now on." At the end of *Get Real*, Steven breaks up with John, who is still afraid to come out, and drives off instead with his fag hag Linda. The camera zooms out from the departing car to the sounds of Aretha Franklin's "Freedom." These simplistic happy endings demonstrate the limitations of the melodramatic form, specifically the need for a more textured construction of the challenges facing individuals *after* they go public with their homosexual or other non-straight sexual identities.

The teen's life after his coming-out is not an endless romantic dancing, or a continuous journey with his best female friend, or an infinite party at the local gay club. The teen's environment, including his family and school environments, is not to be changed overnight. Self-acceptance and public sexual identification are important, but they are not the closure of the queer teenager's confrontation with bigotry, persecution and agony. In this sense, the spectacular visualization of coming-out as the ideal solution for gay youth's agony is a naive illusion. Nevertheless, the happy endings of these queer youth films do demonstrate maturity, acceptance, pride, and happiness. These final melodramatic scenes express empathy, comfort, and compassion, and thus they encourage the young viewers not to feel devastated but to celebrate their gay identity.

The importance of the new queer adolescent melodramas, which are part of New Queer Cinema of the 1990s and early twenty-first century, lies in their being primarily targeted at young gay and lesbian viewers.<sup>51</sup> These audiences often experience hardship in their families, schools, and neighborhoods. They need these supportive visualizations of struggle and success, agony and happiness, destruction and attraction. These films—melodramatic, romantic, comic and ideological as they may be—can give hope to the agonized teenager who sits at the back of the classroom, and tries so hard to survive the daily mental and physical abuse. They show him that his sexuality can be a *Beautiful Thing*.

## Notes

- [1] Ben Gove, "Framing Gay Youth," *Screen* 37, no. 2 (1996): 177.
- [2] Gove, 178.
- [3] Jennifer I. Downey, "Sexual Orientation Issues in Adolescent Girls," *Women's Health Issues* 4 (1994).
- [4] Steven D. Harsin, "Pathfinder: Developing a Male Gay Identity," *Collection Building* 11, no. 4 (1991): 71.
- [5] Joyce Hunter, "Violence against Lesbian and Gay Male Youths," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 5 (1990): 295–300.
- [6] Paul Gibson, "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide," in *Prevention and Intervention in Youth Suicide: Report to the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*, Vol. 3, ed. Marcia R. Feinleib (Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, 1989), 110–42.
- [7] J. W. Edwards, "A Sociological Analysis of an In/visible Minority Group: Male Adolescent Homosexuals," *Youth & Society* 27 (3), 1996: 334–55.
- [8] Rob Cover, "First Contact: Queer Theory, Sexual Identity, and 'Mainstream' Film," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 5, no. 1 (2000): 71–89.
- [9] One of the classic examples is Vincent Minnelli's *Tea and Sympathy* (USA 1956), which focuses on the outsider man who is more sensitive and delicate than his schoolmates in a boarding school. Never, in the film or the play, is it indicated that this student Tom Lee (John Kerr) is gay. Lee's schoolmates call him "Sister Boy" and annoy him, especially after they discover him sitting on the beach with a group of faculty wives, sewing a button on his shirt. At the Happy End, older (and married) Tom visits his old school. Tom's sissiness is depicted in this film as nothing but a phase.
- [10] Keith Howes, *Broadcasting It: An Encyclopedia of Homosexuality in Film, Radio and TV in the UK 1923–1993* (London: Cassell, 1993), 954–5.
- [11] Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987 [1981]), 252.
- [12] Alfred P. Kielswasser and Michelle A. Wolf, "Mainstream Television, Adolescent Homosexuality, and Significant Silence," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9 (1992): 362.
- [13] *Beautiful Thing* (UK, 1995). Directed by Hettie MacDonald; Produced by Tony Garnett and Bill Shapter; Screenwriter: Jonathan Harvey; Channel Four/Film Four Distribution/World Productions; 89 min.
- [14] *Edge of Seventeen* (USA, 1998). Directed by David Moreton; Produced by David Moreton and Todd Stephens; Screenwriter: Todd Stephens; Blue Streak Films/Luna Pictures; 99 min.
- [15] *Get Real* (UK/South Africa, 1998). Directed by Simon Shore; Produced by Stephen Taylor; Screenwriter: Patrick Wile; Distant Horizon/Graphite Film/British Screen/Art Council of England/National Film TruSte Company; 110 min.
- [16] Dyer, Richard, *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002): 167.
- [17] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
- [18] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270–82.
- [19] Eric's visit to Angie's club is similar to other cinematic subcultural initiations located in gay venues. Jamie and Ste's first visit to The Gloucester, for example, was also their first encounter with camp subculture, represented by a drag queen who sings the traditional Israeli song "Hava Nagila" (in Hebrew: "let's be happy/gay and sing together"), and welcomes the boys to the club in his/her sarcastic style. The gay venues are politicized in these films as a liminal sphere, public and private at the same time, where queer adolescents can express their affection freely within a supportive community.
- [20] Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home Is Where the Heart*

- Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 21.
- [21] Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 75–9.
- [22] See Sedgwick, 4, and Thomas Elsaesser (1972), "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 2002 [1987]), 43–69.
- [23] Nicole Alderice, *The Theatre and the Dramatic Theory*. (London: Harrap, 1965); Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form and Television," *Screen* 25, no. 1 (1984): 4–16.
- [24] Martha Vicinus, "Helpless and Unfriended: Nineteenth Century Domestic Melodrama," *New Literary History*, 13, no. 1 (1981).
- [25] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage 1977 [1975]).
- [26] Cover, 71–89.
- [27] Michael Wilmington, "Get Real," *Film Comment*, March–April 1999, 79. Wilmington arguably notes that where the Catholic Capra wanted his heroes to confess, to extract themselves from the web of social hypocrisy in which they were entangled—and incidentally, win their lovers as well—Steven's situation here is more hopeless.
- [28] Steven Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 20.
- [29] See Gilad Padva, "Heavenly Monsters: The Politics of the Male Body in the Naked Issue of *Attitude Magazine*," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 7, no. 4 (2002): 281–92.
- [30] Avner Bernheimer, "One More Love Story" [in Hebrew], *7 Days* (a weekly supplement of *Yediot Aharonot*), 3 March, 1997, 84.
- [31] Until the British Channel Four's series *Queer as Folk* was broadcast in the late 1990s, followed by an extended American adaptation in the early twenty-first century, there were almost no homosexual sex scenes in television films, soap operas and sitcoms. According to Kielwasser and Wolf, when homosexual genital activity was depicted (or suggested) among adolescents and young adults in television movies in the 1980s and early 1990s, it was often identified as the result of some intense, overpowering social force, such as violence and imprisonment, madness and military service, or poverty and a dysfunctional family environment. Gay and lesbian adolescents may find themselves in such situations, but note that these situations do not create gay or lesbian identities. "On television, a young straight male may lose his virginity simply as part of 'growing up' ... [but] the 'homosexual' loss of virginity for a young male, if it were to be explored on television, would portray him not as the proud voice of a gay identity but as another pathetic victim of situational homosexuality" (Kielwasser and Wolf, 361–2).
- [32] Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorship* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), 205–6.
- [33] Earl Jackson, Jr., *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 17.
- [34] Tim Edwards, *Erotics & Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 88.
- [35] Jeffrey A. Brown, "Comic Book Masculinity and the New Black Superhero," *African American Review* 33 (1), 1999: 26–7.
- [36] Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (London: Allison & Busby, 1978), 87.
- [37] Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), 191.
- [38] Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

- [39] Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 35.
- [40] Richard Dyer, "Seen to Be Believed: Some Problems in the Representation of Gay People as Typical," in Dyer's *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), 42.
- [41] For an analysis of queer politicization of camp subculture, see Gilad Padva, "Priscilla Fights Back: The Politicization of Camp Subculture," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 24 (2), 2000: 216–43.
- [42] Simon Button, "Best Friends," *Attitude* 75, July 2000, 46.
- [43] Stephen Maddison, *Fags, Hags and Queer Sisters: Gender Dissent and Heterosocial Bonds in Gay Culture* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 194.
- [44] Barbara Klinger, "'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' Revisited: The Progressive Text," *Screen*, January–February (1984): 36.
- [45] Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 47.
- [46] Cover, 77
- [47] Larry Gross, "You're the First Person I've Ever Told: Letters to a Fictional Gay Teen," in *Talking Liberties: Gay Men's Essays on Politics, Culture, and Sex*, ed. Michael Bronsky (New York: Richard Kosak, 1996), 383–4.
- [48] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 105.
- [49] Farmer.
- [50] Mulvey, 76.
- [51] B. Rubi Rich ("New Queer Cinema," *Sight and Sound* 2 [5], August 1992: 31–4) suggests that in new queer films there are traces of appropriation and pastiche, of irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism. Rich contends that these works are irreverent, energetic, alternatively minimalist and excessive, and, above all, full of pleasure.