

Resisting Homonormativity in Queer Filmmaking Practice

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Abstract

While homonormativity is frequently critiqued within Queer Film Studies, this research aims to contribute to knowledge by envisioning what an *anti-homonormative* form of queer cinema would look like. The research question asks how can queer filmmaking practice critique and challenge the politics and cinematic representations of homonormativity? In response, following a practice-led research methodology, two film works were created. The first, *Expulsion* (30minutes, 2020), depicts a fictional queer nation state, with archival footage of Queer Nation's Joan Jett Blakk interspersed. The second, *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson* (3minutes 30 seconds, 2020), reflects on the historical figure's trans identity.

The research findings identify strategies that confront and critique homonormativity—at a scriptwriting level and in on-screen performances—that can be used as a framework to generate anti-homonormative films. The first research finding is that by situating environmental concerns at the centre of queer politics on screen, the 'respectable' image of homonormativity is complicated. Discussions about the destructive consumerism of neoliberalism can further critique homonormativity. The second research finding is that by focusing on the process of self-acceptance as a catalyst for character growth instead of external approval storylines (i.e. the 'coming out' story), a LGBTQ+ character can find happiness outside of a paradigm weighted towards straight characters' actions. The research findings also define three techniques that present time differently in order to challenge the forward-momentum of neoliberal homonormative cinema: an editing technique that creates connections with LGBTQ+ history through the intercutting of archival footage; the embedding of queer history at a scriptwriting level within the film's narrative; and the re-claiming of queer history from mainstream narrative framings.

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Introduction

Resisting Homonormativity in Queer Filmmaking Practice examines homonormativity from a queer filmmaking perspective using a practice-led research methodology, seeking to identify strategies and techniques that could define an anti-homonormative form of cinema. The research questions addressed are: how can a queer film act as a site for critique and transgression of homonormativity in cinema? And, what new techniques and/or combination of techniques could be developed to allow queer characters and/or queer stories to resist assimilation into prevalent homonormative cinematic conventions? Chapter one, *Queer filmmaking practice as a method of enquiry*, presents the combination of methodologies used in this study: practice-led research, textual analysis, critical reflection, and autoethnography. Chapter two, *Homonormative cinema and queer strategies of resistance*, examines the relationship between queer artist film, queer independent film and mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema. It establishes homonormative cinematic conventions within mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema, before identifying existing strategies and techniques that queer filmmakers use to confront or subvert homonormative cinematic representations or homonormativity itself. These include the emerging queer filmmaking practice of using specifically LGBTQ+ archival footage within fictional works to re-tell queer history.

Chapter three, *Developing an anti-homonormative filmmaking practice*, details this project's research findings through a critical reflection of *Expulsion* (Gaffney, 2020a), a 30 minute film through which I developed strategies and scriptwriting techniques that address how queer filmmaking practice can critique and challenge the politics and representations of homonormativity in cinema. Chapter four, *Queer(ing) time*, explores queer time and the use of

archival footage in *Expulsion* and *Far from the reach of the sun* (Gaffney, 2018). The research findings are presented through the definition of three editing techniques that utilise archival footage to present time differently and that challenge the forward-momentum of neoliberal homonormative cinema.

Homonormativity

Homonormativity is the curbing of oppositional LGBTQ+ and queer activism in favour of assimilation to the mainstream and the “limiting [of] queer aspiration to the same bourgeois citizenship, repressive institutions, and limited lives that hetero society prescribes” (Schoonover and Galt, 2016). While the essence of queerness is to destabilise accepted norms, homonormativity aspires to be assimilated into established systems. Homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003).

Homonormativity is intertwined with neoliberalism and is “the most visible and dominant form of contemporary LGBTQI+ politics of the Global North” (Kagan, 2018). Neoliberalism is an attitude of capitalist governments that prioritises “personal responsibility and individual autonomy through supposed free choice”, which “some gay people (already privileged because of their ethnicity and social class)” have benefited from by becoming “incorporated into state projects, just as the neoliberal state has sought to roll [itself] back from many areas of welfare provision” (Brown, 2012). In a comprehensive analysis of the representation of gay men post-HIV/AIDS crisis, Kagan identifies neoliberalism as being more than just political:

“[...] neoliberalism in its various formations is a prevailing political economy, inseparable from culture in the mostly western nations where HIV post-crisis can be said to manifest; and, therefore, to a large extent, neoliberalism *is* the culture of post-crisis” (Kagan, 2018, emphasis in original).

In this culture of neoliberalism, “national identity is reoriented towards excellence in consumption rather than public civic political participation” (Puar, 2006) and the pink pound enables a form of ‘equality’ which generally privileges white, upper/middle-class gay men and lesbian women, with trans, racial, class and disability issues left on the periphery. Crudely, this results in the perception that gay and lesbian customers’ personal spending power is because of social equality, not capitalism. Schoonover and Galt (2016) observe that “Queers are imagined as the opposite of environmentalists,” individual consumption is encouraged, and the urgency of the collective mobilising is dampened by corporate sponsorships of Pride parades and events where brands benefit from inclusive marketing’s positive optics. Homonormativity is sometimes framed positively in the language of tolerance and acceptance; for example, when Pride crossing-over to become a mainstream festival is considered a success. However, this approach involves a flattening out of difference and queerness to allow for assimilation into the mainstream:

“Gaining acceptance and membership into the heteronormative society often depends on diluting any kind of queer sensibility that might challenge the centrality of neoliberal, middle-class values that also squelch racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender diversity” (Kennedy, 2014).

Critics of homonormativity often decry the LGBTQ+ rights movement’s focus on accessing marriage as an assimilation to a heterosexist institution. However, equal marriage has had a real-life impact of reducing mental health issues for LGBTQ+ people: in states in the USA “same-sex marriage policies were associated with a 7% reduction in the proportion of all high

school students reporting a suicide attempt within the past year” (Raifman et. al, 2017). Closer to home, one study found that “Suicide rates among those in same-sex relationships have fallen significantly in both Denmark and Sweden since the legalisation of gay marriage” (Henley, 2019). When living in a country without equal marriage, queer citizens face vulnerability in ways that are detrimental to their physical health (partners not being allowed to make hospital visits or to make medical decisions on their behalf), mental health (forced and coerced heterosexual marriages), and finances (lack of legal inheritance rights and tax issues). While the movement for equal marriage is often seen as the *mainstreaming* of gay rights, it could also be seen as a challenge to the status quo by demanding the definition of marriage be altered to accommodate some LGBTQ+ relationships. Homonormativity often intersects with what Jasbir Puar terms *homonationalism*, i.e. “short for homonormative nationalism” (Puar, 2006):

“[Homonationalism is] a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations” (Puar, 2013).

Homonationalism is not “simply a synonym for gay racism” (Puar, 2013) but is a critique of nations with legislated gay rights posturing as being more advanced than countries without; a pink-washed colonial idea of the ‘other’. Countries with legalised gay marriage can appear more LGBTQ+ friendly on the surface, despite only recently enacting legislation and protections for their LGBTQ+ populations. Unlike homonormativity, homonationalism “is not something that one is either inside of / included or against / outside of—rather, it is a structuring force of neoliberal subject formation” (Puar, 2007). An example of homonationalism was when ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ was repealed in 2011, and gays and lesbians in the US military could now be out of the closet while ‘liberating’ and killing civilians across the Middle East (which

includes LGBTQ+ civilians, if it needs to be said). Homonationalism is thus “a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality” (Puar, 2007). Through both homonationalism and homonormativity, Western lesbian, gay and bisexual people can now engage in capitalism through their newly state-sponsored sexual identities, welcomed into the system that formerly oppressed them, safe in the knowledge that their state’s military will protect them from the ‘other’.

While homonormative stories and depictions of LGBTQ+ people in cinema have met a largely receptive LGBTQ+ audience, and the characteristics of homonormativity are of a contemporary neoliberal nature, the issue of an LGBTQ+ audience attending films that others in the community find questionable or offensive is not a new phenomenon. Matt Connolly (2018) describes how during the period of 1969-1974 “some activists linked the perpetuation of harmful cinematic representations not just to filmmakers, Hollywood studios, and city officials but also to the capitulation of the LGBT population at large.” This population had “marked differences in opinion over what representations should be on screen, who should control them, and whether a single, definitive, and ‘non offensive’ picture of LGBT experience could ever be decided on” (Connolly, 2018). Homonormativity is also present in contemporary television, with shows like *Looking* and *Modern Family*, which suggests “a post-resistance, post-politics queer era” (Manganas, 2018) where even a Pride march is an apolitical and commercial entity. Manganas (2018) notes that while *Looking* “is set up to sideline the politics of their identities” it cannot disentangle LGBTQ+ representation from viewers’ own political perspectives.

‘LGBT cinema’ or ‘Queer cinema’?

The difference in terminology between ‘queer cinema’ and ‘LGBT cinema’ is not another case of umbrella terms being used indiscriminately, but refers to differences in both content and the economics of distribution and marketing. The development of ‘queer cinema’ and ‘LGBT cinema’ involved a divergence in values, aims, and market prevalence (Borden, 2016). LGBT cinema grew its market share with “LGBT-specific genres, like coming-out and family acceptance stories, that consumers recognize” (Borden, 2016). This had both positive and negative effects:

“While this is a useful step towards legitimizing lesbian and gay lives, it has also turned the energies of that community towards consumption and assimilation and away from activism. [...] Now, we are a niche audiences, and so at film festivals and arthouses we lap up those films that give us back a flattering reassuring image” (Pendleton, 2001).

A film can be classed as ‘LGBT’ if it has an LGBT-focused storyline or features prominent LGBT characters. LGBT cinema seems “content to take a mainstream genre and replace heterosexual romance with homosexual romance” (Pendleton, 2001). The most famous example of LGBT cinema is arguably *Brokeback Mountain*, a tragic romantic drama directed by Ang Lee, starring Heath Ledger as Ennis Del Mar and Jake Gyllenhaal as Jack Twist, two cowboys in Wyoming who have a sexual and romantic relationship although they are both married to women. Based on a short story by Annie Proulx, “in the screenplay, Jack and Ennis are carefully redrawn as competent and caring father-figures, reassuring audiences of their ‘all but normal’ masculinity and their ‘but for an aberration’ sexual normalcy” (Arellano, 2007). They are both masculine and do not identify as gay, bi or queer, with the film making this explicit:

Ennis Del Mar: You know I ain't queer.
Jack Twist: Me neither.

While this can represent their inability to come out or accept themselves in a hostile environment, it also is for the benefit of narrative tension and, perhaps, the audience. If the audience is uncomfortable with the gay subject matter, it is less confrontational for the audience if the characters are uncomfortable with themselves too. Despite being directed by a heterosexual, with a heterosexual cast, being based on source material written by a heterosexual, and with a noticeable lack of LGBTQ+ participation in the main creative roles, *Brokeback Mountain* is considered an 'LGBT film' because of its subject matter and was a watershed moment of gay visibility in cinema. The film is shot beautifully, establishing the film as a classic within its genre. Yet, as Arellano (2007) states:

“It is worth nothing that Jack himself believed that he and Ennis might inhabit their desire and love for one another, despite social constraints. But Ennis is precluded from either one or both of those options by virtue of the determinative logic of heteronormativity that governs the world of the film.”

In contrast, the stories and characters depicted in 'Queer Cinema' exist outside of heteronormative logic, and they do not “try to show what a queer looks like, since the whole point of queerness is that there is no one trait that all queers share, except perhaps resisting heteronormativity” (Pendleton, 2001). While 'LGBT cinema' favours a traditional Hollywood narrative and genre with the aim of mainstreaming identity, 'queer cinema' differs both in its formal styles and ideological aims through its anarchic disavowal of the normative and challenges to audiences' assumptions and expectations. Amy Borden (2016) describes “the practice of queer filmmaking and the cinematic modes by which it is expressed” as valuing

“deviance and an activist aesthetic as a counterpoint to an increasing proliferation of positive Western cinematic and televisual LGBTQ+ representations.”

Visionary queer artists and filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith and David Wojnarowicz dealt explicitly with queer subject matter. Their work acted as a counterpoint to mainstream representations of queer identity and sexuality and was embroiled in legal controversy and attempts at censorship. Barbara Hammer’s films were “intended as correctives to dominant representations of lesbian sexuality” and relied “on the audience’s familiarity with the cultural assumptions, symbolism, humor, and radical politics characteristic of the American lesbian-feminist community at the time” (Weiss, 2004).



Figure 1: A Camp performance by Tilda Swinton and an unhinged queer-coded child in *Edward II*.

During the HIV/AIDS crisis, queer filmmakers (and activists with cameras) were an oppositional force, reacting against and providing alternatives to the negative representations of LGBTQ+ in the media. It was from this that New Queer Cinema emerged in the early 90s, with

the work of directors Derek Jarman (*Edward II*, 1991, see Figure 1), Isaac Julien (*Young Soul Rebels*, 1991), Gregg Araki (*The Living End*, 1992), Tom Kalin (*Swoon*, 1992), and Todd Haynes (*Poison*, 1991). Ruby B. Rich (2004) observed the emergence of this new wave of queer film—coining the phrase ‘New Queer Cinema’—and noted that, while these films did not share a similar aesthetic, they all had a distinctly queer approach to filmmaking: “There are traces in all of them of appropriation and pastiche, irony, as well as a reworking of history [...] these works are irreverent, energetic, alternatively minimalist and excessive.” Whether New Queer Cinema was a movement or a moment (for it did not last long) it “simultaneously disrupted the drive for positive cinematic representations of lesbian and gay lives and the continuation of negative and stereotypical cinematic representations” (Borden, 2016). Bob Nowlan (2010) describes the complex way queer cinema pushes back against audience expectation of what constitutes a cinematic experience in terms of aesthetic, form and content:

“Queer cinema revels in stylization, or, at the least, substantial complication and problematization of the conventionally naturalistic, often in preference for expressionism, magical realism, sur-/super-/and hyper-realism, as well as conversion of the historical into the mythical and the fantastical. Queer cinema is often hyper-self-reflexive and overtly foregrounding of intertextuality, as well as frequently relying extensively on appropriation and expropriation, pastiche and montage, and irony and parody- and highly aleatory and minimalistic or deliberately excessive and frenetic manipulation of elements of mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. Queer cinema queers by means of form, style, and content.”

Sometimes ‘LGBT Cinema’ is referred to as ‘LGBTQ+ cinema’, which suggests that the boundary between LGBT and Queer cinema is not so easily defined. While both do share the aim of reducing prejudice and increase acceptance, queer cinema aims to achieve this through more confrontational means. The occasional addition of ‘Q+’ to LGBT cinema is perhaps more of an attempt to be inclusive of the identities of film festival viewers (and, thus, an expansion

of the customer base), rather than signalling an alignment with queer cinema's values. While writing in 2001 about "gay cinema," David Pendleton (2001) discusses the emergence of what is called 'LGBT cinema' today, in which "AIDS is almost always shunted to the sidelines in these films":

"They tend to be either love stories or coming-out stories. For all these reasons, they respond to the demand of gay identity politics for positive images. [It] has practically evolved into a genre, complete with stock characters. The protagonists are always young white middle-class men."

This lack of congruence between the categories and representations of 'LGBT' and 'queerness' in cinema is obscured by the often-indiscriminate use of 'LGBT' and 'queer' as genre labels. So, while *Brokeback Mountain* can be classified as an LGBT film, could it also be classed as 'queer'? While it displays some characteristics of queer film (such as the urge to challenge prejudices about sexuality, and draws attention to the performativity of masculinity), it does not have the "deviant aesthetic and political potential" of "cinematic queerness" (Borden, 2016). Nor does it have the "formal experimentation and the outsider status" of queer cinema (Pendleton, 2001).

Queer or homonormative images, scripts and characterisations represent two polarities of LGBTQ+ representations in cinema. Queer cinema is usually unashamedly LGBTQ+, politicised, radical, and involves a critique or disavowal of gender norms and sexual binaries. However, the more prevalent homonormative cinema is apolitical while asserting neoliberal individualism. It contains messages of tolerance and assimilation, foregrounds LGBT characters appearing *just like* heterosexuals, and/or has LGBT characters being closeted or living in fear of being perceived as too gay or blatant. Richards (2016) states that the disruptive potential of New Queer Cinema has been "replaced with a narrow hierarchical selection of films that promote a

depiction of respectable sexuality” and that “neoliberalism and homonormativity are what drives this alignment with dominant practices and identity politics.” Whether representations are queer or homonormative, or somewhere in between, the proliferation of representation of LGBTQ+ characters in mainstream cinema has the potential to increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues. Schoonover and Galt (2016) identify this potential for a “queer space” emerging in world cinema:

“The films may not be made by queer-identified directors or addressed to queer-identified audiences, yet they circulate in heterogeneous spaces, creating potentially queer publics in unpredictable ways. The films thus enable us to locate a majoritizing queer space in world cinema – one that might do cultural work very different from that of the LGBT film festival.”

However, in Western mainstream cinema, LGBTQ+ characters are often white (with a few notable exceptions), which is at odds with the racial diversity of queer communities in most Western countries. While queerness should embrace intersectionality, both in a political and community sense, films only depicting white LGBTQ characters can “serve to reproduce dominant ideologies like white homonormativity” (Kennedy, 2014). Following this, a queer film that resists homonormativity should be intersectional, with a diverse cast representing the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community, without being confined to tokenistic, inconsequential roles. This would have the effect of employing diverse LGBTQ+ people, and aligning a film production’s ethics with the values signified by the content of the film itself.

In 2019-2020, television and streaming services continued to include more LGBTQ+ storylines and content.¹ Yet it is unclear how much consideration is given to the quality of each

¹ According to GLAAD’s (2020) quantitative report for 2019-2020: “Of the 879 series regular characters counted on 111 primetime scripted shows on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, FOX, and NBC), 90 series regulars are LGBTQ. [...] The overall percentage of LGBTQ series regular characters on scripted broadcast is 10.2

of these, or how many of these are written/ directed/ performed by LGBTQ+ people themselves. Locating LGBTQ+ voices at the centre of LGBTQ+ television and filmic representations is vital and this literature review will analyse films where this has resulted in dynamic queer stories. It will also analyse where conservative representations have resulted in films made *about* LGBTQ+ subjects *for* a straight audience.

Note on terminology

Throughout this study I will use ‘LGBTQ+’ to refer to the wide gamut of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and nonbinary community. When I do not use the full acronym, and use ‘LGBT’ instead, this is to purposefully emphasise a disconnect between, for example, LGBT cinema and queer cinema. Because LGBTQ+ terminology often changes over time, some sources referenced might use other acronyms (such as LGBT, LGBT+, LGBTQ, or LGBTQI+) and these have not been altered.

percent of all series regular characters, an increase of 1.4 percentage points from the previous year’s 8.8 percent (75 of 857). This is the highest percentage of LGBTQ series regulars GLAAD has found since beginning to gather data for all series regulars in the 2005-06 season.”

Chapter 1: Queer filmmaking practice as a method of enquiry

Queer Film Theory provides the main theoretical framework for this study, including scholarly research by Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt (2016), Amy Borden (2016), Laura Guy (2016) and Alice A. Kuzniar (2000) on the formal and political characteristics of queer film and queer filmmaking techniques. Queer Theory research into homonormativity by Lisa Duggan (2003), Gavin Brown (2012) and Sandra Jeppesen (2010) were used as foundational texts to build upon when examining homonormativity in relation to queer filmmaking, as was Film Studies research into homonormativity in cinema by Tammie M. Kennedy (2014) and Dion Kagan's (2018) comprehensive study of the representation of queer men post-HIV/AIDS crisis. This was supported by research into the film industry's homonormative marketing of queer stories by Eve Ng (2013, 2018) and Stuart Richards (2016).

Vito Russo (1981) and Richard Dyer's (2002a, 2002b) research on the history of LGBTQ+ representation in cinema are referenced to establish links between screen representation and societal struggle, as are bell hooks' (2008) research into the pedagogical role of cinema and Stuart Hall's (1997) writing on the double bind nature of stereotypes. Other key texts from Queer Theory provide a touchstone for discussing concepts of queer 'disidentification' (José Esteban Muñoz, 1999), queer time (Elizabeth Freeman, 2010), and homonationalism (Jasbir Puar, 2006; 2007; 2013). Chapter 4 focuses on the use of archival footage, building on research by Ann Cvetkovich (2002) into witnessing and retelling history, Lucas Hilderbrand's (2006) method of retroactivism, and Emma Cocker's (2010) paper on an "anti archival tendency".

Methodology, methods and procedure

I undertook this research project by employing an original combination of methodologies: practice-led research, textual analysis, critical reflection, and autoethnography. The combination of established methodologies “provides a more robust approach to examination of creative practice than reflection or post-textual analysis provide on their own” (McDougall, 2019). Chapter 2, the literature review, employs a qualitative textual analysis to establish prevalent homonormative conventions in mainstream cinema and strategies employed by queer filmmakers that resist assimilation into this mainstream. The textual analysis “highlight[s] the common codes, terms, ideologies [and] discourses [that] dominate cultural outputs” (Davis, 2008) of widely distributed Western films in relation to queerness and homonormativity. I focus on films from the Western world because of their emergence from—and circulation in—a neoliberal environment which is consistent with the characteristics of homonormativity, and because the West is also the context in which my work mostly circulates. This chapter also identifies existing methods of working with archival footage that queer filmmakers use to create temporal and spatial shifts in narrative and form.

Chapter 4 follows a practice-led methodology and details my use of archival footage as a filmmaking method that can make queer history more visible and allow queer stories to resist assimilation into homonormative cinematic conventions. As dominant representations continue to corral LGBTQ+ characters into narrowly confined archetypes of socially acceptable consumers, I believe experimental queer filmmaking has the potential to act as an alternative, and even to re-politicise the role of LGBTQ+ characters and stories in cinema.

Practice-led research

Because of the nature of the research questions, and my experience as a filmmaker, the practical component of this research project followed a practice-led research methodology leading to a filmmaking output. This research methodology “involves the production of a film (or other screen work) [as] an iterative process of practice and reflection by a researcher who is also the screen practitioner, and a theoretical perspective that informs the overall research” (Kerrigan et al., 2015). As practice-led research in filmmaking is still an emerging and developing field, practice-based research methodologies in the visual and performing arts also informed the formulation of this study’s methodology (Nelson, 2013; Skains, 2018).

This research project grew out of my experimental/artist filmmaking practice², particularly the film I completed prior to enrolling on the PhD programme (*Far from the reach of the sun*), which I was editing while writing my research proposal. Before embarking on this research project, the creation of my films involved extensive research to inform the film’s content or context, or to serve as an inspiration for the film’s script and visual content. Practice-led filmmaking research differs from my usual filmmaking practice because “the focus is on the making of the work *as a vehicle for an enquiry* rather than simply producing an artwork” (Bell, 2018, emphasis in original). As such, Kerrigan and Batty (2018) recommend that “creative practice methodologies are preferred in screen production because they reveal research insights into how audio-visual meaning is made from the perspective of the creator/s of a screen work.”

² Coming from a visual art and moving image background, I refer to myself both as an artist filmmaker and experimental filmmaker because my film projects have circulated in both of these contexts and have received funding from both the visual arts and experimental filmmaking strands at the Arts Council of Ireland. I will use both ‘artist film’ and ‘experimental film’ interchangeably as I feel the boundary between these is blurred and queer film has no reverence for the ‘purity’ of either discipline.

This is pertinent to queer filmmaking, as the filmmaker's identity and subject matter are often intrinsically interlinked. Filmmaking research and queer filmmaking have several common attributes in that they both:

“[Push] at the boundaries of traditional filmmaking and traditional research methods by adopting distinct approaches to professional and critical practices pursuing forms of content creation that might otherwise fall outside of industry production modes and dissemination, where commercial exigencies dominate” (Kerrigan, Callaghan, 2018).

Existing outside the constraints of commercial filmmaking, my practice of experimental/ artist filmmaking was the primary method through which I employed the practice-led research methodology. Several queer film theorists have identified experimental filmmaking as holding the potential to challenge dominant narratives around LGBTQ+ issues in cinema. Schoonover and Galt (2016) state that while “experimental film is often considered to be non- or anti-narrative, its alternative modes of representation can critique dominant forms of narrativity and narrate queer lives differently.” This critique of dominant forms can be found in outwardly oppositional—both in form and content—queer film, but may also be found in LGBTQ+ films that operate in complicity with the capitalist impetus of the film production industry while still communicating challenging ideas. While the literature review examines both forms of critique, my practice-led film aimed to build on the oppositional tactics of experimental queer filmmaking. Writing specifically in relation to lesbian women, Weiss (2004) states:

“It seems that experimental film forms lend themselves more readily than documentary or narrative to exploring possibilities for and problems in the visual expression of lesbian desire [... and it is] able to circumvent both the historical problems of documentary film and the repression of lesbianism by classic narrative film conventions, which has insidiously found its way into independent narratives as well.”

Queer artist/experimental filmmakers are not immune to these “historical problems” and “repression” that Weiss (2004) describes as afflicting independent film simply because of their conceptual aims and low-budgets. Just as LGBTQ+ people must unlearn societal homophobia and transphobia, filmmakers too must deconstruct mainstream representations of LGBTQ+ identity in order to resist repeating them and providing legitimacy to mainstream distortions in their own film productions. In researching and investigating the processes that a queer filmmaker undergoes when writing and producing LGBTQ+ focused film work through this practice-led methodology, I did not hope to achieve a *perfect* representation or story, but to address how homonormativity could be critiqued or challenged within queer filmmaking practice. By concentrating “on the nature of [the] creative practice” of queer filmmaking, my ambition for this study was that it would arrive at “new knowledge of operational significance for that practice, in order to advance knowledge about or within practice” (Skains, 2018).

The writing and production of the films and the writing of the thesis for this project happened concurrently, resulting in a dynamic back-and-forth between both. As I worked on writing and visualising the script, I would research and make notes on scholarly texts that were relevant. This is most evident in the final scene of *Expulsion*, where the character of the Head of State advises an applicant for citizenship, who is to be expelled, on how they should perform their identity in a homonormative manner in order to be accepted in their home state’s society. The Head of State’s description of an ideal homonormative citizen within the film is in direct reference to Lisa Duggan’s (2003) explication of homonormativity where she describes Andrew Sullivan’s politics: “He only asks that gays be allowed to exist within this neoliberal landscape, so long as they support sentimental masculinist nationalism and challenge nothing.”

This interpolation of theory within the film corresponds to Nelson's (2013) definition of praxis as "theory imbricated within practice," where he states that his "approach [to practice as research] looks rather for a resonance between complementary writing and the praxis itself and certainly not to require a transposition of the practice into words." However, a certain amount of explanation of the film work is necessary in order to render the "knowledge that has remained implicitly within the artist" through the practice-led research process as an explicit contribution to knowledge, and often this happens within the written "exegesis that accompanies the creative work" (Skains, 2018). This was achieved by the undertaking of a critical reflection process in which I both reflected on and critiqued the films I've made throughout the PhD process and contextualised these using queer film theory.

Critical reflection

Critical reflection is a key part of a practice-led methodology, with the researcher reflecting on the filmmaking process and the final film work itself. Critically reflecting on the filmmaking process and the final film work allows for a distinction to be "made between art making that purely develops individual professional practice and creative output or practice undertaken as an integral part of research that advances the subject area or discipline as a whole" (Aziz, 2009). In order to ensure an accurate critical reflection during the filmmaking process, Berkeley (2018) notes that "the use of a research diary [...] is an accepted method within screen production research to capture data on the practitioner's experience through the creative process, data that can be subsequently examined to identify knowledge that has emerged from the research process." Critical reflections on my filmmaking process were written in two journals that were examined during the PhD writing-up process. Following Berkeley's (2018) advice that "the

more immediate this reflection is and the more sensitive it is to the specificity of the practice the better”, the entries to the journal were made as close as possible to the process they documented. Critical reflections were written in the evening of film shoots, and reflections on the editing process were made at the end of each editing day. Where this was not possible (because of late shooting nights), entries were made the following day.

The practical journals were useful in documenting the development of the script and creative decisions, including those made with the cast prior to, and during filming in response to conceptual concerns or more practical and logistical production issues. Bell (2006) describes these “processes of production” and “artistic intentionalities” as being potentially “not at all apparent from inspection of the finished work but crucial to an understanding of its generation and achievement”. For example, the collaborative aspect of working with performers (two of whom I worked with previously; one who has been a close friend since I was a teenager, and both being queer theatre makers in their own right) is not immediately visible in the film, but was recorded in the journals. Reflections on the scriptwriting and editing processes were also noted in the journal as they progressed, with each iteration of the film scripts and film edits saved in order to analyse significant changes and developments. I refer to both my reflections in the journals and different iterations of the film scripts throughout this thesis.

Chapter 3 and 4 include critical reflections on the final films made, *Expulsion* and *Retelling Dr James Barry and John Joseph Danson* (Gaffney, 2020b). Here I am also interested in the gaps, or unintended consequences, between my intention as a filmmaker, the script, the actors' delivery, and the resulting filmic scene. Being able “to identify patterns in the creative process and narrative artefacts that may not have been apparent while the activity was underway” is a result of a “distancing [of] the practitioner-researcher both in time and

perspective (the latter by applying post-textual analysis) from the creative practice” (McDougall, 2019). The purpose of this reflection is not to unearth moments worthy of self-congratulation because “a genuinely (self)critical stance implies that one constantly questions both one’s own and borrowed mental frameworks” (Pauwels, 2012). An important consideration I examine is how my prior practice as a filmmaker has influenced this research project’s findings, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 through a critical reflection of the development of a technique that I first experimented with in my prior film, *Far from the reach of the sun*.

Autoethnography and disclosure

“[Because] the artists themselves will take the lead in this knowledge gathering (as they historically have done), and because they are both the subject and the object of this investigative process, this research process is more likely to take the form of *auto-ethnography*” (Bell, 2006, emphasis in original).

In chapters 3 and 4, I employ an autoethnographic methodology to reveal experiences that have influenced me as a person and, thus, intrinsically shaped my practice as a filmmaker. In these chapters, I discuss particular incidents or experiences when they are relevant to how a scene was planned or when they can reveal the impetus behind a creative choice. Autoethnography allowed me to identify and make visible these influences, which would otherwise function as invisible pressure points upon the practical film work. These interjections of autoethnography do not, however, provide a full picture, so I will now define my position and background in relation to the research undertaken for disclosure and to discuss the implications of this further.

I am from the Republic of Ireland and am queer/gay and non-binary (pronouns he/him/they/them). Today, while Irish people may experience ignorance about Ireland’s colonial history, and anti-Irish sentiment still flares up in the parts of England (Whelan, 2012),

there is not the systemic racism that Black and people of colour face. As Dyer (2013) observes, during the 19th Century in the USA, “the Irish were the sector of the immigrant working class who might be hailed as white as against the Native Americans, African slaves and even some other European migrants.” This ability to shake off the racist associations of being from a colonised country in certain circumstances is best illustrated in the story of Cornelius Bryan, an Irish indentured servant (c. 1650) in Barbados who became a slave owner (c. 1680s) of at least two women (Shaw, 2013). While this was not an isolated case, moving up the ranks of oppression in this manner was never an option for African slaves. This, alongside the Republic of Ireland’s wealth as a developed country, has reinforced my reluctance to assign any significant lack of privilege to being white-Irish in the 21st Century.³

I grew up in Dublin and experienced continuous homophobia throughout my life, with school years being particularly difficult, all of which influenced my perspective and the films I make. In 2002, aged 15, I found some comfort and like-minded friends at BeLonG To Youth Services (an LGBTQ+ youth group in Dublin); one of these friends was Sian Ní Mhuirí who performs the main role in *Expulsion*. Soon after, I was performing in not-very-sophisticated drag at Pride in Dublin. Kathryn Grushka (2005) describes how artists use these autobiographical experiences to connect to and understand the world around them:

“Artist[s] have traditionally derived much of their understandings of the world from affective positions such as an autobiographical knowing linked to personal feelings, experiences and opinions informed by and beyond self to transpersonal understandings. [...] For artists reflective orientations are essential between the affective self, engagement with their medium and their socially discursive constructed ways of knowing.”

³ In Northern Ireland—where I have undertaken this PhD study—the legacy of colonialism is still present and a source of intermittent conflict across sectarian lines. A discussion of racism and systemic discrimination within Northern Ireland is beyond the scope of this study, but I do not wish for my statements about Irish experience internationally to be applied to, or diminish, the systemic discrimination faced by Irish people in Northern Ireland historically or presently.

Unlike my previous films, the film script for *Expulsion* features no direct autoethnographic writing, but it contains much of my feelings and experiences, and my thoughts and concerns about queer history and politics. Similarly, while the film script for *Re-telling: Dr James Barry and John Joseph Danson* also features no direct autoethnographic writing, it contains my personal frustrations at Hollywood's co-opting of queer and trans stories in order to make them palatable for the straight consumer. My voice as a director is thus intrinsically linked with my identity and life experience. Here I have attempted to make these personal influences as clear as possible because "autoethnography tends to be process oriented" (Pidduck, 2009). Skains (2018) states that "in many practice-based projects, autoethnography can [...] play a role, as creative research questions are often inseparable from artist identity, experiences, and culture." This is clear in this project's title and research questions which aim to *resist* homonormativity: 'resisting homonormativity' contains an inherent negative value judgement that homonormativity is something to be resisted, i.e. that it is something that it is detrimental to queer filmmaking.

From my life experience, and experience of the LGBTQ+ community and its representations in cinema and television, I believe this value judgement is not exaggerated. It is backed up by scholarly writing within Queer Theory and Queer Film Studies, in which homonormativity is analysed as a neoliberal politics of a "depoliticized gay culture" (Duggan, 2002). A depoliticized minority cannot advocate for itself in meaningful ways and neoliberal consumerism has a negative impact on our environment and the planet. As such, the value judgement inherent in the thesis title is merely an observation based on a wish for a politically empowered minority and a protected environment.

Fieldwork and presenting the research

After beginning the PhD in September 2018, I began script writing, which continued until the 8th July 2019 when the final script was sent to the performers with the working title *I leave the rest of me behind*. Early in the pre-production process, it was confirmed that *Expulsion* would be shown in a solo museum exhibition at the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork. This allowed me to work with this final output in mind; knowing that it would be shown outside of a competitive film festival context in the first instance.

“In positioning *Expulsion* outside of the short film marketplace, Gaffney can work to resist, renegotiate and destabilise LGBTQ+ representations found in popular cinema by *re-politicising* the queerness that mainstream cinema seems intent on *de-politicising*” (McCollum, Gaffney, 2021).

Pre-production began on the 31st January 2019 with a site visit to the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork. I filmed the first scenes for *Expulsion* on a farm in Cavan on 12-13th May 2019 and shot the flag-bearing quarry scene in Wicklow on 16th July 2019. The main body of the film, and the entirety of *Re-telling: Dr James Barry and John Joseph Danson*, were filmed on 24-25th July 2019 at the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork. With the new title of *Expulsion* in mind, I began editing the film in early October 2019, with final colour grading and sound editing being completed on 20th April 2020. *Expulsion* and *Re-telling: Dr James Barry and John Joseph Danson* were shown for the first time at a solo museum exhibition at the Crawford from 11th September- 31st January 2021. Since then *Expulsion* has become part of Ireland’s National Collection at the Crawford, and was exhibited at a group exhibition *I Am What I am* at Ballina Arts Centre, curated by Sinéad Keogh in 2021. *Expulsion* premiered at the Another Hole in the Head Film Festival (San Francisco, 2020) and subsequently screened at the Thessaloniki Queer Arts Festival and Balkan Can Kino Festival in 2021.

Chapter 2: Homonormative cinema and queer strategies of resistance

This chapter's literature review employs textual analysis to provide a summary of LGBTQ+ representation in Western cinema, to establish homonormative conventions in Western cinema and, finally, to identify strategies employed by queer filmmakers that resist assimilation into these conventions. While I drew on the wealth of scholarly research about LGBTQ+ cinema, the films I carried out substantial original analyses on are: *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives* (1977); *O Fantasma* (2000); *Flaming Ears (Rote Ohren Fetzen Durch Asche)* (1992); and *Knife + Heart* (2018). These films were chosen because their queer characteristics suggest a potential framework for an anti-homonormative cinema to be developed. None of these films had wide distribution, which is significant because they were addressed specifically to queer spectators with no regard for attracting, or pleasing, either a heterosexual *or* homonormative audience.

100+ years of being queer on screen

In 1919, Magnus Hirschfeld presented *Different from the Others* (original title: *Anders als die Andern*) featuring the “very first gay man to be presented on film” (Russo, 1981) and argued for the dignity of queer people who were persecuted by Paragraph 175, which made homosexuality a crime in Germany. Unfortunately, *Different from the Others* “ended in the obligatory suicide that would mark the fate of screen gays for years to come” (Russo, 1981). In the 1970s, the Gay Liberation movement deemed queer characters doomed to commit suicide and other negative stereotypes (for example, “the sad young man”, Dyer, 2002a) as a reflection and reinforcement of societal inequality:

“The gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 1970s had a particular investment in combating the perceived misrepresentation of LGBT experiences in popular media [...] either through the *creation of alternative media representations* or by publicly protesting their prevalence within film, television, theatre, and other forms of popular culture” (Connolly, 2018, emphasis my own).

However, Vito Russo (1981) argues that the movement “made the early mistake of asking Hollywood to begin reinforcing the myth that homosexuals are just like heterosexuals except for their attraction to members of the same-sex.” Russo (1981) suggests that by accepting these terms of absorption into the mainstream in return for respectful representations, LGBTQ+ people were “implicitly accepting society’s terms”. Despite Gay Liberation’s efforts to encourage more positive representations, LGBTQ+ representations remained contentious, and there was no consensus amongst the community about how to accurately, or authentically, represent their identity on screen. Available representations were inadequate: characters who were presented as overtly gay or gender non-conforming were accompanied by stereotypes and clichés, reducing any potential for a positive impact; and characters who were presented as gender-conforming appeared more socially acceptable, yet were often burdened with closeted shame and tragic endings. Writing about the perception that the LGBTQ+ community only wanted normative representations on screen, Russo (1981) states:

“There is a false assumption abroad that gays, especially politicized ones don’t want to see effeminate homosexuals portrayed onscreen at all because they represent negative stereotypes that have been overworked. In fact, it is the politicized lesbians and gay men who appreciate the radical politics of drag. Closeted gays are threatened by it.”

Over a century since *Different from the Others* premiered, films with LGBTQ+ characters or plots remain inescapably intertwined with the politics of queer life; they reflect the social context they were made in and have the potential to challenge or reaffirm images and

stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people. In contemporary cinema, there is still this “fraught catch-22 in which queer people are either too closeted or overly blatant [...] putting queer people on screen is a hyperbolic mode of going public” (Schoonover and Galt, 2016). Russo’s (1981) stated that the options for queer representation on the mainstream screen were “invisibility, assimilation or ostracism,” which still has resonance today when considering how queerness can navigate mainstream visibility. In this chapter, I will examine homonormativity in cinema as the invisible or assimilationist, and queer cinema as a deliberate ostracism and a continuation of the creation of “alternative media representations” (Connolly, 2018).

Perhaps as a logical conclusion to Gay Liberation’s attempt to counter negative representations with positive ones, LGBTQ+ cinema, like its television counterpart, is now more focused on providing positive images of gay life where characters’ lives are ‘unburdened’ by queerness. Yet, according to Dion Kagan (2018), these “positive images represent both impossible ideals and restrictive sets of norms” which are usually homonormative and “at the expense of other, queerer and more marginal identities and lives.” These positive images can “disavow a consciousness of the negative states and feelings that have constituted queer life, both historically and now” (Kagan, 2018), having an alienating effect on the LGBTQ+ viewer who has a decidedly different life experience. For film studios, relevance to and sensitivity of a minority audience’s feelings are less important than market forces:

“The economic motivations driving the gay Indiewood trend are aligned with the contemporary homonormative politics. Whiteness, normative gender expressions, and so on are privileged by the neoliberally driven homonormativity. The conservative elements of the aforementioned films allow them to enter the mainstream market” (Richards, 2016).

Visibility and the importance of representation



Figure 2: Rural American masculinity, but make it gay, in *Brokeback Mountain*.

Commercially and critically successful mainstream films depicting LGBTQ+ characters in a more benign manner emerged sporadically from the late 1980s, paving the way for *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, see Figure 2); a watershed moment which seems to have removed some of Hollywood's trepidation about making big-budget films with gay themes. However, despite their popularity and positive critical reception, "some of the most successful and popular gay-themed films of the 2000s have addressed LGBT politics in the problematic language of tolerance" (Schoonover and Galt, 2016). There is also a disconnect between some of the film's content, the society they circulate in, and the community they claim to represent:

"Popular representations of out lesbians and gay men read as Western neocolonialism rather than as queer radicality. Moreover, the many instances of homophobic and transphobic violence that persist at state level (alongside the hate-mongering of xenophobic populist politics) may make the term 'popular' seem out of place in a discussion of internationally queer culture" (Schoonover and Galt, 2016).

In *Brokeback Mountain*, besides the two main characters, Jack and Ennis, the only other gay men in the film are dead, having been violently murdered in a gay bashing (Stacy, 2007). In *Call Me By Your Name* (2017)—about a 17-year-old’s infatuation for a 24-year-old student living in his family home—the only other LGBTQ+ people are an older gay couple mocked for being camp and effeminate. Even in *Moonlight* (2016), where queer icon Janelle Monáe performs in a supporting role, there are no LGBTQ+ characters outside of the two main protagonists: they have found each other in a sea of heterosexuality. Hollywood has not so much embraced LGBTQ+ characters into the fold as created a fold around them, absorbing them into a heterosexist world where LGBTQ+ characters are either isolated, apolitical, tortured, or brooding, with other LGBTQ+ characters in the films on the periphery murdered, mocked, tragic. Why is the representation of LGBTQ+ people important? Why does it matter if LGBTQ+ film depictions are queer, homonormative, or somewhere in-between? Dyer (2002b) traces the link between representation and social belonging:

“How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens.”

Call Me By Your Name depicts a romance between Elio and Oliver—that is, men having sex with men in 1983—but does not allude to the emerging HIV/AIDS pandemic. While the book was set in 1987, the director, Luca Guadagnino, relocated the film to 1983 (Garrett, 2017). Was this a self-consciously apolitical stance done in order to not distract from the romance, or does the time period of pre-HIV/AIDS mainstream awareness allow the character's self-involvement to not feel distastefully privileged? Can this effort to remove a fictional image of the past from

historical references have any negative impact outside the cinema? Galt and Schoonover (2019) argue that *Call Me By Your Name*'s "mode of historicity is precisely not that of realist depiction, but a melancholic future anterior that asks us to look, like Elio, beyond the frame." However, outside of the frame is also a prevalent homonormative cinema and media culture, into which *Call Me By Your Name* effortlessly fits. Dion Kagan (2018) describes "the New Gay Man" as:

"[...] an archetype produced through the work of cultural disavowal that aims to erase the spectre of AIDS and its attendant connotations: promiscuity, hedonism, feminisation, isolation, narcissism, contagion and death. The efforts required to regulate these absences produces a new subject of contemporary gay masculinity, sporting an image that is desexualised, domesticated, often masculinised and generally endowed with the hallmarks of bourgeois, white (hetero)normative personhood."



Figure 3: The 'New Gay Man' in *Call me by Your Name*.

While Elio and Oliver are not domesticated (Elio doesn't even remember to close a fridge when he is finished with it) and not desexualised, they otherwise fit this archetype (see Figure 3). I do not wish to imply that reality must be imposed on fiction, but merely to draw attention to how homonormativity is shaping images of queer people in cinema through, in this case, fictional characters. However, when examining *Stonewall*, I will discuss how representations of important people in queer history are being re-shaped to fit a neoliberal profit-driven cinema-

going experience. Both fictional and historical LGBTQ+ representations have an importance for minorities because of the “pedagogical role” of cinema (hooks, 2008):

“A distinction must be made between the power of viewers to interpret a film in ways that make it palatable for the everyday world they live in and the particular persuasive strategies films deploy to impress a particular vision on our psyches. The fact that some folks may attend films as ‘resisting spectators’ does not really change the reality that most of us, no matter how sophisticated our strategies of critique and intervention, are usually seduced, at last for a time, by the images we see on the screen. They have power over us and we have no power over them” (hooks, 2008).

I felt this imbalance of power acutely when growing up watching damaging representations and stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people on tv and in the cinema, all of which prompted me to begin to make videos about my own identity. However, no matter how we choose to “find and refuse to find ourselves in these categories, live with, within and against them”, we will “never actually [be] without them” (Dyer, 2002a). Writing about Black experiences of stereotyping, Stuart Hall (1997, emphasis in original) writes: “[...] blacks are trapped by the *binary structure* of the stereotype, which is split between two extreme opposites—and are obliged to *shuttle endlessly between them*, sometimes being represented as *both of them at the same time*.” Following this logic, if a queer filmmaker were to react against gay stereotypes, or contemporary homonormative stereotypes, they could then become “trapped by the stereotype, unconsciously confirming it by the very terms in which they try to oppose and resist it” (Hall, 1997). Thus, the process of representing queerness on screen is stuck in a never-ending cycle of being ‘too queer or ‘not queer enough’. In a production research study of homonormativity in Flemish television productions, Vanlee (2019) identifies a link between media portrayals, the political status of LGBTQ+ rights, and homonormative representation:

“[Domestic] media’s treatment of sexual and gender diversity has arguably contributed to the legalization of same-sex marriage and the introduction of anti-discrimination law at

the turn of the century (Borghs, 2016). Nevertheless, these same portrayals simultaneously articulate homonormative expectations and assumptions by framing non- heterosexual enactments of desire and non-cisgender embodiments of gender through visual imaginaries and narrative structures that forward gender conformity and relational traditionalism as core ideals for the LGBT+ community.”

Vanlee (2019) argues that when television “glosses over its potential to actively counteract the intersecting structures of marginalization faced by some LGBT+”, there is an “[inadvertent legitimising of] pervasive homonormative discourses circulating in Flemish society.” Thus, homonormativity becomes the form of representation that is both available *and* acceptable.



Figure 4: White suburbia in *The Kids are All Right*.

In her astute analysis of *The Kids are All Right* (directed by Lisa Cholodenko, 2010, see Figure 4), Tammie M. Kennedy (2014) discusses the continued importance of interrogating representations of queer people on screen: “Thinking about representations of lesbians in mainstream films as ‘public pedagogy’ offers a productive tool that helps to expose how white homonormativity creeps into individual theologies that often plague our best intentions to address issues of oppression.”

The marketability of homonormativity

With the release of his film *Poison* (1991, see Figure 5), Todd Haynes was pronounced as one of the directors of the New Queer Cinema movement (Rich, 1992). *Poison* depicts three intercut stories (*Horror*, *Homo* and *Hero*) each in a different genre and aesthetic. White (2011) analyses *Poison* as being “three tales about ostracism,” with each involving “an element of camp satire”. Each section could also be seen as a reflection on a queer person’s place in society: *Horror* parodying the AIDS crisis and media hysteria; *Homo* reflecting on the criminalisation of homosexuality, the vulnerability of queer men in the prison system, and the homoerotic/homophobic undertones present in all-male spaces; and, *Hero* as an expression of a queer child’s isolation at home and their wish to escape.



Figure 5: melodrama in *Poison*.

Despite being a prominent New Queer Cinema director, his more successful film *Carol* (2015) was marketed in a homonormative manner. *Carol* was based on the 1952 novel *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith, telling the love story of Carol and Therese. To be profitable, films need to have a large straight audience beyond a niche LGBTQ+ audience. Thus, a commercially acceptable image of LGBTQ+ people, which is acceptable to the straight consumer, is often

decided on for the characters in the film, or at a later stage during marketing and press campaigns. *Carol*'s "official promotion and mainstream commentary rehashed the same territory as *Brokeback Mountain*" (Ng, 2018) wherein the treatment of the film "as a universal love story encouraged viewers to deprioritize queer subjectivity in their reception of the film" (Wuest, 2018). Discussing *Brokeback Mountain* among other films, Richards (2016) notes that "these films are marketed as having cultural value, and this comes at the expense of promoting these films as queer narratives". So, while Hollywood and independent film are more comfortable telling LGBTQ+ stories today, the "queer media marketed to the mainstream remains shadowed by fears of being too niche" (Ng, 2018). And this fear is, of course, linked to the fear of not turning a suitable profit.

This effort to promote *Carol* in a non-threatening—or homonormative—manner is at odds with the queer form of the film, which "uses aesthetics to question truth" (White, 2015). Equally, its content includes overt instances of queer defiance within the film; for example, when Carol resists social and legal pressure in the custody case of her daughter she demonstrates "an extraordinary rejection of the heteronormative, the maternal, and the imposition of the legal and medical discourses that would name and bind her behaviour" (Smith, 2018). Set during Christmas, Carol's role as a mother and wife is under particular scrutiny because "Christmas can be, as Eve Sedgwick notes, also a depressing time when "religion, state, capital, ideology, domesticity, the discourse of power and legitimacy" all line up and speak with one voice" (Sedgwick, 2013, cited in Smith, 2018). Despite its universally appealing marketing campaign, *Carol* is becoming a Christmas classic for many LGBTQ+ people, perhaps because the pleasure of seeing Carol and Therese find love and comfort away

from the pressures of family and society is, as White (2015) states, “a love story suspended in time but located in history” where the viewer “shares the temporality of reverie.”

Is the cautious marketing of *Carol*, and its subsequent commercial and critical success, representative of the market co-opting queer film, or is it symptomatic of queer directors being complicit with capitalism in order to have their work financed and distributed to a wide audience? Does this wide circulation of queer film create the possibility for straight (and LGBTQ+) audiences to interact with queer film in a way they might not have access to previously? The marketing attempt to make *Carol's* queerness palatable for mass consumption cannot neuter the film as a text itself, particularly when it is viewed years after the campaign and actors' interviews have faded from memory. This is not the case with *The Kids are All Right* by another New Queer Cinema director, Lisa Cholodenko, where the film itself is homonormative. *The Kids are All Right* depicts the domestic affairs of a married lesbian couple (Nic, played by Annette Bening, and Jules, played by Julianne Moore) with children who “project a more traditional relationship in subtle ways” while the film “deploys a universalist narrative device” (Kennedy, 2014).

When Nic discovers Jules's affair, “the moment reads more like the stereotypical unappreciated housewife acting out rather than a queering of gender roles within long-term relationships” (Kennedy, 2014). Yet *Carol*, who is not formally ‘out’, challenges the status quo by rejecting the legal and social constraints placed upon her, and abandons her ‘safe’ identification as a heterosexual married woman by pursuing a relationship with Therese (also not an ‘out’ woman, in fact, the audience is not provided with a definition of her sexuality). Narratively, *Carol* is much slower and quieter than *The Kids are All Right*, silence often filling the screen.



Figure 6: A quiet moment of intimacy in *Carol* before the intrusion of heterosexual laws and expectations.

It is in this silence and ambiguity that I believe a queer audience can find room for themselves, whereas *The Kids are All Right* is not made *for* us, it is made *about* us. *The Kids are All Right* presents an image of white domestic lesbians that heterosexuals can find somewhat familiar and non-threatening: there is no sexual or narrative ambiguity; there is no betrayal of the heterosexual marriage partner as in *Carol*; they do not forego a relationship with their child to pursue a queer relationship; and, in fact, mother and father are united at last when Jules has an affair with their sperm donor. In *The Kids are All Right* the acting and script are neither believable nor intriguing, so, when the magnetism of heterosexual lust threatens to implode the lesbian relationship, the film further descends into a soapy mess. Meanwhile, the silent glances and anticipation in *Carol* produce a heavy air of sexual and romantic tension, where the intrusion of heterosexuality is recognised as such (see Figure 6).

Homonormativity: the straightening, sidelining and erasure of difference

Milk (2008) brought the story of gay rights activist and politician Harvey Milk, played by Sean Penn, to the big screen. *Milk* was commercially and critically successful, with Penn's performance as a gay man awarded Best Actor at the Academy Awards (see Figure 7). While *Milk* was directed by Gus Van Sant, another New Queer Cinema director, and Penn was praised for his "naturalness in the role of a gay man" (Buckley, 2010), his performance—to me, at least—felt like a typical straight actor *playing gay*, employing many of the unconvincing gay affectations that straight actors lean into. While these affectations are often comforting and familiar as a community signifier when performed by an LGBTQ+ actor (or a recognised ally), they become something different when performed by a straight actor.



Figure 7: Sean Penn's lauded, but ultimately superficial, performance in *Milk*.

Straight actors have protested that they should be free to take on LGBTQ+ roles (Gilbey, 2019), with Cate Blanchett declaring: "I will fight to the death for the right to suspend disbelief and play roles beyond my experience" (Nicholson, 2018). What is the difference between Blanchett

in *Carol* (a film I've praised above) and Penn in *Milk*? While *Carol* is entirely fictional, *Milk* tells the story of an important figure in the LGBTQ+ rights struggle; thus, the casting of a straight actor in the titular role displaces queer people from representing their own history. With straight audiences being the largest consumer group, is the fronting of LGBTQ+ films by recognisable straight actors the only way to draw this audience into the cinema? Speaking about straight male actors performing as trans women, Jen Richards in *Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen* (2020) discusses Eddie Redmayne in *The Danish Girl* (2015) saying while he “admittedly might give a really great performance as a trans woman”:

“What’s remarkable about his performance is the transness, is the way that he’s been able to manifest those feminine parts of himself into a convincing trans performance. But, it reduces that person—in this case, who was a real person—to a performance of transness, to a performance of femininity, rather than as a whole person, of whom transness is one aspect of.”

Stonewall (2015) attempts to tell the story of the birth of the Western LGBTQ+ rights movement by focusing on a fictional white saviour, Danny (see Figure 8). *Stonewall*'s director Roland Emmerich outlined his thinking behind the creation of the character of Danny by saying: “Danny is a very straight-acting kid [...] as a director you have to put yourself in your movies, and I'm white and gay” (Jung, 2015). Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt, the “only surviving member of the Stonewall street youth”, states that in fact “the people who passed for straight hid and didn't want to be active at the beginning. The straighter-acting people ran away” (Smith, 2015). The director's statement shows that he is more concerned with appeasing a (white gay) audience than depicting the historical events in an accurate or compelling way. The sequence of events depicted in the lead up to the riots, and the riots themselves, are historically inaccurate. Danny talks Cong (a Black friend of Rays) out of throwing a brick into the Stonewall bar which the

police have been trapped in, and the character of Marsha P. Johnson is led away placidly by police. This cements Marsha P. Johnson as being “a secondary character” in the film despite being “credited with being one of the first to resist the police” at Stonewall (Schou, 2015) and “in the following days, [she] led a series of protests and riots demanding rights for gay people” (BBC, 2020). Yet, she is missing for most of the riot in the film.



Figure 8: Danny shouting “Gay power!” after throwing a brick in *Stonewall*.

Ultimately, *Stonewall's* reduces the event that started the LGBTQ+ rights struggle into a subplot in favour of the oft-repeated story of an unassuming boy coming out and trying to make it in a big city (a trope also present in *Pride*, which will be discussed shortly). The credits declare that the film is dedicated to the “unsung heroes of the stonewall riots” and it is unclear whether this declaration is an afterthought or evidence of the director’s cognitive dissonance. *Stonewall* wastes the opportunity for the film to draw attention to any of these unsung heroes by focusing instead on a fictional character while side-lining figures of real historical importance. Sarah Moore (2015) notes that other trans women of colour—Miss Major and Sylvia Rivera—were erased in the film’s narrative and that “Stormé Delavarie, a butch bi-racial lesbian and drag king is noted to have thrown the first punch in an act of self-defense in the face of police brutality”,

yet does not appear in the film. Responding to criticisms of the film, Emmerich said, “Stonewall was a white event, let’s be honest” (Jung, 2016). This erasure and side-lining of seminal people and events in the history of LGBTQ+ rights in order to appease the marketplace, and to appeal to audiences that favour homonormative narratives, demonstrates how homonormativity functions at both a commercial and textual level within Hollywood cinema. Historically, LGBTQ+ films that focus on white subjectivity, such as *Boys Don’t Cry* (directed by Kimberly Peirce, 1999), have been met with critical praise and awards.



Figure 9: Violence against the trans character in *Boys Don’t Cry*.

Boys Don’t Cry, which was loosely based on the murder of trans man Brandon Teena (performed by Hilary Swank, see Figure 9), has been hailed as an “important and provocative film” (Pidduck, 2001). Patricia White (2001) observed that its popularity suggested “a cultural sea change in imaginings of gender and sexuality” if films such as this “resonate with popular forms and audiences”. In Netflix’s *Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen* (2020), Laverne Cox reflects on the fear the film caused her as a trans woman: “After I saw [*Boys Don’t Cry*], I was like... oh my god, I’m gonna die.” Evidently, the popularity of the film was little comfort for a trans

viewer. While “Peirce, for most of the film, keeps the viewer trained upon the seriousness of Brandon’s masculinity, the authenticity of his presentation as opposed to its elements of masquerade”, she “sacrificed the racial complexity of the narrative by erasing the story of the other victim who died”, Philip DeVine, a disabled African-American (Halberstam, 2001). Tiq Milan notes that the erasure of DeVine implies a lack of validity for Black queer viewers: “They’re telling me that I can’t exist in my blackness and my queerness and my transness” (*Disclosure*, 2020). Devere Brody (2002) asks “what is it about the historical erasure of blackness that appears to make some queer texts queerer?” in an analysis of the film, highlighting how it “failed to produce an ethical history”:

“The overbearing whiteness of this [New Queer Cinema], of which *Boys Don't Cry* is a prime example, relies upon the erasure of blackness. Nothing is included in the film to mark DeVine's death. He is not represented in the printed white letters on an otherwise blank black screen at the end of the film which commemorate the others' lives. DeVine's story is absented from the film: his life and his devastating and tragic death does not merit attention. Where Peirce had an opportunity, if not an obligation, to record the real confluence of racism, classism, misogyny, transgender discrimination and homophobia, she chose instead to ignore the racist issues at stake in this story” (Devere Brody, 2002).

Devere Brody’s highlighting of the lack of intersectionality present in New Queer Cinema is similar to LGBTQ+ cinema today. This prioritising of white narratives at the expense of historical accuracy and Black lives in *Boys Don't Cry* continues today, as we have seen with *Stonewall*. The Hollywood co-opting of the LGBTQ+ rights movement—while diminishing Black, trans, and people of colour—is a homonormative cinematic convention, and is a sanitised regurgitation of a radical history in order to mass market to the white straight consumer. As Kennedy (2014) states: “Like other film tropes, white homonormativity functions as one of the shorthand devices that enable filmic stories to be told in 90 minutes.”

Foregrounding intersectional, Black and trans perspectives

Dietze et al. (2018, emphasis in original) summarise that “the paradigm of intersectionality [...] promised initially to be a critical tool with which to tackle power and privileged positions as well as the misguided idea that oppression could be safely targeted via *one* category of marginalization only” and, now, there needs to be “a stronger focus on the conditions of inequality and power relations rather than on categories.” *Pride* (directed by Matthew Warchus, 2014) acknowledges this need by bringing the 1984 story of the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) group to the big screen, examining how their fundraising supported a striking mining town, Onllywn in Wales. *Pride* opens with archival footage of the mine strikes, underlining the factual origins of the film. The film depicts the political activism of queer men and women across classes, with the London-based group working hard to help the struggling rural town and vice versa.



Figure 10: LGSM are joined by the miners at a gay pride march in *Pride*.

Richardson (2020) notes that “the film draws a parallel between the shame of gay male sexuality and the stigma of older female desire”. In fact, the miners find themselves quite at home in the

queer scene. This is demonstrated at two instances: firstly, when LGSM and the Welsh miners visit a queer BDSM bar, the miners are unperturbed and chat away to the bartender; and, secondly, when the women from Onllywn are staying in Dominic's house they find a dildo, which is shaken by one woman to the uproarious laughter of the group. While these scenes are funny and light-hearted, when located alongside more serious scenes in the film, they act as a "monument to the desire for solidarity; it moves the viewer through a narrative that highlights how coalitions can work across difference and illustrates how solidarity can be established through the response to a negative affect: in this case by being hated by the same groups (the Thatcherites, the tabloids)" (Dietze et al., 2018). The miners even arrive to support the pride march in London, and march alongside LGSM at the front of the parade (see Figure 10). This happens after a disagreement between the Pride organiser and Mark Ashton (founder of LGSM) over the purpose of pride and its movement towards becoming an apolitical celebration:

Pride organiser: "There was a general feeling-

Mark: Amongst who?

Pride organiser: Amongst the committee that people have become tired of politics and that this year the tone should be celebratory with affirmative slogans and a positive atmosphere.

Mark: Bullshit.

Pride organiser: So, if you insist on marching with your banner you will have to march at the back with the fringe groups.

Mike: Mate, we're LGSM. We fought alongside the miners.

Organiser: Congratulations, but now it's time for a party.

Unlike *Call me by Your Name*, the challenges facing LGBTQ+ people in their personal and political lives during the time period depicted are acknowledged and explored with some realism. The homophobia and violence facing the LGSM activists is brought into sharp relief when, after a newspaper ran an outraged article about their activism, a brick and a firework are thrown through the window of Gay's the Word bookshop, which the group use as their

headquarters. Later, Gethin is hospitalised after being gay bashed, and we then find out that the jubilant Jonathan is HIV-positive. The familial rejection facing LGBTQ+ people is explored in two ways: the first is the long-term estrangement of Gethin from his family for 16 years, until he reunites with his mother who visits him in hospital after he is attacked; and, the second is the outing of Joe to his middle-class family, who are appalled as he leaves their home to stay with Steph. However, despite the intersectional nature of the film's story, Joe's character has a remarkably similar function to that of Danny in *Stonewall*:

“In his beige jacket and pressed jeans, Joe not only provides a comfortable and unthreatening figure for identification, he furnishes the audience with the pleasure of watching a ‘small-town boy’ transform into his true ‘authentic’ self. [...] He acts as an intermediary between the history of LGSM and the conventions of contemporary narrative cinema. He also provides a vehicle for this history while translating it into a format that is box office friendly. Finally, he offers a method for looking back at the radical Left-wing politics of LGSM without raising questions regarding the current state of political activism today” (Mowlabocus, 2019).

Both Joe and Danny are the vehicle through which the (mainstream straight) audience is meant to identify with, which was probably a strategic decision by the filmmakers to make their stories more accessible for those unfamiliar with the subject matter. Robin Griffiths (2016) identifies a similar function of the character Russell in 2011's *Weekend*, commenting that he is “the perfect point of entry for a mainstream heterosexual audience” in that “his loneliness and universal desire for love and a relationship lends him a modicum of unthreatening empathy and, in the end, he is cast as the prototypical, generic, romantic lead.” While Joe does not dominate *Pride*'s narrative as Danny or Russell do, all three display the characteristics Griffiths describes. However, this positioning of Joe as a gateway-character perhaps fits well within with the overall effect of *Pride*: “Solidarity functions to devalue allegedly defining differences and leaves only fragments of identity behind: the only true identitarian quarrels in the film arise between the gay

men and lesbian women who choose to start their own separatist group” (Dietze et al., 2018). Similar to how LGSM reached ‘across the divide’ to the miners, perhaps *Pride* attempts to do the same with its audience.



Figure 11: A tender exchange after many years apart in *Moonlight*.

Moonlight (2016, see Figure 11) won Best Picture at the Academy Awards and was a refreshing departure from white homonormativity, perhaps because “[...] black images, absent for so long from mainstream cinema, allow for the creation of fresh perspectives and standpoints” (hooks, 2008). While the film shows the poverty and systemic racial inequalities facing Chiron (performed by Trevante Rhodes, Ashton Sanders, and Alex Hibbert) and his mother, which affects both of their lives in destructive ways, it also shows the “struggle with hypermasculinity that Chiron faces as a black queer man” (Walter, 2020). His gender normativity is thus problematised, unlike in *Call me by Your Name* where gender normativity a given. *Moonlight* also avoids becoming a Black version of the typical ‘white gay or lesbian coming out’ movie. In fact, “[*Moonlight*] subverts this fixation on and obsession with homosexual identity as secrecy and exposure with its depiction of queerness: first, by not limiting the character’s sexuality through the coming-out process, and second, not reducing them to their sexual

identity” (Walter, 2020). Discussing the lack of sex in the film, Josh Lee (2017) observes that the film has a more pressing concern:

“By confronting us with queer childhood, we’re forced to consider what growing up queer in our heteronormative society robs us of: safety, opportunity, peace of mind, authenticity. [...] Confronting this through *Moonlight* gives queer audiences the chance to reconcile feelings of loss and resentment towards our childhoods, and begin healing in a way that no sex scene could.”



Figure 12: Solidarity and friendship in the face of adversity and hatred in *Tangerine*.

Another film focused on Black lives robbed of “safety, opportunity, peace of mind” (Lee, 2017) is *Tangerine* (Baker, 2015), which tells the story of one Christmas Eve in the life of two trans sex workers, Alexandra (Mya Taylor) and Sin-dee (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez). Shot entirely on an iPhone, *Tangerine*’s plot barrels along at full speed, with Sin-dee’s chaotic and destructive urge for revenge on her boyfriend (he cheated while she was in prison) exasperating Alexandra. Pre-empting criticisms of the portrayal of trans characters as sex workers being stereotypical, Mya Taylor (quoted in Lamphier, 2015) states: “I’m not saying that every trans woman does sex work. [...] But this is real. It happens, and it needs to be addressed.” The film’s connection to reality, and its casting of two trans women in the main roles, is the reason it avoids becoming another transploitation movie:

“At times, the film possesses an unhinged, camp sensibility á la John Waters [...] its rawness and lived-in performances, and the way that Baker conveys his characters’ clashes

and mishaps without bias or judgment, elevate *Tangerine* from a farcical, exploitative romp to a poignant, empathetic look at life on the outskirts” (Lamphier, 2015).

The touching and supportive friendship between Alexandra and Sin-dee is emotionally affective in a way that no relationship in a John Waters’ film has managed. When Sin-dee is working the street, a man throws urine on her, prompting Alexandra to lend Sin-dee her own wig while they wait together in a laundromat for Sin-dee’s clothes and wig to dry (see Figure 12). Rather than being *about* trans people for a cis audience, LaVelle Ridley (2019) analyses how Alexandra’s singing performance “allows viewers to see that other paths are available to black trans women, even when they have to forge them themselves.” *Moonlight* and *Tangerine* offer the viewer images of queer and trans lives outside of a white homonormative bubble. In achieving commercial and critical success, they demonstrate an audience’s desire to watch and hear stories other than that of the young white gay man coming out, or the young gay (but masculine) white romance, or a straight saviour narrative. Writing about *Brokeback Mountain*, Matthew Tinkcom (2017) observes that if Ennis and Jack were played by Black actors or actors of colour the audience would “speculate strongly upon the meaning of this casting decision” and this critical reflection should take place when considering “the whiteness of the film’s characters”, rather than taking whiteness as a default.

Queer strategies of resistance in cinema

I will now examine existing strategies used by queer filmmakers to resist assimilation into mainstream homonormative cinema, before examining four films (made in 1977, 1992, 2000, and 2018), each which employ unique strategies and create alternative modes of expressing queerness on screen. These analyses will be used as a foundation to build a framework for anti-

homonormative cinema that I will develop in Chapters 3. In Chapter 4, I will discuss strategies of resistance which I have developed, including the use of archival material to queer time and the re-telling of queer history within a film to resist the de-politicisation of LGBTQ+ issues.

In *Queer Cinema in the World*, Schoonover and Galt (2016) identify several “stylistic moves” which “help outline contemporary queer cinema’s persistent troubling of time”; these include “textual operations such as anachronism, asynchrony, slowness, inattention, excision, and ellipsis.” In a similar manner, Laura Guy (2016), when discussing Boudry and Lorenz’s film *Opaque* (2014), writes that they “threaded fiction through document in ways that allowed alternative propositions for, and utopian articulations of identity to emerge.” Guy (2016) also identifies the titular opacity and “various obfuscations” of the film as a strategy that can “resist recognition”, one in which “exposing identity is not the end game”. The strategies identified by Schoonover, Galt and Guy (anachronism, asynchrony, slowness, opacity, obfuscation, etc.) all describe a complication of a film’s expected form or plot trajectory, where comprehension is made purposefully more difficult, if not impossible.

José Esteban Muñoz (1999) proposed that disidentification is a way to “resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology” without identifying with it, or assimilating to it, or without “attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism)”. Disidentification is the process through which Black queers and queers of colour read a film/performance/book *against the grain*, creating the circumstances where the “racialized presences can be liberated from the protective custody of the white literary imagination” (Muñoz, 1999). In contrast to the methods used by artists and filmmakers which Schoonover, Galt and Guy identify, Muñoz theorises a similar complication of the text on behalf of the viewer themselves. Here the viewer is purposefully obfuscating an

author's intended meaning in order to read the text in a manner that they find more interesting (or, less offensive).

Queer filmmakers often use allegory because it “offers ways of speaking—and being—otherwise in the world” (Schoonover and Galt, 2016). While allegory “gives the impression of clarity and precision despite its semantic obscurity”, it “calls attention to oblique signification and threatens illegibility” (Kuzniar, 2000), an effect that is similar to how opacity and obfuscation function in queer film. The “wickedly queer currents in allegory” include “the extravagant, the wasteful, the excessive, the monstrous, and the duplicitous” (Schoonover and Galt, 2016), which are similar to the characteristics of Camp; the most recognisable queer strategy of resistance. Camp is often capitalised to signify its importance as a “politicized, solely queer discourse” (Meyer, 2004), or to separate ‘high Camp’ from ‘low camp’. In a move to make Camp “sanitized” and “safe for public consumption (Meyer, 2004), Susan Sontag (1966) attempted to remove queers from Camp, asserting that if queers hadn’t invented Camp “someone else would”. This led to Camp being confused with “rhetorical and performative strategies such as irony, satire, burlesque, and travesty; and with cultural movements such as Pop” (Meyer, 2004).

Camp is often imprecisely used to describe something kitsch or tacky, which reduces Camp to being simply an aesthetic. ‘Campy’ is often used (somewhat disparagingly) to refer to something which is overacted and ‘extra’, but which doesn’t have a meaning behind its theatrics: it remains lowercase camp. While Sontag (1966) sees Camp as being an intentional or accidental failure, she cannot see the subversive potential of Camp to allow an audience to “witness ‘serious’ issues with temporary detachment” (Babuscio, 2004) and, even, moral detachment.

Through this detachment, Camp has “cultural and ideological analytical potential” (Meyer, 2004).



Figure 13: The nuns in *Dark Habits* using heroin and sitting on a bed of nails.

Camp is a queer register that directors can use to speak to their audiences, and Pedro Almodóvar has used it repeatedly in his storytelling and direction of his cast. In *Dark Habits* (1983), an order of nuns (with names such as Sister Manure and Sister Rat of the Sewers) explore drugs, try to rescue ‘fallen women’, and one finds fame writing lewd romance novels (see Figure 13). *All About my Mother* (1999), while more sincere, still has a Camp premise and performances, telling the story of Manuela (Celia Roth), a mother grieving her son who died while chasing after an actress for an autograph. Manuela begrudgingly befriends a young nun (Rosa, performed by Penélope Cruz) who supports local trans sex workers. One of these sex workers in *Agrado* (Antonia San Juan) who delivers a funny and touching monologue about her trans identity, with a Campness that can remove tension for a straight audience by encouraging laughter while also acting as a knowing wink to the queer audience (see Figure 14). Camp works, in this way, at multiple levels at once:

“As if strategically wary of the problems of affirmation and positive images, Almodóvar’s long cinematic project of constructing empathy for the non-normative sexual subject and the socially marginalised figure has been famously both oblique (taking some odd angles on social and personal difficulties) and extreme (variously melodramatic or hilarious,

intermittently attentive to people and issues habitually ignored in Spanish mid to high culture and yet star-struck)” (Perriam, 2013).



Figure 14: Agrado’s self-effacing and funny speech about her identity in *All About my Mother*.

John Waters’ films employ a Camp premise and aesthetic, with Divine and an unruly cast delighting in upturning commonly held notions of decency and morality as queer anarchy unfolds on screen. In *Pink Flamingos* (1972), Divine and her misfit family battle a richer couple for the accolade of “the filthiest person alive,” culminating in Divine infamously eating a freshly defecated dog turd. In *Female Trouble* (1974, see Figure 15), Divine plays Dawn Davenport who embarks on a life of crime before becoming famous and dying on the electric chair. For a queer audience, Waters’ films provocations acted as an antidote to the straightness of mainstream films. Divine did not emulate glamorous divas but brought drag into the grotesque (putting raw meat between her legs under her dress, licking dead fish, etc.) and the uncontrollable (Divine would whizz through a scene with such momentum, dialogue flying out with such force, that you felt anything could happen). Drag is not always elevated to Camp, it can remain at an uncontentious or non-meta ‘campy’ level.

Chris Holmlund (2017) argues that reading *Female Trouble* as Camp “misses the specificity of the film’s late-1960s, early-70s impulse and impact” and, while the film is “comic, melodramatic, and tragic [...] it was not intentionally camp and was not received as camp at the time.” Holmlund compiles opinions the film’s cast, and John Waters himself, to assert that *Female Trouble* could not be Camp because the creators did not intend it to be—yet all of these accounts, including Holmlund’s own, appear to refer to Sontag’s outdated conception of ‘camp’ as meaning ‘so bad its good’. Regardless of the creators’ intentions, or the development of the word Camp, “the camp fascinations of Waters’s works [are] structurally similar to those of other camp texts” (Tinkcom, 2002). Tinkcom (2002) further argues for the radical potential of Divine’s Camp performance, which “aligns perversity with femininity not to justify or offer consolation about the ultimate ascension of patriarchy but to vivify the perverse pleasures that patriarchy ultimately seeks to punish.” Waters and Divine together defied all expectations of what gay and straight audiences expected of a drag queen, both in looks and behaviour. They eschewed respectability politics for the abject and revelled in the immoral and preposterous, all while making films that are not just cult classics, but Camp classics.



Figure 15: Divine taunting her kidnapped neighbour in *Female Trouble*.

Queer(ing) history

Queer filmmakers and artists have often attempted to trace or reflect on LGBTQ+ identity through history. In *Caravaggio* (1986) and *Edward II* (1991), Derek Jarman exhumes the queer identity of these historical figures and, in doing so, creates a “queer lineage” which “provides a queer family history and a tool for education, a means for queers to understand their origins, as well as how to make sense of their own place in the world” (Stamm, 2018). Jarman’s “attempts to revise history [...] open a space in traditional representation and locate queer subjectivity within that historical nexus” (Richardson, 2009). However, these historical “queer restagings” (Munoz, 2009) do not just impact on our interpretation of how queer lives existed in the past, they can “[help] us imagine new temporalities that interrupt straight time.” One technique Jarman uses to “collapse period settings with contemporary society” (Richardson, 2009) is the use of anachronism.

In *Caravaggio*, when the art critic writes a review of the painter’s work on a typewriter, the audience is faced with a jarring anachronistic image, the prop being out of sync with the time period represented faithfully elsewhere in the film (see Figure 16). As Niall Richardson (2009) writes, Jarman’s films are not simply “anachronistic ‘gayness’ stuck into a period setting”, they hold the potential to “expose the institutionalized repression of dissident sexual desire throughout history” and the focus remains on “the homophobic landscape of English history.”



Figure 16: The art critic in *Caravaggio* writes on a typewriter which would not be invented for roughly another 270 years.

In video artist Nguyen Tan Hoang's work *K.I.P.* (2001), the artist records "his faint reflection on a television screen that is showing a condom-free sex scene from classic gay porn starring Kip Noll (the iconic gay porn star of the late 1970s)" (Hallas, 2009). This longing for a time of anxiety-free sexual freedom resonates alongside the loss and devastation of the HIV/AIDS crisis, as the image of the artist's reflection is ghostly and melancholy. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) notes that "*K.I.P.* explicitly connects experimental video's temporal dissonance to queer sexual dissidence" and "speaks to mass-popular ways of using filmic temporality to expand bodily possibilities." Nguyen's recording of his reflection on top of a VHS porno allows him "to reframe" it through his own experience (and reflection) and this "[transforms] the present by illuminating its relation to the historical past" (Hallas, 2009).

The Watermelon Woman (dir. Cheryl Dunye, 1996) revolves around a young lesbian filmmaker (played by Dunye herself) searching for her own queer lineage through archival material of a fictional Black lesbian actress from the 1920s. This archival material is faked for

the film, which asks the audience to consider how archives are curated and which stories are considered worthy of preservation:

“Dunye [...] creates a history as a way to shed light on all of the ancestors—family or otherwise—that have been lost in the archive, or intentionally forgotten. In many ways, *The Watermelon Woman* is creating something that should be there anyway” (Igwe and Stokely, 2018).

In doing so, *The Watermelon Woman* identifies and critiques the lack of representation in archives for LGBTQ+ people and people of colour. Igwe and Stokely (2018) state that “to be Black and Queer to the archive means to have a refutable past” and that “to exploit and ‘reclaim’ these pasts mean to disidentify with them, to transform the past into a contentious space, and therefore queer our understanding of linear time.” Cvetkovich (2002) notes the important role of “gay and lesbian archives” to “address the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics, and they assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect.” Yet, *The Watermelon Woman* uses humour to reflect on how even a lesbian archive can have a blind spot for racial diversity. The creation of false archival material in *The Watermelon Woman* is a form of pastiche:

“Like New Hollywood, much of Queer Cinema is characterized by parody and pastiche. Yet unlike New Hollywood these are not simply ‘blank parodies’ but interrogations and/or reclamations of past history. The queer filmmaker reclaims previous re-presentations/ art/ historical events and explodes the queer subtext which previous representations have elided” (Richardson, 2009).

However, a recent development in queer cinema is the interpolation of authentic archival footage of the LGBTQ+ rights struggle within the main body of the film, as seen in *120 BPM (Beats Per Minute)*, which was also released as *BPM (Beats Per Minute)*. While *120 BPM* takes the

form of a traditional dramatic story arc, archival footage of ACT UP protests intercuts the film, lending a sense of authenticity and history against which to read the original footage of the film.

Archival footage becomes an active text in *120 BPM*

120 BPM (2017) is a French drama about ACT UP Paris during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1990s. *120 BPM* follows the Paris-based ACT UP working collectively to access healthcare for HIV/AIDS patients in the community and depicts their protesting of pharmaceutical companies inaction during the pandemic. Directed by Robert Campillo, *120 BPM* received the Grand Prix and the Queer Palm from the Cannes Film Festival and was distributed widely through arthouse and independent cinemas in 2017 (subsequently released in Ireland in March 2018). *120 BPM's* positive critical reception and decent box office turnover indicates that a cinema-going audience is interested in seeing the history of radical queer protests and the HIV/AIDS pandemic from a queer perspective, without needing the presence of a Tom Hanks or Matthew McConaughey to make it appealing.

The film stages ACT UP meetings where two of the main characters, Sean (Nahuel Pérez Biscayart) and Sophie (played by queer icon Adèle Haenel) are regular activists. Newcomer Nathan (Arnaud Valois) joins the group and begins his political awakening alongside a romance with Sean. Later, Sean is diagnosed as HIV-positive and “Campillo is careful to cast the Aids crisis as both personal tragedy and social epidemic” (Hans, 2018). It is unashamedly queer in its representation: showing collective action to raise awareness of safe-sex for teenagers; recreating ACT UP Paris’ protests at pharmaceutical companies headquarters and on the street; depicting friendships between queer men and women during the

HIV/AIDS crisis; showing the political tensions within ACT UP; and, ultimately, foregrounding solidarity within the LGBTQ+ community.

120 BPM intercuts archival videos into a non-historic, fictional plot-driven drama about ACT UP Paris set in the 1990s. The archival videos used were created by grassroots activists documenting ACT UP Paris' protests and actions, lending a sense of authenticity and history against which to read the original footage in the film. In *120 BPM*, the archival footage is not acknowledged by an on-screen title: it simply interjects, without introduction or explanation.⁴ This textual intervention mirrors how “cinematic and televisual works of queer memory” function as “rhetorical interventions into heteronormative narratives of collective memory” (Horvat, 2021). *120 BPM* thus operates as a “commemorative [text]”, one with enough international acclaim to “amplify [its] reach [...] well beyond national lines” (Horvat, 2021).

Campillo, as director and editor, and a member of ACT UP Paris during the HIV/AIDS crisis, aligns *120 BPM* with the legacy of AIDS video activists by embracing their aims to “[record] not only political events but also the passion and personal connections behind them, [and allow] affective historical access for subsequent generations of queers and activists” (Hilderbrand, 2006). In weaving fiction with archival footage, Campillo challenges conventional cinematic forms in a manner similar to the “Queer AIDS media” as researched by Hallas (2009):

“Produced by a generation of media makers steeped in postmodern genre hybridity and caring little about the sanctity of medium specificity that consumed the generation before them, queer AIDS media also reframe discursive space by moving fluidly between documentary, experimental, and narrative modes.”

⁴ The film's end credits state that the archival material is held at l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel.



Figure 17: Archival footage of ACT UP Paris appears in *120 BPM* before re-enactments of the protests are shown.

The sequence featuring the archival footage in *120 BPM* is edited loosely in a manner akin to an experimental film: moving between archival footage of ACT UP Paris storming religious ceremonies and various street protests, and original fictional footage of character Jérémie as his HIV diagnosis progresses. The archival videos of actual ACT UP Paris protests and actions are stretched to the same aspect ratio as the film's original footage but are grainy and blurry in comparison, and this noticeable shift in aesthetic signifies the footage as archival (see Figure 17). Jérémie's voice-over about the French Revolution plays over this collection of images. As Jérémie lies in bed, the voice-over states:

“This will be my political funeral. This is what I want, that they will carry my body through the city with whistles and horns” [translation my own].

Towards the finish of the voice-over, it is not clear if the narration has shifted in perspective from the French Revolution to Jérémie's inner own monologue about dying of AIDS. A reviewer for *The Crowd* (2018) notes that combining this narration with the archival footage situates the social movement of ACT UP within the tradition of the French Revolution. The

sequence continues with fictional footage *recreating* an ACT UP Paris protest, with protestors holding up signs with photographs of Jérémie on them. The characters are distraught, chanting:

“AIDS. We’re dying. Indifference remains” [translation my own].

Screening the original archival footage by itself as a historic document might allow an audience to view it with a distance afforded by time or from the perspective of LGBTQ+ rights having advanced considerably since the footage was taken. Instead, by incorporating the archival footage within an exciting and powerful drama, Campillo brings the archival footage to a general movie-going audience who may be unaware of ACT UP’s social and political activism. Similarly, *120 BPM* brings this footage to the LGBTQ+ viewer, allowing them to empathise with the fictional character’s participation in ACT UP. In drawing connections between various sources (archival footage, fiction, staged protests—see Figure 18, and the French Revolution) *120 BPM* succeeds at successfully “[reframing] discursive space” for the viewer (Hallas, 2009).



Figure 18: *120 BPM* re-enacts ACT UP Paris’ protests in throughout the streets of Paris.

What effect does this reframing have on the archival footage shown, and its status as an historical document? Considering LGBTQ+ history is often denied or misrepresented, is there a danger of ‘fictionalising’ the historical document by intercutting it with fictional footage in this way? Or is this a new strategy for queer filmmakers to retell LGBTQ+ history? Hilderbrand (2006) proposed “retroactivism” as a “mode of nostalgia that accounts for generative historical fascination of imagining, feeling and drawing from history.” While ‘nostalgia’ can often imply a rose-tinted exploration of the archive, Laura Guy (2016) suggests artists working with the archive “[can be defended] against accusations of nostalgia, foregrounding instead the importance of returning to the past in order to map lineages of queer and feminist practice.” In *120 BPM*, the practice mapped is one of resistance through radical protest, political intervention and radical joy; radical because it is present during a time of distress and oppression. This resistance through radical joy is most present in the sequence where:

“The group invade a medical insurers’ dinner, dispersing Sean’s ashes around the room. [Then,] they go dancing” (Walters, 2018).

Hilderbrand’s conceptualisation of retroactivism as a *generative* form of nostalgia is put into practice in *120 BPM* when archival footage of historical protests are activated anew when they become an integral part of an active text. The fictional space of the film is interrupted, with the uncomfortable truth of the archival footage undercutting the audience’s cinematic pleasure in the storytelling and cinematography. The archival footage is simultaneously used to propel the narrative forward, lending it a sense of authenticity by locating the on-screen drama within a historical context. In this re-activation of the archival images, the important stories held within the archival footage are retold to a cinema going audience. By bringing the footage out of the archive and duplicating it digitally, the rarity or uniqueness of the historical document is

affected. Rather than the archival footage seeming artificial in its new home, it is reframed within the film's intimate and emotional scenes, drawing parallels between the director's voice and the voices in the archival footage. This emotional connection is a "cultural memory [which] conveys a sense of shared experience that is not reducible to dates and places but rather history that is felt" (Hilderbrand, 2006). The director's personal connection to the film's subject, as a member of ACT UP Paris himself, could be, as Cvetkovich (2002) describes, a way to "address traumatic experience through witnessing and retelling."

While *120 BPM* does not explicitly deal with homonormativity, it is, for the most part, unashamedly queer in its representation of identity and its politics. Unlike "mainstream Hollywood films which normalize gay identity, [but] almost always isolate the gay or lesbian character from a larger gay/lesbian subculture" (Dean, 2007), *120 BPM* is notable for its representation of friendships between queer men and queer women during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Equally refreshing is the frank discussions about safe-sex, LGBTQ+ representation in the media and the sense of a truly diverse community which are usually missing from most homonormative films. Writing in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, Frederic Fovet (2019) notes that what distinguishes *120 BPM* from Hollywood AIDS movies such as *Philadelphia* (1993) or *And the Band Played On* (1993) is its "determination to finally set the AIDS narrative in an intersectional landscape" and show the "genuine intersectional canvas of the diversity of lives that were affected by the epidemic." While the relationship between Sean and Nathan is one of the main focuses of the film, *120 BPM* is still "a collective story about collective action, willing to sit with dissensus, ambiguity and irresolution" (Walters, 2018).

Narrating otherwise: alienating the viewer in ‘The faggot film’

It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives (von Praunheim, 1977) or the “*Schwulenfilm (Faggot Film)*” as Rosa von Praunheim calls this work, is frequently lauded as the first gay activist film worldwide, although from the start it provoked anger on the part of its gay audiences both in Germany and North America” (Kuzniar, 2000). Today, the film retains its radical potential in how it completely ignores a straight audience, instead directing itself acidly at gay, queer and bi men (see Figure 19). Predating New Queer Cinema, *It is Not the Homosexual* is not preoccupied with demonstrating positive representations to counter mainstream media’s negative and homophobic depictions of LGBTQ+ people. It confronts uncomfortable issues within the community about self-image and self-worth, and its observations are so ruthless that it could be seen as homophobic if it were not so clearly an “insider critique” (Kuzniar, 2000).

The film is aggressive and confrontational, and “the predominant voice-over [is] a castigating commentary on the behaviour of “faggots,” together with “fags,” a word used ninety times in the film” (Kuzniar, 2000). Kuzniar (2000) also notes that the strong voice-overs are an “assault of information” and quotes von Praunheim as stating “this over-exertion of the spectator, in opposition to these long takes... the spectator or critic can interpret uncommonly a lot into this film” (von Praunheim in Kuzniar, 2000). Watching in the cinema, the film continued to increase my discomfort until it broke through a ceiling of hysteria and I surrendered my attempts to deconstruct the complexity of all that was being signified, which is apparently what the director intended:

“The voice-overs serve various functions: to begin, marking a rupture from the visual image, they call attention to the fact that cinema is a technical construction that mechanically weds sound to image and hence cannot be taken as mimetically reproducing

reality. This split emphasizes that the fictional biography of Daniel can make no pretense of accurately depicting a gay lifestyle; it accents as well the work's status as art as opposed to documentary" (Kuzniar, 2000).



Figure 19: The provocative and hectoring voice-over clashing against light-hearted fashion and style.

While the form of the film and the language used is challenging for the viewer, Kuzniar (2000) discusses how the main character of Daniel was cast "in order to show not camp perversity but lack of personality" and quotes Praunheim as saying "I didn't want a story with which people could identify but images that were exemplary in their alienation" (von Praunheim in Kuzniar, 2000). This disregard for both the audience's comfort and ability to 'connect' with the main character is in stark contrast to the purpose of Joe in *Pride* and Danny in *Stonewall*, and the form of the film equally eschews any claim to authenticity or positive representation. In one sequence, *It is Not the Homosexual* recalls Kenneth Anger as lingering shots observe a cruising scene with leather queens and bikers. Except the voice-over condemns what the camera is fetishising, leaving the viewer in an ambiguous space, unsure of where they are supposed to be positioned.

At a discussion after the film screened at Queens Film Theatre on 28th March 2019, one audience member, sounding frustrated, said “I don’t know what he is saying with that part.” I felt that this scene’s conflicting message forced me to consider in real-time whether I would follow or agree with the narrator, or else ignore it and appreciate the beauty within the image. While this was frustrating for some viewers, this process of editing the intake of information should be familiar to most LGBTQ+ people navigating mainstream media. Kuzniar (2000) observes that while “the Marxists stance of the voice-over condemns the faggot for his ‘middle-class assimilationism,’ the way in which the faggot exceeds and thereby erodes normality is continually present in the film”, rendering even the sharply didactic sequences to be not as clear-cut as they initially seem.



Figure 20: Surrounded by lavender, the naked men discuss how to be free.

The film ends with a long sequence in which six men lie around naked, draped in and surrounded by lavender (see Figure 20). They discuss their dissatisfactions with the gay community, how

to drive change, and what needs to be rejected and what needs to be improved in the modern articulation of LGBTQ+ identity. It is proposed that Gay Liberation needs to align with women's rights and Black liberation, yet this hope for intersectional politics is incompatible with the focus on consumption, which Daniel was preoccupied with earlier:

“Calling for gay emancipation, they advocate social engagement and collective organization against discrimination. Their nakedness contrasts with the film's earlier focus on trendy, even outlandish dress” (Kuzniar, 2000).

Sex, power, and violence in *O Fantasma* and *Knife + Heart*

O Fantasma (2000) by João Pedro Rodrigues follows the sexual life of Sergio, a garbage collector in Lisbon, as he becomes fixated on wealthy motorcycle-riding João after collecting rubbish from his home. Eschewing conventional plot-driven drama and both straight and queer romances, *O Fantasma* instead “uses eyelines and Sergio's sensory stimulation to propel a narrative that, aside from the tension between Fátima and Sergio, contains no conventional subplots”, but there are “numerous scenarios in which one person is tasked with deciding whether or not to exercise power over another” (Dillard, 2018). Fatima is the only woman working in the garbage collection company, and she flirts with Sergio until they finally have sex, with Sergio treating her rudely and dismissively afterwards.



Figure 21: Sergio's sexual urges change throughout: from desiring to be controlled to encounters where he is the aggressor.

Despite his good looks and brooding personality, Sergio is an unconventional main character: he has sex with men and women; sometimes anonymously; sometimes he's on top; sometimes he's on bottom; sometimes he's in full fetish gear; sometimes it is not clear how consensual it is (such as, when he jerks off the tied up policeman); we see him masturbating while choking himself with a shower hose (see Figure 21), and rubbing himself against João's motorbike. Da Silva (2014) notes that "the ways the filmmaker engages with the characters' sexualities show that human sexuality is destabilised, decentred, and de-essentialised." We are not let into Sergio's inner world besides his sexual desires. The dog who lives at the garbage collection site is "the only being that [he] seems to care about on an intimate, emotional level" (Koresky, 2020). For the most part, it is not clear if Sergio should be desired, or pitied, or if he is repulsive.

Most of the film's scenes are accompanied by loud background atmospheric sound, creating the sense that there is no privacy and that each moment is about to be interrupted. But, this changes dramatically when Sergio is sneaking into João's bedroom, dressed fully in fetish gear: the break in sound to complete silence signifies a major change in Sergio's character. He ties João up, violently covering his face with a pillow, and knocks him out. The camera never cuts, instead moving with him as he dry humps the unconscious body and throws him out the window, before dragging him down an alleyway. When João wakes up, Sergio kicks him and—because he does not receive reciprocal desire, perhaps—he runs away.



Figure 22: Sergio kidnaps João, in an echo of the unexplained tied-up policeman.

This scene (see Figure 22) could be viewed as a revenge fantasy for outcast queer kids against the archetype of the popular athletic straight man, except that Sergio does not act as “an accessible vehicle for our sympathies. [...] Rodrigues isn’t asking us to empathize with Sergio, but to consider how working-class people are regarded by policy makers as refuse” (Dillard, 2018). The kidnapping thus transgresses lines of class and sexuality that are unspoken (working-class/middle-class/wealthy; queer/ straight), but which weigh heavily on the interactions between Sergio and João, making this “act of revenge [feel] as class-based as sexually driven” (Koresky, 2020). While creative works by and about gay and queer men have tended to fetishise working-class men, *O Fantasma* turns this on its head with Sergio fetishising João and his expensive-looking motorbike, without the hope for upward social mobility. John Mercer (2017) states that the character of Sergio is made from a blueprint established of the “physically beautiful yet physically detached” males in Jean Genet’s *Un Chant d’Amour* (1950) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Querelle* (1982). However, unlike the characters in those films, Sergio

does not appear to be bound by the same social constraints of what constitutes masculinity or fearful of the social stigma around queer sex, particularly about being a bottom. Mercer (2017) writes that:

“While Sergio’s sexual encounters punctuate the film’s narrative with consistent regularity, they are always presented as having the flat, mechanical feel of transactional sexual exchanges and as a consequence are markedly not titillating in spite of their explicit nature. They are not presented as acts of connection but instead as enactments of sexual ‘performance’ implicitly bound up with power relations.”



Figure 23: Sergio licks and smells his hand after his sexual encounter with the tied-up policeman.

However, while the sexual acts do sometimes seem cold and even ruthless, the level of connection in them cannot be discounted merely because they do not signify the shared ‘love’ of love-making, or because no words are exchanged. For example, after jerking off the policeman—who was inexplicably tied up in the back of a car—Sergio returns to work and smells and licks his hand—in which the policeman presumably ejaculated—with his co-workers standing nearby (see Figure 23). Here a direct connection is made between the ‘filth’ of the

sexual exchange still on Sergio's hands and his job of collecting actual filth. Smelling and licking his hand demonstrates a lingering desire from a fleeting sexual moment, one which exists outside a transactional exchange and outside of porn, where the money-shot is considered the apex and final scene.⁵ Disregarding the intimacy of these sexual exchanges is to read the film in a puritanical manner: while there may not be a personal connection between sexual partners, the intensity of Sergio's performance consistently shows a physical connection which is urgent and—as with his other interactions with policemen—often potentially dangerous.

While *Knife + Heart* (2018, original title: *Un couteau dans la Coeur*, i.e. “A Knife in the Heart”) is more narrative-driven than *O Fantasma*, it also focuses on uncontrollable urges. Directed by Yann Gonzalez, *Knife + Heart* is a (sexual) horror mystery set in Paris in 1979, which bounces off giallo references in both its colour palette and storyline (Bitel, 2019); revolving around a small gay porn studio whose actors and staff are slowly picked off and murdered. In the opening sequence—where no dialogue is spoken by the actors until almost the 8 minute mark—we watch film reel porn footage of a young man, Karl, and then see him in a club flirting with a (fairly ominous) masked man. Karl is then tied up to a bed, and the masked man kisses his back while gentle soundtrack music plays. He rips off Karl's underwear, stuffing them into the Karl's mouth, and takes out a dildo from his own pants. Intermittent cuts to Karl performing in the porn footage heighten the sense of anticipation, but a knife slides out of the dildo the masked man is holding. The lighting turns red and the music becomes more frantic as he stabs Karl (see Figure 24). The stabbing happens out of shot, but later we learn Karl was

⁵ As will be discussed shortly, In *Knife + Heart*, Anne makes a passionate speech in the police station about desire and the exchange between her porn actors which resonates with the point I'm making here: 'debased' or 'transactional' sexual activity is not always devoid of affection and desire.

stabbed “multiple times in the rectum”. As the first and most erotically charged murder, the correlation between sex and death hangs over the rest of film.



Figure 24. Left: 8mm porn footage of Karl performing.
Right: The killer prepares to stab Karl with a knife that comes out of his dildo.

We are then introduced to the film’s main protagonist, Anne (Vanessa Paradis), a queer woman who is a director at the porn studio. She phones Lois (Kate Moran), a film editor at the studio, who was editing footage of just-murdered Karl. Anne is impulsive and passionate in her communication with a resigned Lois. Their fraught relationship is the film’s main subplot, with it occupying Anne’s thoughts more than the murders. When Anne returns to the porn studio, we see her spying through a hole in the wall on Lois editing. In the context of the porn studio, this spy hole references a glory hole except it is filled with paranoia instead of anonymous sex. While driving with Archibald, a porn actor/producer/friend, Anne demands he stop the car at a quarry while she scouts for a young man, Nan, to be a porn actor. She flirts with him aggressively and leaves her number in his pants. She tells Archibald that Nan is going to “blow Lois away”; their relationship being intertwined with the gay male porn they make. When being questioned by the police about Karl’s murder, Anne reminisces about Karl’s captivating performance in an orgy scene where five men were on him, saying:

“He went from one to the other. Eyes ablaze... at the mercy of his partners, possessed. When you lose yourself with another person, or persons, when you lose control... have you ever felt that? It’s a form of love. Beautiful. Voracious. Boundless.”

Feeling no shame or inhibition, Anne intimidates the police officers with her description of sexual enjoyment. The film cuts to the porn studio, with Archibald performing as Anne being interviewed by the police. As the scene becomes more and more preposterously sexual, the porn actor performing as the policeman's typist bangs his hard dick against the typewriter.⁶ Anne grins while watching her experience become this fantasy, which she titles *Anal Fury*. In this Camp recreation of her, very recent, serious incident, Anne is letting the viewer know that this is how she sees the world and this is how she processes trauma:

“Sometimes misrecognition can be *tactical*. Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture” (Muñoz, 1999, emphasis in original).

Unable to unleash her anger or sexuality in the police station, she creates a fictional account that fetishises and mocks the police officers (see Figure 25).



Figure 25: Anne directs her porn recreation of her encounter with the police investigating the murder of her friends.

When Lois watches—with fondness, although they have broken up—a filmed strip of Anne laughing, she sees Anne has scraped “you have killed me” (“tu m’as tuée”) into the celluloid. This text was engraved on the celluloid over the image of Thierry, one of the studio’s porn actors

⁶ When the actor pushes against the typewriter, it recalls both Sergio dry humping the motorbike in *O Fantasma*, and Volley rubbing against the table in *Flaming Ears*.

who was just murdered with the killer's dildo-knife breaking through the back of his skull. The inscription on the film strip connects Anne's obsession with Lois and the destructive nature of their relationship with the murders and the murderer. After learning about Thierry's death, Anne declares she has an idea for a title for a new film: *Homocidal*. It will be her porn-version of the murderous events. The trans girls, whom Anne met in a bar earlier, perform in the film, with one of them acting as a dominatrix whipping a man on all fours. Anne performs as the murderer in a leather mask: pretending to stab the others before being shot by Archibald, who is again dressed in drag as Anne. Anne's mask is pulled off, and the dominatrix declares:

“She saw so many gay flicks, she thought she was a fag. Mother by day, murderer by night. A sickness on the rise.”

There is a perversity in turning a tragic series of her friends' murders into a porno, but there is also a sense of resistance: parodying something that is affecting their lives, with the killer revealed as a penis-envying lesbian, is so ridiculous and camp that it neutralises their fear of the murderer. Equally, Anne is attempting to draw the real-life murders to a conclusion for herself as she directs it and unmasks the killer. After her performance, Anne asks the cameraman if she was “a good fag”, and the cameraman replies “superb”. As in *120 BPM*, the friendship between queer women and men is central to the film- except sexual activity is less separate in *Knife + Heart*, with Anne having a canny knack for making gay male sex look good on camera.



Figure 26: Anne's dreams are haunted by her murdered actors and friends.

Lit in sleazy saturated colours, Anne goes to see the premiere of *Homocidal* in a gay cruising cinema; to see her porn film about the film we're watching. In this sequence all the strands of the film conjoin: Anne being a queer woman in a male cruising space, as the creator of the porn the men are watching, which features her murdered friends, and which was edited by her just-murdered lover. The last actor in *Homocidal* who remains alive, Nan, enters the cinema to see himself on screen. When we see the murderer, Guy Favre, sitting behind him, his death seems assured. Anne drunkenly falls asleep in the screening and has a nightmare of her murdered friends surrounding her, appearing as zombies (see Figure 26). Nan leaves the cinema and enters the adjoining cruising area and Favre approaches him with a knife, before Anne bursts in and declares him the murderer. Favre takes a hostage and drags him to the front of the cinema screen. The cinema crowd stands up, with one man asking, "get off on killing fags?" The men tackle him and a young man picks up Favre's knife and stabs him repeatedly, literally twisting the knife in him. However, this revenge sequence is not as satisfying as Sergio's kidnapping of João because the killer is revealed as a burn victim, a clichéd and insensitive cinematic trope.



Figure 27: Archibald, as a faun, frolics amongst a communal sex scene.

The end-credit sequence is an ethereal sex-scene where Archibald crawls around a fountain as a faun and Anne kisses Lois, giving us a glimpse of the lesbian romance we were rooting for. As Anne is pulled back into reality, the lights and music drop out, and it is as if the porn actors are suspended. In the first truly quiet moment in the film, Anne and Archibald share an inexplicable moment. This communal sex scene (see Figure 27) recalls the final scene in *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse*, with many naked queers lying around in a utopic space. Except where that was explicit in terms of its social commentary and critiques, *Knife + Heart's* final scene is ambiguous and revelling in sexual excess.

A dirty nature: trash, filth and excess

While the sexual ‘position’ of Sergio shifts constantly in *O Fantasma*, so does its cinematic forms: from arthouse, to porn, to slow artist film. Repeatedly moving between these forms leads the audience to wonder if they are supposed to be following a story, becoming aroused, or reflecting on the social conditions that depict poverty in Lisbon. John Mercer (2017) situates the director Rodrigues within a lineage of queer filmmaking, stating that *O Fantasma* has the “same shared reference points [...] of homoerotic and dreamlike narrative pace” as Kenneth Anger’s and Derek Jarman’s films; both of whom also shared Rodrigues’ lack of respect for cinematic hierarchies of form and genre. This is most evident when we are introduced to a seemingly newly constructed garbage dump: it is shot in the vein of an artist film’s slow and lingering gaze. Hollywood and arthouse films would use a shorter shot to establish the garbage dump as a site for action, before cutting into relevant details, but *O Fantasma* lingers for so long that the viewer wonders if it is staged or documentary footage, and if the scene has any meaning.



Figure 28: Sergio drinking dirty water in the garbage dump after searching for food.

O Fantasma becomes surreal when Sergio runs away after kidnapping João: we see him still in his fetish gear, climbing through a gate, drinking from a pond, walking through trees before jumping onto the back of a passing garbage truck. He stands at the back of the truck, as he once did in his job, except now in full fetish gear: his ‘deviant’ sexual persona merging with his daytime life as he becomes “increasingly truthful to his subjectivity” (da Silva, 2014). He leaves the truck when it returns to the previously languorously introduced garbage dump. The visuals of him traversing the dump are visually arresting: he walks more like a beast than a human, as if he has transfigured into a creature that haunts the garbage site. During a misty dawn, he finds where all the garbage has been left in the pit and begins rooting through it. As he eats rotting fruit, the waste and consumption he finds in the pit has a parallel with his sexual excesses, but there is no moral judgement made; the meaning is ambiguous and unsettling. Sergio drinks some muddy water before vomiting and, finally, takes off his mask (see Figure 28). After passing out, he wakes up in the dump’s processing plant, having been rescued. After zipping open his rubber suit from his crotch to his ass, he defecates out of shot, before escaping back into the garbage pit, rejecting the attempted rescue or capture, and avoiding reintegration into society.

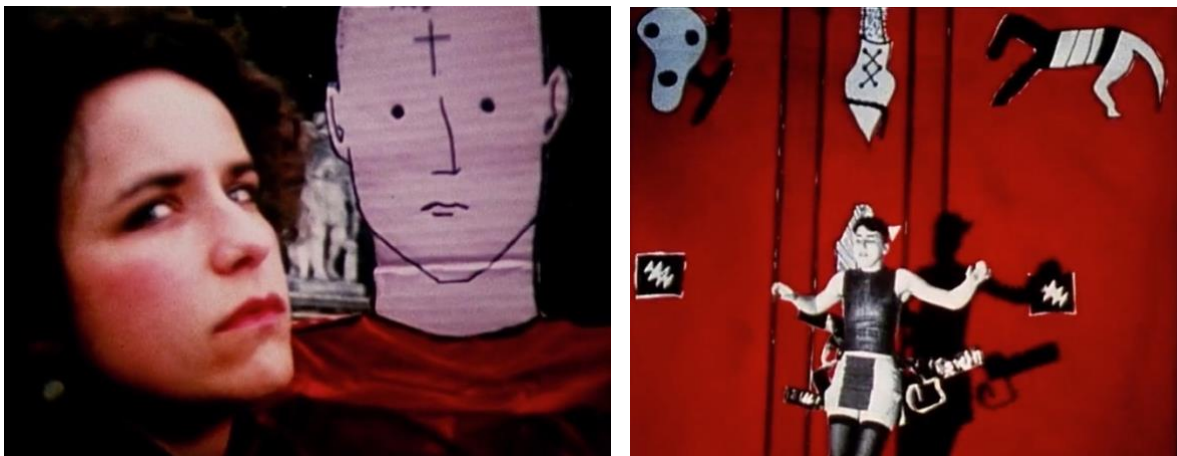


Figure 29: Throughout *Flaming Ears* there are fast changes between different aesthetics and techniques

Flaming Ears (original title: *Rote Ohren Fetzen Durch Asche*, 1992) is a pastiche of dystopian sci-fi thrillers where “the existence of an autonomous lesbian society is taken for granted” (Kuzniar, 2000). While *Flaming Ears* employs a similar register of frantic camp as John Waters’ films, it is not as narratively focused as them, nor is it as narratively loose as *O Fantasma*; *Flaming Ears* carves out its own space. Kuzniar (2000) states that “with its radically discontinuous narrative lacking suspense and characters who repulse empathic identification or visual attraction, this film redefines a queer aesthetic as one that toughly pushes limits and transgresses boundaries.” There are often cuts to abstract scenes, floating imagery and montages which offer obscure connections to the main storylines (see Figure 29).

Although *Flaming Ears* moves wildly between disparate scenes, it establishes a motivation for one of the main characters, Spy (a comic book maker) to seek revenge against Volley, who had burnt down a printing press which printed Spy’s comics. As Kuzniar says, it is not possible to empathise with the character’s bizarre motivations. However, Volley’s chaotic sexual presence is alluring, as is her performance in the club, which creates a sense of suspense or anticipation that is more akin to that of a hook-up than the suspense we expect of narrative cinema. She is similar to the character of Sergio in *O Fantasma* in that she has many lovers and traditional relationship structures seem to have no relevance to her. Like Sergio, she is sexually spontaneous: encouraging her driver to put on a dirty wet rubber glove she just found and fist her with it outside in the dirt. But while Sergio gyrated against the motorbike belonging to his object of affection, when Volley ‘has sex’ with a piece of furniture it is simply an inanimate object that she will soon light on fire. Towards the end of *Flaming Ears*, the Alien collapses into a folded cardboard cut-out:

“The force of a queer cinema derives from its will to free one from the illegitimacy of the ruling symbolic order. Ideally, it would defy labels, pathologies, and moralities and demonstrate how uncontrollable the meaning generated by experimentation can be. [...] queer cinema can also border on a crisis in representation once its dissent tries to recode the discursive field on several fronts simultaneously” (Kuzniar, 2000).

Shot on 8mm film, the film’s DIY aesthetic is as chaotic as the story it tells, with live action, stop animation and miniature sets happening all within one sequence alone. Strong colours, playful costumes, and Camp performances signify it as being a satirical B-movie of a dystopian city, however:

“Alienation and aggression determine the relations between women in this film that forecasts a futuristic dyke state as anarchistic and cruel. The very name of its city, Asche (Ashes), betokens bleakness, decay, and destructuring.” (Kuzniar, 2000)

The cityscape of Asche feels hostile and desolate, covered in shadows with no sense of a world outside the city, and the miniature sets of the city distorting any sense of the scale of Asche. Yet, within this, we observe a club where Volley (a pyromaniac) performs: patrons wear extravagant costumes, dancing and posing like it is an exclusive subcultural queer club, with their styles revealing the film’s 90s production and conjuring a joyful utopia. Volley’s performance involves her hanging nude from a cage wearing a penis and testicles made of bone or plastic (see Figure 30). When one woman with long rosary beads, and another with a whip, rub against Volley, it is not clear if it is a sex club or if it is simply part of the performance. Afterwards, the club owner pays Volley and tells her:

“That was a lousy show tonight. And, besides, you lost too much weight. I want you to cut down on your perverted obsessions. You can’t go on like that.”



Figure 30: Volley's costume and performance in the underground queer club.

As in the rest of the film, even these casual conversations seem pointed and loaded. While the audience has no frame of reference for what Volley was like before, we are made aware there is long running tension and resentment between these two characters. Volley retorts:

“I can! You can count on that. Never again will I squeeze through this ridiculous door. I will strut proudly on stairs of stone, claim palaces and cut the air of loft chambers with my body. I don't need you.”

Throughout the film, Volley has many of these speeches where she castigates the other person and veers into lyricism. Later she is disgusted with the Alien for the state of their home and lambasts her:

“What a mess this place is. I bet the dishes are growing lovely mould and you there for hours watching them grow. Yuck! Tiny, frail stems, infant sprouts, moss pads leaking away... yellow... and violet. You could breed carnivorous plants. A wonder you aren't doing it already.”

This almost free-association rant conjures images and sensations off screen; which do little to propel the narrative but connects the characters with nature that grows from damp and dirt, and with the carnivorous plants that eat filthy creatures. Later Volley asks the Alien:

“Where did you roam about again? In fermenting garbage piles, in slimy sewers? My honey is a scumbag. Sheer lunacy.”

The Alien melts plastic toys to eat, and later we see her roaming in a garbage site, echoing the visuals of Sergio in *O Fantasma* except that the Alien's face is visible when Sergio's is not (see Figure 31).



Figure 31: In *Flaming Ears* (left) and *O Fantasma* (right), two outcasts in latex, leather and rubber, rooting through garbage dumps to find food.

Discussing Robin Morgan's "analysis of patriarchy as the backbone of terrorism", Jasbir Puar notes that she "borders on advocating lesbianism and a woman-centred world as the antidote to terrorism" (Puar, 2006). Yet, in *Flaming Ears*, the female and lesbian-centric world is rife with pyromania, shootings, general chaos, besides one scene where Volley lies amongst nature (see Figure 32).



Figure 32: A rare 'soft' and quiet image of Volley towards the end of the film, among the damp and dirt she both loves and detests.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified several homonormative cinematic conventions. First, cinematic retellings of the LGBTQ+ rights struggle tend to erase or side-line LGBTQ+ people—both in terms of casting and in the veracity of historical events—as evidenced in analyses of *Milk* and *Stonewall*. This is done to appeal to a mainstream white, straight, cis audience who favour non-threatening homonormative narratives, i.e. narratives which are at odds with the history of the LGBTQ+ rights movement. Second, the use of a conventionally attractive and naïve white gay male leads acting as the audience’s ‘way in’ to the subject matter is a trope repeated in several films, including *Pride* and *Stonewall*. Finally, mainstream cinema’s homonormative framework minimises Black people’s, trans people’s and people of colour’s parts in the LGBTQ+ community through various combinations of: a lack of meaningful roles, the skewing of historical narratives, and the focus on white homonormative couples. This was examined through *Stonewall*, *The Kids are All Right*, and *Boys Don’t Cry*.

In my textual analyses, I have identified several existing queer strategies of resistance employed by directors and artist filmmakers to reject or resist the above homonormative conventions. In *It is Not the Homosexual*, the director rejects the audience’s comfort and a need for a ‘relatable’ main character. By presenting conflicting messages through a loud and damning narration, the audience is forced to consider whether or not they agree with the narrator in an intentionally confusing and frustrating process. This technique draws the viewer’s attention to the constructed and quasi-ethnographic nature of the film. In *O Fantasma*, the director frustrates the viewer’s desire to identify Sergio’s sexuality by constantly changing how he has sex: from active, to passive, to aggressive, to playing at strangling himself. His character is not the empty cipher of Danny in *Stonewall*, but instead is purposefully inaccessible: we are not let into

Sergio's inner world besides his sexual desires. While clearly handsome, Sergio is morally questionable, leading the viewer to wonder if they should be aroused, try to piece the story together or be repulsed by his violent behaviour. Yet, despite the cold nature of his sexual adventures, we see Sergio's desire as existing outside the transactional.

In *Flaming Ears*, lesbian Camp as frantic as John Waters is paired with an original mix of aesthetics and forms. As in *O Fantasma*, the chaotic sexual presence of the lead, Volley, creates more anticipation in the film than the plot itself does. Similar to Sergio, traditional relationship structures have no meaning to Volley, who is sexually spontaneous and performs sex in public. *Flaming Ears* challenges the viewer through form and content, with its lead actor revelling in pyromania and performing nude, a far cry from the wine-drinking suburbia of *The Kids are All Right*. In *Knife + Heart*, sex, porn and death are intertwined in a film that merges Camp with horror. Rapid tonal shifts between staged porn, unfolding drama and surreal sequences destabilise the viewer's path through the unconventional murder mystery. These strands conjoin in a thrilling and meta sequence when Anne, a queer woman, enters a male cinema cruising space and watches the porn she created, which was edited by her murdered lover, and which features her (almost all murdered) actors and friends, until the murderer arrives in the cinema to kill her newly discovered favourite porn actor, who is watching himself on screen. The friendship between queer women and queer men is central to the film, except sexual activity is not separate between them, with Anne's talent for making male-on-male sex look good on film. Unlike the Hollywood films discussed which attempt to segregate the LGBTQ+ categories, *Knife + Heart* features the full spectrum who help Anne process her trauma through Camp recreations, turning their tragedy into comedic porn and neutralising their fear of the killer.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the queer filmmaking strategies that I've developed which resist the above identified homonormative cinematic conventions, and which build on the queer strategies of resistance examined here.

Chapter 3: Developing an anti-homonormative filmmaking practice

This chapter identifies strategies and techniques developed through a practice-led research methodology which address how queer filmmaking can critique and challenge the politics and representations of homonormativity in cinema. This chapter will examine three of *Expulsion's* themes: the Queer State's bureaucracy; meditative and introspective scenes; and, surreal and sexual happenings. The next chapter will focus on scenes that have an historical theme. My filmmaking practice forms the basis of the research project's practical component. My films are situated in both cinema and artist moving image contexts, and are not set within a particular time period, but suggest a near future. The scripts I write are often slightly absurd or surreal and do not have traditional character story arcs- in fact, often the character's role, or way of performing, changes from scene to scene. I combine these techniques to create an ambiguous and unsettled terrain in which to reflect on a character's shifting identity and to draw attention to the constructed nature of cinema itself. For this PhD project I have made *Expulsion*, a 30 minute experimental film investigating the representation and politics of queerness and homonormativity, and a 3 minute 30 second video, *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson*, which critiques the erasure of trans individuals from history.

The work made as part of this project builds on my established filmmaking practice and seeks to establish several new filmmaking techniques and textual methods that challenge the predominant homonormative formulas for LGBTQ+ characters and narratives in cinema, which I have established in the previous chapter. The prevalent trend, or *modus operandi*, in contemporary mainstream cinema is for LGBTQ+ characters to perform homonormative values (through gender-normativity, whiteness, marriage, family and class) in order to be deemed respectable and/or accepted within the diegesis of the film and by the audience. In contrast, queer

artist and experimental film often have dramatically different concerns, such as: the destabilisation of sexuality and gender categories; a more antagonistic relationship with the viewer through challenging form and content; and the troubling established of cinema practices such as identification processes. While the relationship between queer filmmakers and their mainstream cinema and tv counterparts have been studied in depth, there has been no practice-led research undertaken in this area and none specifically examining homonormativity from a queer filmmaking practice perspective. This gap in research within the field led me to develop the following research questions: how can a queer film act as a site for critique and transgression of homonormativity in cinema? And, what new techniques and/or combination of techniques could be developed to allow queer characters and/or queer stories to resist assimilation into prevalent homonormative cinematic conventions? While Queer Film Studies have examined homonormativity in cinema, this chapter gives insight into the tacit knowledge of queer filmmaking practice through practice-led research, specifically addressing how homonormativity can be challenged on both a scriptwriting and conceptual level.

Expulsion: towards a Queer State

Writing in the practical journal on 10/10/2018, I wrote that “my last films used a conceit as a conceptual framework in which to explore and reflect/re-purpose my research”, and began asking questions to determine if a “queer [nation] state” could be used in a similar manner for this research project. For previous films, defining the premise of the film and its conceptual ‘conceit’ allowed me to determine its limits, and thus decide how characters would operate within those bounds. I thought the idea of a queer nation state could contain the ideas of homonormativity and queer film discussed in the previous chapter, while allowing space for

play and experimentation, which could lead to unexpected outcomes. Before any script writing, I wrote a statement of creative intent (see Appendix 1) —similar to funding proposals I’ve written for the Arts Council of Ireland’s film grants—which sets out the conceptual concerns that the film, and myself as director, would grapple with:

“As a Queer State develops, and the society there becomes more insulated, what happens to radical queer politics? As an oppositional and disruptive force, what is there left for ‘queer’ to achieve? What would queerness look like then?”

I hoped that the concept of an improbable queer nation state would address the promise and potentiality of queerness. As Muñoz (2009) argues: “queerness does not yet exist” but “is an ideality or a figuration of a mode of being in the world that is not yet here.” In contrast to queerness’ undefined and undefinable nature, this fictional Queer State would aim to contain and regulate the politics of queerness within the bounds of a nation state. During this concept writing phase, the film’s working title was simply *A Queer State* and the script outline asserted that the ideal of queerness would confront the respectability politics of homonormativity through a series of staged situations, emphasising how polarised these political positions are and forcing the viewer to reconsider the characters’ motivations on screen as they navigate various ambiguous scenes.

Some of the earliest ideas from this script and concept development phase are present in the final film in some form, including: “to become a citizen of the Queer State one undergoes a rigorous test of ones’ queerness”; rejected applicants are “referred to re-join their heterosexual state and are offered guidance on acceptable expressions of their sexuality and identity”; “complementary therapy is available for citizens to heal traumas resulting from time spent in heterosexual society”; “archival footage intercuts this original footage in order to show historical

precedence for a Queer State”; characters will be devised to represent different positions of agency and political alignment; and, the “Queer State was achieved through queer terrorism and civil unrest”, as mentioned in the film’s opening title (Figures 33 and 34). Ideas which did not make it into the final script, but which informed how I thought about the out-of-shot world surrounding the Queer State and influenced how I prescribed motivations to the characters were: “society self-regulates and there is no police force— although there is militarised border guards as a necessary precaution [against invasion]”; “neighbouring states—once considered the bastions of gay rights—have infiltrated the Queer State with spies to spread discontent, report on developments and push for a regime change from a radical queer society to a concentrated capitalist Pink Pound hub”; and, “alternatives to capitalism are constantly being explored and tested”. I hoped that developing these rough ideas would result in complex characters that reflect on the many conflicts and contradictions between queerness and homonormativity and would allow that tension to play out on screen.

Ideas in the statement of creative intent which were left behind completely were issues around the raising of children in the Queer State, one applicant being a spy, and the day-to-day running of the state (“clean energy, legal sex work, free sustainable condoms and sanitary products, free PEP and PrEP, [legalised] recreational drugs”). As I continued to develop the script, these ideas seemed too big in scope to be addressed in their full complexity, and the risk of world-building ‘everything’ about a Queer State was drawing me away from my research questions. I also felt that the purpose of the film was not to build and present a fully-formed utopia, but to use the idea of a potential queer utopia to critique the present stultification of LGBTQ+ rights in the face of capitalism’s co-opting of queerness. As Muñoz (2009) states: “Utopia is an idealist mode of critique that reminds us that there is something missing, that the

present and presence (and its opposite number, absence) is not enough.” I decided these ideas would be better suited to a film about the foundation of a Queer State, but the film I was making would be set further along in the Queer State’s development; where it has adopted the bureaucracy it purports to detest. I thus refined the rough outline for four characters (which were drafted in the statement of creative intent) into the following character profiles for myself and the cast to refer to:

The Head of the Queer State: The gatekeeper who decides who gets to enter, or is expelled from, the Queer State. She is responsible for the state surviving and serves as a figurehead of its founding, being one of the original citizens. She is a matriarchal figure for the state’s citizens; performing a ritual to remove their internalised homophobia/transphobia for each citizen, resulting in her having a bond with each of them. She keeps a clear mind for hearing counsel from citizens, and for assessing applications to the state. She is insightful, but pragmatic. When applicants are rejected for state preservation, she is cold and merciless, sometimes delighting in these interactions where she can exert some playful cruelty and power with little repercussion.

The Historian and Mystic: As the Queer State’s historian, he records its progress while contextualising it in wider history. He re-investigates histories for bias and prejudice, aiming to rescue LGBTQ+ figures and stories from historical erasure. Connecting the state’s citizens to their place in history provides comfort during difficult periods and reminds them of the importance of the state’s mission. He is regarded as a ‘myth builder’ by other states; an attempt to denigrate the results of his research. Inspired by the lost nature religions, he communicates with nature and has a strong spiritual connection to the citizens of the state. He finds the application process for citizens to be abhorrent and distressing, and often provides the Head of State with his criticisms and concerns. If the Head of State is the brain of the state, he is the body and spirit.

Applicant 1: This applicant (pronouns: they/them) arrives at the Queer State looking for acceptance. Tired of being at the mercy of homophobic/transphobic doctors, psychiatrists and bureaucrats who are noticeably less clever than they are. Feeling both ignored and persecuted for their difference: both invisible and a target. They seek to leave behind ongoing conflict with family, dissatisfaction with social inequality and working for corrupt companies. They have a growing rage accompanying continued sadness. In their mind, the Queer State is their last chance to find a place in the world. When accepted, to the Queer State, potential opens up for them, a relief that a life they had not considered possible is becoming attainable. While it is largely a happy moment, the pressure of starting life over brings a huge amount of uncertainties and unknowns.

Applicant 2: This applicant feels dissatisfied with gay male hook-up culture and, as he grew older, felt the image pressure of gym and drinking/hook-up culture was affecting his self-esteem. He is uncomfortable with both stereotypes and masculine ideals and he does not feel he fits in fully anywhere. He wants to be more free and creative, and says he feels ‘different’, but what he really means is ‘special’. He thinks society is too conservative and dull, despite him being largely conservative himself. He works in marketing and wants to be in a society where being gay is not really a big deal. It would be cool to just be ‘normal’ (and by that he means everyone will be like him). He is rejected by the Queer State for being too homonormative.

Most of the characters in my previous films have little facial expressions, instead sharing their vivid internal world of emotions and thoughts through monologues and voice-overs. They have no names, with no allusions to their backgrounds or occupations, no friends and no families. I decided to continue this approach in order to suggest that the Queer State officials do not care to learn the names of the applicants and to imply that the applicants are not told the names of the people in power. I hoped that this would emphasise the power dynamic between the characters and reference the faceless bureaucracy of most real-world immigration procedures.

On the 26th February 2018, I wrote in the practical journal:

“When the applications for the Queer State are being processed that are referred to as ‘No-name from Stateless’. The judge or administrator says they must remove their names and origin country to avoid any prejudice or unconscious bias in their ruling. When someone is accepted into the Queer State, the judge informs them they are now free to choose their own name and note their gender identity and pronouns for official purposes, which can be altered at any time in the future. They can, of course, keep their original name.”

This idea implied that the Queer State would send rejected applicants back to their home states where they are no longer citizens and, while I wanted the application process to be illogical, this would unambiguously render the Queer State as the film’s antagonist. As the idea cooled down, I wondered if I had taken too much inspiration from *Milkman* by Anna Burns (2018), as the idea of ‘No-name from Stateless’ would work better as part of a written story where many no names

appeared, rather than in a film where people are visually identifiable. However, the procedure of applicants choosing their own name and noting their gender identity remained in the final script.

While a sense of community would be important within a Queer State, I decided that *Expulsion* would focus on the Queer State as an institution, with the promised utopian community kept hidden from the applicants and the viewer. Everyone's utopic Queer State would be different, so I instead wanted to film to focus on the state itself and the clash between the politics and ideals of queerness and the aspiration of homonormativity to be accepted by society and capitalism. I began to formulate and write scenes that could deliver key parts of the statement of creative intent (see Appendix 1). While the first few scenes I wrote were edited beyond recognition, or cut outright, they contained the root of the tensions between characters and queerness/homonormativity which I needed to grapple with to answer the research questions. While the Queer State is a utopian idea guided by well-intentioned principles, I wanted the people running it to be flawed. Thus, the viewer sees the Head of State—who has power and ultimate responsibility for delivering on the ideals of the Queer State—change from being community-focused and guiding a healing meditation to being harshly bureaucratic and unsympathetic. Thus, the viewer's relationship with her character's development is not stable; her development does not follow a predictable or coherent arc and the viewer is given little background information to contextualise her behaviour.

Working through initial scene drafts, I wrote in the practical journal (on 10/10/2018) “How can this be Camp [and] satirical, but not a B-movie?” I was concerned that the seriousness of the topics could be lost, or dismissed, if I was not careful to avoid a B-movie aesthetic. While some scenes kept elements of satire, Camp was encoded in the performance of the Head of State

rather than in the film's aesthetic. The archival footage features a series of overt Camp performances by Joan Jett Blakk shot in a DIY-fashion, yet as historical documents they cannot be categorised or mistaken for a B-movie.

Historical precedent and a Queer Nation presidential candidate

When researching this concept for the film, I found some real-life precedent in the Queer Nation Party, founded at an ACT UP meeting in April 1990 in New York City (Berlant and Freeman, 1992). Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman (1992) observed that Queer Nation “refuses closeting strategies of assimilation and goes for the broadest and most explicit assertion of presence” and that their “nationalist-style camp counterpolitics [... shifts] between a utopian politics of identity, difference, dispersion and specificity and a pluralist agenda, in the liberal sense, that imagines a ‘gorgeous mosaic’ of difference without a model of conflict”. By refusing to assimilate and having a disruptive presence, Queer Nation was perhaps also fighting against the prevalence of homonormativity within the LGBT rights struggle- although, homonormativity was not theorised as such at that time. As Berlant and Freeman (1992) state, Queer Nation disregarded “the assimilationist patience of some gay liberation identity politics” and “the assertive rationality of the ‘homosexual’ subject who seeks legitimacy by signifying, through ‘straight’ protocols”. Yet, as Karl Schoonover (2020) notes:

“Queer Nation wasn’t just about complaint. It was also a beacon of unapologetic imagining, riotous anti-assimilationism, and a reclaiming of public space and the political sphere.”

This ability to *imagine otherwise* led Queer Nation to attempt major interventions into the politics of the USA, running their candidate Joan Jett Blakk (the drag queen persona of Terence

Smith) for mayor of Chicago in 1991 and for president in 1992. After becoming transfixed with archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk's political rallies, speeches to the community, and direct-to-camera addresses of proposed policies, I decided to use footage of Blakk's campaign in my film. Blakk's (quoted in Stamets, 1992b) prescient statement that "if queer images are merely plugged into the old ways, then they too will function as tools of oppression" is still a relevant call to critique the messaging of mainstream cinema today, and one which resonates with this research project. Initially, I thought I could re-appropriate these archival videos to show the founding of my fictional Queer State, imagining that Joan Jett Blakk had been successful in her bid for the presidency. But, as the project developed, I decided that her ideas and use of camp as a tool for subversion would be more effective as a joyous and anarchic counterpoint from the past to the bureaucratic fictional Queer State of the future.⁷ When asked about Joan Jett Blakk's political positions, Smith replied:

"Pretty much anarchy. I wanted to take the military and school budgets and switch them around. But you know, some of the things I talked about have actually happened. For example, I said we should legalize drugs and tax the hell out of them" (Terence Smith quoted in Jones, 2019).

Walker (1997) wrote that "Queer Nation might be seen by some as nationalism's ironic Other, offering a moment of carnivalesque bemusement" or a "parodistic mimicry of 'real' nationalisms". However, while the seriousness of the gay rights movement and gay culture was often dismissed, Queer Nation was "a textbook case of a nascent nationalism" (Walker, 1997). In Joan Jett Blakk's campaign there was a mixture of the seriousness Walker describes, and a Camp humour in her performances and political delivery of these serious messages. Video artist

⁷ The use of archival footage in *Expulsion* is examined in greater depth in the next chapter.

and drag performer (and member of both ACT UP and Queer Nation), Glenn Belverio's 1992 video *On the Campaign Trail with Joan Jett Blakk* recorded Blakk having just been barred from entering the Democratic National Convention. Discussing this video work, McStravick (2020) writes:

“[Fired] up by the AIDS crisis, racist and structural inequality and rampant homophobia, Ms Blakk serves decolonial punk glamour, all while decrying trenchant political conformity, US imperialism and coloniality, and, most notably, the emergence of a police state – in ways that speak both to the past and present.”

Terence Smith soon entered the convention in his ‘manly’ attire, before changing into his Joan Jett Blakk ensemble in the bathroom, and then declaring her bid for presidential candidacy on the convention floor (Goodman, 2018). This action embodied Queer Nation's tactics which aimed “to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privileges of normality- in short, to simulate ‘the national’ with a camp inflection” and, in this occupation of space, to aim for the “most explicit assertion of presence” (Berlant and Freeman, 1992). Such an urgency to be seen, and to have an undeniable presence in the political sphere, is undoubtedly in reaction to the discrimination and marginalisation felt by the LGBTQ+ community. Queer Nation's highly visible political activism counteracts the “characterisation of homosexuality as outside the nation, as a foreign threat or colonial pollutant, [and] brings sexuality out of the private sphere into the public sphere only to position it as neither private nor public, subject to State monitoring and regulation” (Macleod, 2018).

Yet, Queer Nation did not strive for legitimacy through state recognition. Escoffier and Bérubé (quoted in Duggan, 1992) observed that Queer Nation aimed “to combine contradictory impulses to bring together people who have been made to feel perverse, queer, odd, outcast, different, and deviant, and to affirm sameness by defining a common identity on the fringes.”

Lisa Duggan (1992) observed that, for Queer Nation, “the rhetoric of difference replaces the more assimilationist liberal emphasis” and that they prioritise tactics of “publicity and self-assertion; confrontation and direct action.” I wanted my fictional Queer State to incorporate Queer Nation’s “camp counternationality” (Berlant and Freeman, 1992) while also failing (prior to the film’s timeline) to be an opposing force, becoming instead just another nation state which prioritises *the nation* as “a unifying impulse” over *the queer* which “undermines identity categories” (Macleod, 2018). In doing so, I planned that my fictional Queer State would fail to live up to the promise and ideals of Queer Nation; mirroring how Queer Nation “ultimately collapsed under the weight of their own internal contradictions” (Stryker, 2015). Queer Nation, while being one of the most interesting examples, was not the only incidence of LGBTQ+ nationalism:

“Nationalisms have a long history in gay and lesbian politics and culture. [...] With no geographical base or kinship ties to provide boundaries, gay and lesbian nationalists have offered biological characteristics (as in [Hirschfeld’s] ‘Third Sex’), or shared experience (whether of sexual desire or gender solidarity) as common ground” (Duggan, 1992).

In 1986, there was an attempt to create an ‘all-gay’ town in Rhyolite in Nevada, an abandoned desert mining town which was “midway between Death Valley and the nation’s nuclear testing grounds” (New York Times, 1986). Fred Schoonmaker and his partner, Alfred Parkinson, and a small group of friends attempted to re-purpose the town to be a safe-haven from homophobia and violence. Despite receiving 2,500 letters from interested LGBTQ+ people, only 22 people were actually living in the town when their bid to buy it failed due to lack of funds (New York Times, 1986). The purchase process was mired by panic about HIV/AIDS in nearby towns, with one County Commissioner stating:

“We accept atomic waste. We don’t accept the gay community” (Frost, 2018).

This failed attempt to create a queer bubble within the United States was more separatist in intent than contemporary commercial and residential ‘gay neighbourhoods’ because it eschewed the need or desire to share public space with heterosexuals. However, Rhyolite was not the full defection and rejection of capitalist statehood that I wanted my fictional Queer State to propose. While existing gay districts and ‘gay villages’ in big cities purport to offer the surface-level experience of a ‘queer nation’, they are often merely “spaces of consumerism predicated on public displays of perfect (white male) bodies indulging in capitalist excess” (Jeppesen, 2010). Without the rejection of, or confrontation with, the inequalities of capitalism, the ‘autonomy’ of a gay street/district/village is simply capitalism adapting to occupy another unexploited pocket. Jeppesen (2010) observes how “queer citizenship has provided another framework for rethinking heteronormativity”, but notes that “anti-capitalist queer organizing” must “unlink queer culture from consumerism [...] and the corporate sponsorship of Pride marches.” *The Fathers Project: What if AIDS never existed?* (2019) is a film, directed by Leo Herrera, that ultimately fails to ‘unlink’ capitalism from future-imaginings of queerness.

The Fathers Project is a loosely edited vision of a utopia where a “Stonewall Nation” is founded because of the population of LGBTQ+ activists and artists not being decimated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This fictional Stonewall Nation depicted through mostly documentary footage of Fire Island, Pride parades, sex clubs, dance clubs, and the Folsom Street Fair; where muscled male bodies, the occasional woman, and the odd drag queen enjoy endless clubbing, consumption and sex. The superficial treatment of the topic suggests AIDS was a real party-pooper: look at all the partying that could happen if AIDS had never happened! Yet, the documentary footage demonstrates this reality *exists today*, rendering the question the film proposes as futile. This unserious handling of such a loaded proposition does a disservice to

how the HIV/AIDS pandemic was ignored by governments and continues to affect LGBTQ+ people's lives. *The Fathers Project* imagines its Stonewall Nation as having a patchwork religion, overseen by "Stonewall monks" as successors of the Radical Faeries. Yet, LGBTQ+ people have railed against the treatment from organised religions, particularly during the HIV/AIDS crisis. The Radical Faeries are not a religion, but a countercultural network of queers who take influence from paganism, anarchism and environmentalism. In connecting the Radical Faeries to a state-endorsed religion, the film misunderstands the many differences and historical contexts of the Radical Faeries and religious organisations.

Ultimately, *The Fathers Project* can only imagine a queer utopia as a heightened version of current gay-male-themed consumption and cis-gay-male-focused events where politics are an afterthought. In doing so, the film does not confront homonormativity or gender normativity but sidesteps it in favour of depicting queer liberation's end-goal as being simply (mostly cis-male) queer consumption. By envisioning queer liberation as forever entwined with capitalism, *The Fathers Project* presents a radically different vision of equality to Karl Marx's argument for the proletariat to free themselves from exploitative labour (Marx, Engels, 1848). As Audre Lorde (2018) famously said, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." A recent experimental queer film that also has a speculative fiction concept with a more hopeful tone is *Queering the Teknolojik* (Timothy Smith, 2019), a PhD film which envisions a collective queer voice speaking from the future, asking:

"Have they managed to overcome the challenges of climate change and avert the impending environmental catastrophe? Did they succeed in dismantling the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy and finally achieve equality for all? Which strategies of protest and resistance were the most effective?" (Lucid Films, n.d.).

One proposed method of creating a queer utopia is the formation of “queer anarchist autonomous zones” where “non-authoritarian social relations and value-practices are required” (Jeppesen, 2010). In *Expulsion's* opening titles, it is implied that the Queer State began as an anarchic movement which descended into “pink terrorism” (Figure 33). Judith Butler states that “queer anarchism poses an important alternative to the rising movement of gay libertarianism”, and that anarchism can “[pose] disturbing challenges about state legitimacy” (Butler in Heckert, 2011). Whether the Queer State borrowed from, or flirted with, anarchism to achieve its goal of nation building, it did not incorporate anarchist ethics into its operations because “anarchism is simultaneously about interrupting or halting the institutionalisation of the state in favour of popular sovereignty *and* subverting everyday disciplinary identities and hierarchical relationships” (Butler in Heckert, 2011, emphasis in original).

Unlike “an anarchist ethic [that promotes...] fluidity and horizontal forms of organisation over hierarchies” (Brown, 2011), the Queer State has a clear hierarchy in which the applicants have no power, and it is implied that staying in the state (if accepted) is conditional upon the destruction of papers from their home state. In doing so, the fictional Queer State has a borderline-authoritarian relationship to the state’s applicants and any anarchist origins of the state’s creation have clearly given way to indiscriminate bureaucracy where there is an “alienated dependence on hierarchal structures” (Brown, 2011). If the Queer State’s system was to be truly queer (that is, malleable and unfixed), how would a citizen of the Queer State continue to dissent against the Queer State’s system? Would they eventually rebel against the lack of rigidity, the lack of definitions and structure? Then, would these problematic citizens be expelled to their original home states? In addressing these questions, I wanted *Expulsion* to question if queerness is compatible with statehood and if it can be constrained by statehood.

Locations and scriptwriting: finding the right space to develop ideas

Initially, I had thought that the Queer State could be set on a remote island and, in the practical journal (18/1/2019), I wrote that while my ideal location of an abandoned prison on Green Island off Taiwan was not within my budget, perhaps I could shoot on an island off the coast of Northern Ireland. While I soon realised this would be budgetarily impossible, the idea of the state being physically isolated informed how I envisioned the state's operations. In December 2018, the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork city invited me to exhibit my work in their galleries in June 2020 as part of their 'artist-directed series', and offered a production budget to create new work. On 30th January 2019, I went to the Crawford for a site visit and realised that, besides being an opportunity to exhibit this PhD research film, the Crawford would be a versatile main location for shooting the film.

The Crawford was built in 1724 as Cork Custom's House. The Crawford's grandeur has a colonial aesthetic, which I thought would make an amusing or absurd setting to locate the Queer State in- implying that the Queer State had adopted the traditional trappings of power. The Crawford's lecture theatre is stately and archaic in its salmon pink and maroon walls, emerald green benches, and oil paintings hanging high above the seated audience. Thinking of the ACT UP meetings depicted in *120 BPM*, I thought that this location could be used by the Queer State to teach its history to its citizens, or else could stage an 'outside world' lecture about the Queer State. The library has a heavy air, being entirely wood-panelled and surrounded by bookshelves in glass cabinets- its colonial styling provoked the idea of using it as the room in which the Queer State unironically interview and process applicants. Crawford's gallery director and curators were very enthusiastic about this idea and, having a tentative green light and

budget, the locations within the Crawford spurred on many ideas for scenes during the scriptwriting process.

When developing the script, I arranged scenes into two thematic categories: first, the Queer State's operations, bureaucracy, immigration and the expulsion of applicants; and, second, historical precedent and context, in the form of archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk, the communication of queer history as told by Arthur Evans, and the re-claiming of Dr James Barry as an iconic trans figure. For the most part, my early stage scriptwriting was focused on these two themes. In the practical journal (17/12/2019) I wrote three ideas which I was unsatisfied with and, feeling frustrated, I noted that I could "think of myself growing up, how I felt, and the situations around me" for motivation. This was something which had 'freed up' my writing on previous film projects, allowing me to find a personal connection to the topic as opposed to writing the script from a detached position. In this journal entry, I wrote of the "double alienation" I felt growing up: first, from society; and, second, from the images of LGBTQ+ people on tv, which left me in a "nowhere space".

In addition to feeling the script was becoming 'detached', I was also considering aspects of my previous films that I've remained satisfied with years later; in particular, parts where characters share introspective and revealing information or where they delve into a meditative or ruminative state. I felt this was missing in the early drafts of the script and, to correct this, I developed a third theme: meditative scenes about nature, environmental concerns, and healing. This resulted in a guided meditation scene where the Head of State leads the Historian on a self-healing visualisation, and a monologue that explores a personal connection to nature and as a motivation for eco-activism. I thought that a closed quarry in Wicklow that I'd previously recee'd for another project could be used as visuals for this monologue, and that it could work

as the opening sequence. The visual of a depleted landscape would amalgamate with the spoken queer politics, making a visual connection between passion for the environment and concerns about environmental destruction and an impetus for action.

In the months before beginning production, I realised I had not allowed for any surreal images that could suggest the sexual freedom a Queer State would offer. All of my films to date have had surreal and sexually suggestive scenes, such as: a woman rolling an egg yolk around her mouth before spitting it out and, later, bathing in a vat of jelly; a man licking dust off a window; and men eating penises made of agar-agar. These were scenes I felt had remained interesting after many viewings, so continuing this approach made sense within the context of this new work. I then began a fourth theme focused on surreal and nocturnal happenings that explore sex and ritual. Inspired by the sex rituals detailed in *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (1978), I imagined the film cutting to scenes of wet bog holes, naked figures covered in rocks and mud, and one character being sexual in a natural environment. I decided to use a relative's farm in County Cavan as a site I could film on for free and not be disturbed (or disturb anyone else) while shooting. A bonus was that the farm sits across some fields from the parish priest's home.

Throughout the script-writing process, I had no title for the film. I considered a deleted line from the opening monologue ("Trying to make fire from ashes") and a line that remained in the film ("we've inherited the dust") as potential titles, but decided against these as they felt like a complaint or victimhood. The script I shot from had the working title *I leave the rest of me behind* to emphasize the applicant's transformation and sacrifice in joining the Queer State. However, I felt this title was not accurate because the film was not from a single character's perspective. Ultimately, a few months after shooting wrapped, I decided on *Expulsion* in order

to have the title focus on the rejection of one applicant and to conjure the violence and finality of the Queer State's actions and to reference the reference the Queer State's exile from a global capitalist society.

Casting Process: the values and concerns of an LGBTQ+ film project

Concurrently with script writing and location hunting, I had begun the process of casting the roles for film. On 6th December 2018, I wrote: "I'm already worried about casting this film. If it is going to be a queer state, it can't be all white. However, Northern Ireland is very white." Another concern was the limited budget. I knew I could make a call for casting through local LGBTQ+ networks, but I was not happy with how my last film went after casting through an open call as one of these cast members caused tension and disruption for cast, crew and my budget. I decided that with the very limited budget (approximately 10% of my previous film), the risk to the production of a cast member not being reliable was even higher because there was little space for contingency money. I decided to pull from my own network of frequent collaborators for the most crucial roles, approaching Oisín McKenna and Sian NíMhuirí to perform the roles of Historian/ Mystic and Head of State, respectively.

Both Oisín McKenna and Sian NíMhuirí had performed in my previous film, *Far from the reach of the sun*, and are queer theatre makers and writers themselves. As I toured with that film, the scenes I was most happy with, and that I felt delivered the most nuance and captured the tone I was trying to achieve, were the ones heavily featuring Oisín or Sian. Their contribution went beyond that of a regular actor/performer, because they gave me honest, insightful feedback on my script, and were interested in collaborating with me (as opposed to a hierarchical director-actor relationship). They both agreed to be in this new work and this gave me two strong leads,

and I wrote, “they will delve into the film in their own unique way, it will be so valuable to have their input.” While this casting decision covered the LGBTQ, I still did not have any trans or non-binary performers. I have issues with Hollywood’s portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community as being overwhelmingly gender normative, when trans and non-binary people are an integral part of both the community and our history.

I attended Queertopia, a queer experimental performance night, in the Black Box, Belfast, on 25/4/2019 to scope for potential performers. Maoilíosa Scott (pronouns: they/ them) performed two of their own bilingual songs on the guitar and was very magnetic and tender on stage. I approached them to gauge interest in performing in the film and they agreed to meet me. Our meeting was very positive and Maoilíosa was enthusiastic about the subject matter, and I cast them in the role of the accepted applicant. Yet, I still did not have any racial diversity in the cast. I believe that a film cannot represent the LGBTQ+ community, or speak about queer issues, as a white monolith: this is simply not who the LGBTQ+ community is in Ireland or abroad.

Following on from Tinkcom’s (2017) call to critique the role whiteness plays in a film’s characters, I decided to cast a white man and woman in the roles of power within the Queer State. This casting decision acted as a device to imitate the Hollywood image of the lesbian white woman and gay white man as the ‘acceptable image’ of the LGBTQ+ community. As the Queer State’s representatives becoming compromised and almost villainous throughout the film’s screenplay, I thought this might disrupt the audience’s identification with them. While casting for *Far from the reach of the sun*, I had been introduced to Gideon Chirwanerongo who is originally from Zimbabwe but had gone through the brutal asylum-seeking process of direct provision in Ireland and was gaining experience in theatre productions in Dublin. Since then, we had kept in touch and I approached him to perform in this new film. Meeting in Dublin, we

discussed the film's concept, the script and the role of the rejected applicant. I was concerned that this would be too close to home, but he assured me it would not be and told me that, in fact, he found it perversely funny that he would play this role. We discussed the power imbalance of the white cis-gendered Head of State and Historian interrogating a Black man and a non-binary character as applicants, when the applicants are at an even further disadvantage in the 'outside world' of the film. We decided that this layer of privilege would be an interesting power dynamic to incorporate into the film and that it would underline how the Queer State has failed to live up to the intersectional morals of queerness.

While it feels cynical to categorise the performers by identity, it is vital for the integrity of the film that it reflects real diversity within the community. While undertaking this casting process, the Elton John biopic *Rocketman* (2019) was in the cinema with a straight man (Taron Egerton) performing as John. Despite being produced by Elton John, the filling of LGBTQ+ roles by straight actors takes away work from many LGBTQ+ actors who are rarely considered for as many roles because of being gender non-conforming. While I don't think my comparatively tiny film production⁸ will change this industry pattern, it was important for me as a filmmaker that the film production would hold the same integrity as the ideas it aims to communicate through the film itself. As such, having an entirely LGBTQ+ cast was an important choice for this film. On set, the two established performers and theatre-makers, McKenna and NíMhuirí, supported and encouraged Scott and Chirwanerongo—neither of whom had performed on camera before—between takes, sharing advice and giving feedback. As I was doing sound, camera, lighting and set design myself, there was a lot of waiting time for them,

⁸ *Expulsion* was made with €5,000, and *Rocketman* with \$40 million.

in which the more inexperienced performers got to benefit from McKenna and NíMhuirí's expertise. This skill-sharing was an inadvertent positive side-effect of casting an all LGBTQ+ cast of varied experience, as opposed to casting actors based purely on their CV and suitability for the role. Finally, I approached trained stunt performer and good friend, Helen O'Dea, to perform as the flag bearer in the opening sequence.

On an institutional level, filming on location and exhibiting the film at the Crawford created dialogue about accessibility. I had requested that one bathroom be designated as gender-neutral before the exhibition opening in order to make the institution more LGBTQ+ friendly and to remove barriers to the community accessing the work comfortably in the gallery space. I told the curator that the gallery needs to be a safe space for trans and non-binary people, especially as the work itself is purporting to support these issues, and that I was concerned that there would be a gap between the intent of the work and how the space was experienced by an audience. The Crawford put this in place quickly, designating one bathroom as 'gender neutral' over six months before the exhibition opened.

Critical reflection of *Expulsion* (30min, 2020)

I have always edited and colour-graded my films, whether the budget for production is high or low. I find this allows me to spend a long time experimenting with the edit and thus find new sequences that emphasise elements of the film in a manner that I did not foresee when scriptwriting. Perhaps because of my background in fine art, I see the editing process as similar to the composition of a painting or the installation of an exhibition: it is leading the viewer through different ideas and it does not need to be a linear exposition. When editing *Expulsion*, I initially divided the film into 'chapters' which were introduced with title cards (e.g. "i.

interview”, ii. “expulsion advice”), but quickly found that by separating the scenes in this way connections were harder to make between adjacent clips. After removing the ‘chapters’, I found that scenes following each other, without introduction, were more interesting and facilitated a bleed between meaning and intention, which was a productive space in which to question the characters’ motivations.

When I was working towards a final edit of *Expulsion*, I realised that the script I had shot had not given adequate background information on the founding of the Queer State. The viewer would be forced to play ‘catch up’ as the film quickly delved into the machinations and details of the Queer State’s operation. As a result, I feared the first few scenes were being lost in a ‘scramble’ for the viewer to get up to speed with what the film was about. To remedy this, I wrote two title-cards that would begin the film, giving the viewer a grounding in the topic (see Figures 33 and 34). While my previous films land the viewer into the midst of a topic, they used dialogue as exposition, and I felt my attempts at writing exposition for this film had failed. This was perhaps due to how complex the topic was or because I was immersed too deeply in the research to see how it would ‘read’ to an audience. As such, these title cards were an after-the-fact necessity to make the film legible, and not a creative choice. I decided to link the foundation of the Queer State with a campaign of “pink terrorism” to, first, separate the Queer State from the peaceful history of LGBTQ+ rights activism and, second, to locate the Queer State in an alternative timeline, or future; one that represents a radical shift from our present reality.

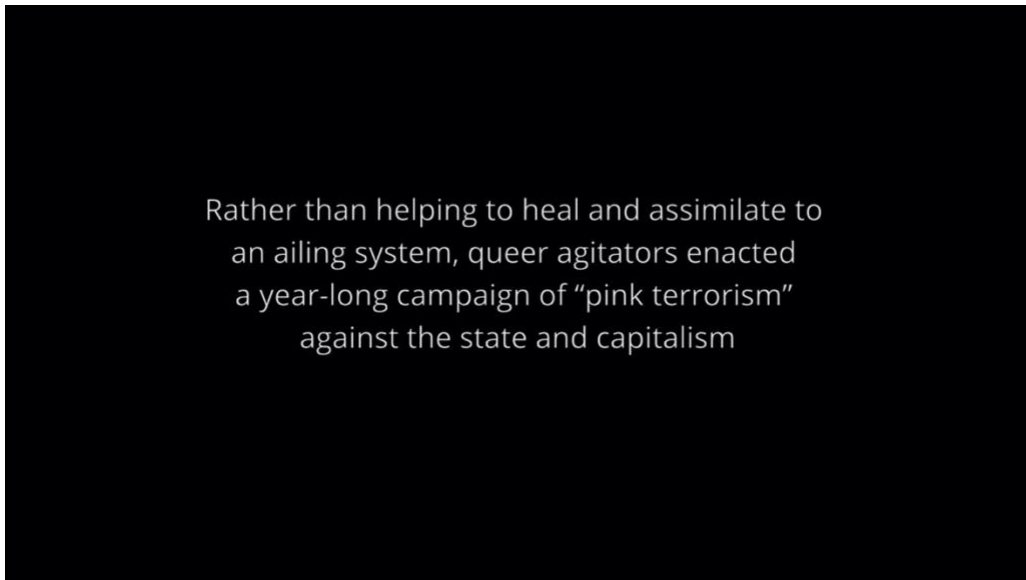


Figure 33: The first title card in *Expulsion* summarises the Queer State’s motivations and background.

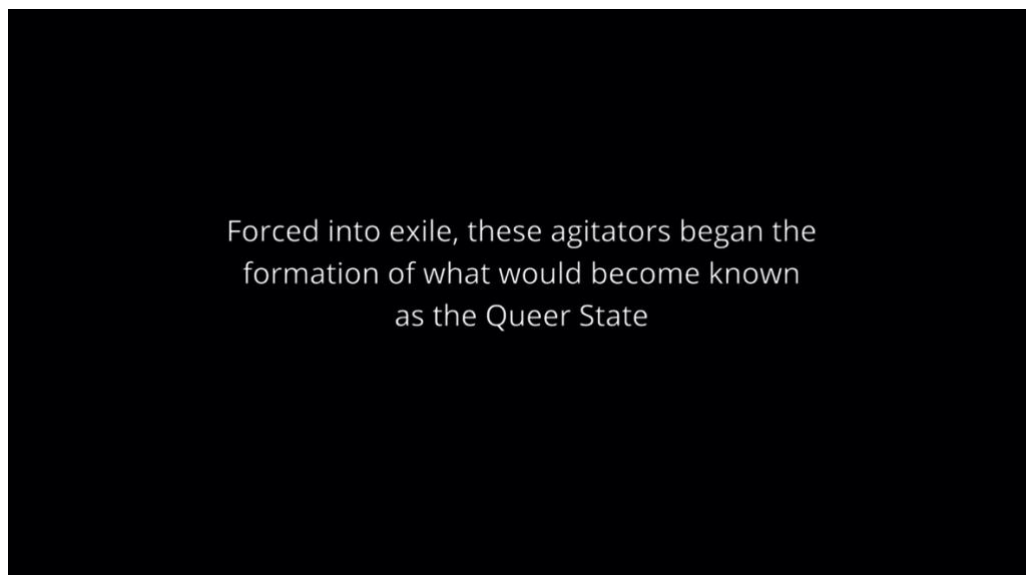


Figure 34: The second title card summarises how the Queer State was formed from a movement of violent protest.



Figure 35: The third title card summarises the immigration process.

A third title card appears after a scene (which will be discussed shortly) in which the Queer State's flag is brought through an abandoned quarry; stating that the Queer State has a border and that it has an application system for citizenship that requires the applicant to satisfy "ever-changing criteria" (see Figure 35). Early in the scriptwriting process, I considered having a news report that would serve as an introduction to the Queer State. I wrote a draft of dialogue that an 'outside world' reporter would say: "The designation of the Queer State as a terrorist organisation demonstrates the threat it poses to the foundations of our society." This idea was ultimately re-written to be from the Queer State's perspective, with the Head of State addressing the camera and announcing: "The Queer State is recognised internationally as a terrorist organisation."



Figure 36: The Head of State delivers ethically fraught advice to applicants to the state.

Delivered in a dead-pan manner, with no hint of rejection or disapproval of that designation, the Head of State informs applicants of how they can explain their visit to the designated-as-terrorist Queer State if rejected (see Figure 36). Acknowledging that the rejected applicants will be treated with suspicion on returning to their ‘home’ country, the Head of State advises them to invent a cover-story as “it is better to be perceived as stupid, rather than seditious.” As the first scene featuring a person in a position of power within the Queer State, I decided this would introduce the state’s militant policing of its borders and its moral deficiency in its willingness to return applicants to a hostile environment; both of which are antithetical to what queerness purports to be. Initially, I had written and filmed this short scene to be edited in a sequence with the ‘expulsion advice’ at the end of the film (see film script in Appendix 2), but decided while editing that it could be used better as a stand-alone introduction to both the Queer State’s contradictions and the Head of State as a forceful and unsympathetic character.

Foreclosing the possibility of becoming queer



Figure 37: The first applicant is interviewed by the Head of State and the Historian.

Applicants to the Queer State are interviewed to decide if they get to stay or are expelled, in an unsubtle questioning of who is ‘queer enough’ to be accepted (see Figure 37). Early drafts of the script had the Queer State asking questions with a clear bias towards the type of answer they receive: Applicant 1 would answer in a way that aligned with queer politics and would be accepted, while Applicant 2 would give homonormative answers and would be rejected. The film is in English, with the actors speaking in Irish and Northern Irish accents, locating the film as being in Ireland. When writing the script, I asked myself who would leave the comfort of a mostly tolerant (but perhaps homonormative) society to seek refuge within a Queer State that is designated as a terrorist organisation? For the two interview scenes, I based the applicants’ answers on their character profiles and decided that dissatisfaction with government, societal pressure and a desire to be somewhere *fully* accepting could be their motivation (see film script

in Appendix 2). In an email conversation with Oisín McKenna (personal communication, 13/6/2019), he provided feedback on the script and raised the following issues:

“The way that this echoes with contemporary policing of queer culture is very stimulating to think about. Who is queer enough? Who is using the right language? Who has developed a certain set of politics and who hasn't? Are we or aren't we willing [to] reach out and try to share our knowledge compassionately?”

“Applicant 2 clearly lacks the language to articulate an anti-capitalist position, let alone act on it. There's an interesting thing going on that in certain ways he acquires some forms of power through his position within the capitalist hierarchy, but he's also harmed by it. The dynamics of who gets to define an acceptable set of beliefs within a Queer State and who has had the education and life experiences that have enabled them to access that set of beliefs is really fascinating.”

I had written Applicant 2 in a judgemental way, with his character profile saying “he thinks society is too conservative and dull, despite him being largely conservative himself”. McKenna’s feedback led me to realise that, in writing Applicant 2 as being rather myopic, I was implying that the Queer State’s rejection of him was correct. Following McKenna’s observations, I realised that if Applicant 2 had only known the rainbow capitalism version of LGBTQ+ rights or homonormative politics, because of that being what’s presented as acceptable and possible in cinema and politics, then queerness was not made accessible to him. The Queer State rejecting him thus *forecloses* the possibility of him *becoming queer*, which should be contrary to the potential queerness holds for transformation and the lack of respect for definitions within queer thinking. I also realised that the script was weighted towards the Queer State’s perspective, and decided to ‘bake in’ the idea that the applicants were being judged on who they are at the exact moment of their interview and that the decision is made arbitrarily by another human with their own blind spots and misgivings. I emphasised that the state is looking for ‘correct’ answers, rather than a genuine interest in the applicants’ history, by adding

dialogue where the state asks the applicants to fill in a ‘multiple choice’ questionnaire after their interview. While the text on the questionnaire is not seen in the film, I wrote it so that the performers would know how arbitrary the process was for the applicants, and that there was an element of intellectual snobbery. It had leading questions such as:

Dating apps...

- a. Are a great way to meet people.
- b. Enable depersonalization through the consumption of humans as experiences.
- c. Foster sexism, misogyny, racism and ableism.

Camp is...

- a. A tacky lack of taste.
- b. Any drag queen.
- c. A destabilizing queer force of humour, parody, critique and knowingness.

The interview scenes were intended to satirise nation states ridiculous parameters for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers. For example, in 2019, an asylum seeker’s application was rejected in the UK because the immigration judge said he did not display a gay “demeanour”, that he did not wear lipstick and was not effeminate (Booth, 2019). The power of a judge to make a ruling based on archaic stereotypes and his own ignorance have huge repercussions for the asylum seeker whose experience he is trivialising. In writing this scene, I was trying to ask what if the Queer State replicated these unequal power dynamics and abuses of authority? Yet, I did not wish to inadvertently trivialise the plight of refugee and asylum seekers themselves, so I instead referred to them as ‘applicants’ to retain the fictional premise and to keep the focus on the Kafkaesque actions of the state representatives.



Figure 38: The second applicant is interviewed by the Head of State and the Historian.

I shot the final script with a plan to splice both applicants' interviews together (see Appendix 2); hoping this would highlight the impersonal nature of the process and emphasise the differences in the applicants' answers that would determine their fate. However, after viewing my first edit, I was unhappy with this scene as it felt jumbled and rushed. I realised that the differences in their answers were relatively subtle and that, in editing them together, it was not clear that Applicant 2 had performed badly by the state's unseen metrics (see Figure 38). I worked on editing both interviews separately, and this gave each enough space to breathe, and they became more satisfying as individual scenes. However, as both interviews had the same questions asked of the applicants, I was worried this was frustratingly repetitive. Ultimately, I positioned Applicant 1's interview near the start of the film, and Applicant 2's interview towards the end. While this worked with my final edit, it was a decision made out of necessity to create a clear idea of each applicant. As with the need to make title-cards at the beginning of the film,

I felt this was another mistake because of my failure to visualise the final film properly and fully. If it had been possible to re-shoot this, each interview scene would have different dialogue from the interviewers and I would change the format of how each was shot or edited so they would remain engaging for a viewer. In my determination to edit both interviews together, I filmed both in a way that boxed myself into a straightforward, unadventurous edit.

However, I was satisfied with the decisions I made about sound design and music. Music and scores in film guide viewpoints and often direct the viewer emotionally, heightening the moods of a scene. I have not used music or a score in this way since a short film I made for my MA project, which toyed with horror, sci-fi and b-movies. Since then, I have used sound design to draw attention to detail within an image and to build up an ambience, and I decided for these new works there would again be no music or score. I noted in the practical journal (on 7/2/2019) that the viewer would have to work “harder to identify their position, my position as director, [and the] characters’ positions” in relation to the ideas in the film, and that: “This ambiguous space allows for a multiplicity of readings; it is less immediate [and] less entertaining, [but is] more cerebral and gives the viewer more space to navigate the scene.”

An anarchic state with a hierarchical relationship to its citizens



Figure 39: The first applicant is accepted to the Queer State and informed of the process that will follow.

In the above scene (see Figure 39) the Historian is telling Applicant 1 that they have been successfully accepted to the Queer State and is informing them of the process they will undergo to gain citizenship: they will be asked to hand over their documents “to be destroyed, and will be issued new documents.” On these new Queer State papers, they are able to choose their own name, “sever ancestral ties” and note their gender identity and pronouns for “official purposes.” In offering the possibility for the applicant to change their name, and by respecting gender difference, the Queer State is, on the surface, offering freedom or emancipation for the applicants. Yet, the demand to destroy papers from their home state demonstrates that the Queer State has a clear hierarchy in which the applicants have the lesser power. In interviewing the applicants in a manner akin to assessing competency for a job, the Queer State is weighing up

the applicants' productive value which implies that, while the state is managing supply and demand in a closed economy, it has not fully rejected the exploitation of resources that capitalism thrives under. Tellingly, the Historian reveals that Applicant 1 has been accepted because the Queer State recognises their "potential to become an asset for us", but Applicant 2 will soon be rejected for having "no discernible skills outside of capitalism" which renders him a "liability" to the Queer State's society.



Figure 40: The second applicant rejects the Queer State in turn, bemused by their alienating judgement.

The Head of State stands on a platform behind a large desk, literally looking down on the applicant, telling him he has been rejected from the Queer State (see Figure 40). Here I wanted to create a physical barrier to emphasise the distance between his hopes to join the state and the bureaucratic obstacles he faces. In contrast to the relaxed and open setting we saw of the

applicant being accepted, this scene is filmed tighter; with the Head of State speaking in a clipped, efficient manner that underlines that this is a formality as opposed to a productive, or compassionate, meeting. Yet, Applicant 2 rejects the Queer State in turn, saying: “actually, I think coming here was a mistake... I didn’t know it would be like this.” The Head of State dismisses this rejection with a condescending shake of the hand and a pained expression. This is the second time Applicant 2 has questioned the Queer State’s heavy-handed tactics: earlier in the film’s sequence—in a scene that will be discussed in the next chapter—he asked the Historian: “how can you criticise bureaucracy while we go through this opaque application procedure?” In rejecting Applicant 2, the Queer State demonstrates it does not have the ability to absorb criticism and—although it is not declared it outright—the applicant is partly rejected for dissenting from the state’s prescribed notion of queerness.

When Applicant 2, a Black man, is interviewed and ultimately rejected by two white representatives of the Queer State, I wanted to imply that the Queer State has its own prejudices that it has not confronted, despite their claims to be a radical alternative to outside society. The Queer State’s dismissal of his confidence as being “intrinsically linked to production and consumption” is a bold assessment for them to make from the superficial interview they conducted in the scene previously. As the differences between both applicants were trivial, I wanted the viewer to perceive the state as having a racist bias. In relation to the values the Queer State espouses, the expelling of a Black man who challenged their authority and ethics twice is “inconsistent and cruel” (Schoonover, 2020). Discussing *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), Devere Brody (2002) observes:

“[...] the inextricability of ethics and aesthetics is demonstrated in the way in which the production of a pure white queer subjectivity in this film is achieved through the excision of black humanity.”

In formulating this scene in combination with a scene *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson* (which will be discussed in the next chapter), I was attempting to create a self-reflexive and critical moment within the film about the treatment of racial diversity in majority-white Western LGBTQ+ cinema through how the Queer State creates space for *some* citizens at the expense of others. By implying that the Queer State's representatives were making space only for applicants who were 'like themselves', I wanted to hint at reasons for the state's failure to be the paradise it promised. Schoonover (2020) notes that:

“Most troubling is the Queer State's advice for his re-entry into the non-queer world upon his forced, immanent return to it: adopt a non-confrontational attitude, embrace his masculinity, and aim for an individuality motivated by self-interest exercised in private. How could a radically humanist project expel an applicant only to return him precisely to the oppression it purports to oppose? Would an anti-hierarchical paradise demand such things? Offer such advice?”

In retaining an “unresolved ambivalence towards the Queer State's justifications and its practices” (Schoonover, 2020) and presenting characters with little backstory and no names, I aimed to foreclose the familiar cinematic experience of relating to a character, instead encouraging the audience to question the characters' and state's motivations.

Exerting power



Figure 41: The Head of State gives generic ‘expulsion advice’ to rejected applicants to the state.

I first drafted a scene where the Head of State would inform the unsuccessful applicant of his rejected application for citizenship and show him an instructional video guide on how “to reintegrate with your society and be your best homonormative self.”⁹ In this scene, the Head of State gives advice to rejected applicants who must return to their home country, as faux-soothing corporate music plays in the background (see Figure 41). In a series of harsh, but humorous, statements, the Head of States provides an aspiration for the rejected applicant to thrive in their home country if they can adopt a homonormative attitude. I wanted this ‘expulsion advice’ to feel like a corporate branding video in order to underline that the generic advice was being given to many rejected applicants. The script notes I’d written for the performer were different for

⁹ These initial script drafts became condensed and edited as the script progressed, before finally becoming the direct-to-camera ‘expulsion advice’ that was filmed.

each paragraph, as each would be filmed in front of different sculptures in the Crawford's sculpture galleries (see Appendix 2). These direction notes stated the Head of State would be: "buoyant and selling it, like an ad for an airline"; "speaking *as if* [you are] seeing eye-to-eye [with the applicant]"; "corporate and sympathetic in a patronising fashion"; and, finally, "serious and stately".¹⁰ Coding the performance with these varied references was to heighten the absurdity of both the words she was speaking and the character's self-seriousness. While she is the Head of State, imbuing the performance with an arch Campness pushes the audience away with a wink, creating a disturbance between what she is saying, how she is saying it and the role of the dialogue within the film.

This Camp register is not present in the scene's aesthetic or the character's appearance, but solely in her performance and delivery, aiming to speak directly to the subsection of the audience who will take pleasure in the skewering of homonormative values. Susan Sontag (1966) described Camp as "art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is 'too much'". Here I am using Camp in an antithetical fashion to this description: while the script's information is serious, and the character takes herself seriously, the film—by framing it as humorous or absurd—does not. Both myself as director and Sian as performer purposefully aimed for the Head of State to always register as 'too much'. In the excess of the Head of State's devotion to her principles, in her exaggerated enunciation and cuttingly dry delivery, a gap between her intention and its result begins to open. Here I intended to use Camp intentionally and I believe it is possible to be serious while not being quite serious

¹⁰ During the editing process, I moved the "serious and stately" scene near the beginning of the film after seeing that it was tonally an outlier from the other scenes in this set-up. With hindsight, I realise that my instructions for the performer in the script should have made it clear that the tonal shift between these scenes would be too big to work in the edit.

at the same time. Camp encompasses this double-sided intention, allowing the text to be read in multiple ways depending on the audience.

After my site-visit to the Crawford, the sculpture galleries casts of nude muscled-men struck me as providing an interesting set-up that could work with this scene's concept. Soon after my site-visit, the Victorian-era 'modesty leaves' of plaster had been removed from the sculptures, revealing their genitals. The Crawford's connection with colonial history is most present in the sculpture galleries as it features reproductions of "some of the greatest works of Ancient Greek and Roman sculpture in the Vatican Museums, the Canova Casts [which] were commissioned by Pope Pius VII as a gift for the Prince Regent (later King George IV)" (Crawford Art Gallery, n.d.). As King George IV ruled over Ireland, and the Vatican treated Ireland like a vassal state, the sculpture galleries maintain a connection to Ireland's colonial past.

In total, the galleries had a charged build-up of references to power: colonial history in Ireland; Ancient Greece (including a sculpture of *Adonis* c.1816); the Roman empire (which is mentioned in a historical scene to be discussed in the next chapter); idealised white male bodies; and, displays of masculinity. With the sculptures newly revealed nudity, I felt that the sculpture galleries would make a perfect backdrop to film the ethically-fraught 'expulsion advice' about freedom and state power. I decided to end the film with this scene, leaving the morality of the Queer State open-ended and unsettled, allowing the viewer to decide what the Queer State was and what it stood for.

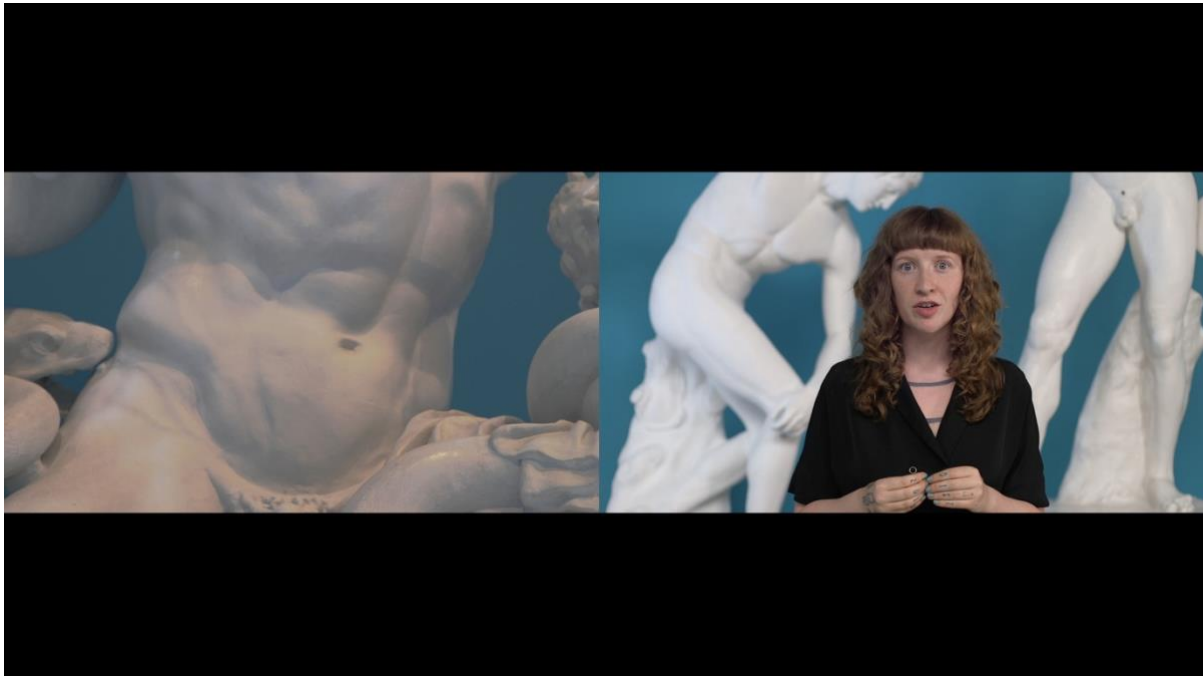


Figure 42: The Head of State gives generic ‘expulsion advice’ surrounded by idealised white male bodies.

While the dialogue is scathingly critical of homonormativity, there is also a cognitive dissonance in that the Queer State is promoting this advice in order to enable the rejected applicant “to acquire capital and an envious social status”; something which the Historian had railed against in his lectures. The sculptures’ idealised white male bodies are similar to homonormative white male bodies in Hollywood LGBT cinema, and they act as a visual echo of the power the Head of State suggests the applicant will gain from following her advice on how to be homonormative (see Figure 42):

“You are a masculine individual. You vote to protect your tax liability and the free market. You are wealthy with an above average carbon footprint. You don’t need to rub your sexuality in other people’s faces. You don’t see colour. You do not confront instances of injustice. You challenge nothing. Life is a series of consumed experiences, without much consequence” (Gaffney, 2020a).

The writing and production of the film and the writing of the thesis for this project happened concurrently, resulting in a dynamic back-and-forth between both. While writing the script, I would research and make notes on relevant scholarly texts. This is most evident in this final scene of the film, where the script was written in direct reference to Lisa Duggan's (2003) theorisation of homonormativity which says, "He only asks that gays be allowed to exist within this neoliberal landscape, so long as they support sentimental masculinist nationalism and challenge nothing." There is a didactic element to this scene because it communicates both ideas from Duggan's research and my own ideas about homonormativity and climate change, consumption, and political intent. While homonormativity has been formally theorised by Duggan (2003), similar ideas have been written about in Queer Theory for some time:

"Steven Seidman [...] argues that the recent gay and lesbian visibility can be seen as creating new boundaries of gay representation. He states that gay images in today's Hollywood films evidence a shift from the 'polluted' to the 'normal' gay. 'The "normal" gay is presented as being fully human; as the psychological and moral equal of the heterosexual'. However, he observes that 'the normal gay is expected to be gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride' (Seidman, 2002 in Dean, 2007).

The applicants that are being expelled are treated in an authoritarian manner by the Queer State, with Lisa Duggan's exposition of homonormativity being weaponised as scathing advice. Thus, Duggan's writing on homonormativity is problematised in the context of this scene: the words appear cruel and demeaning, yet they function both as a critique of homonormativity's anti-queerness and a critique of the Queer State's staunch anti-homonormative stance. In doing so, I wanted to create a tension between both polarities and raise a question about the impossibility of ideological purity; one that would hopefully stay with the viewer as it is the film's final scene.

When initially visualising this scene, I had envisioned it to be filmed like a fake television advertisement because I had read that “Queer Nation’s glossy pseudo-advertisements” aimed to “promote homosexuality as a product” (Berlant and Freeman, 1992). If I wrote the script in the same manner as the fake medical advertisements in my previous film (*Far from the reach of the sun*), I thought that the ads could satirise homonormativity by promoting it as a product. This would have referenced how “gaystreaming reinforces the trope of the good gay (especially male) consumer [and] enmeshes certain LGBT subjects more closely with dominant forms of national identity” (Ng, 2013). In the practical journal (on 1/11/2018), I wrote I was inspired by Hito Steyerl’s (2013) *How Not to be Seen: a Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, and that I could make satirical infomercials that the Queer State would release on “self-representation and acceptable media representations.” Ultimately, I decided that the Queer State showing the applicants an infomercial which “offers guidance on acceptable expressions of their sexuality and identity” for when they re-join their ‘hetero world’ would work better in implicating the Queer State in the rejected applicants’ oppression.

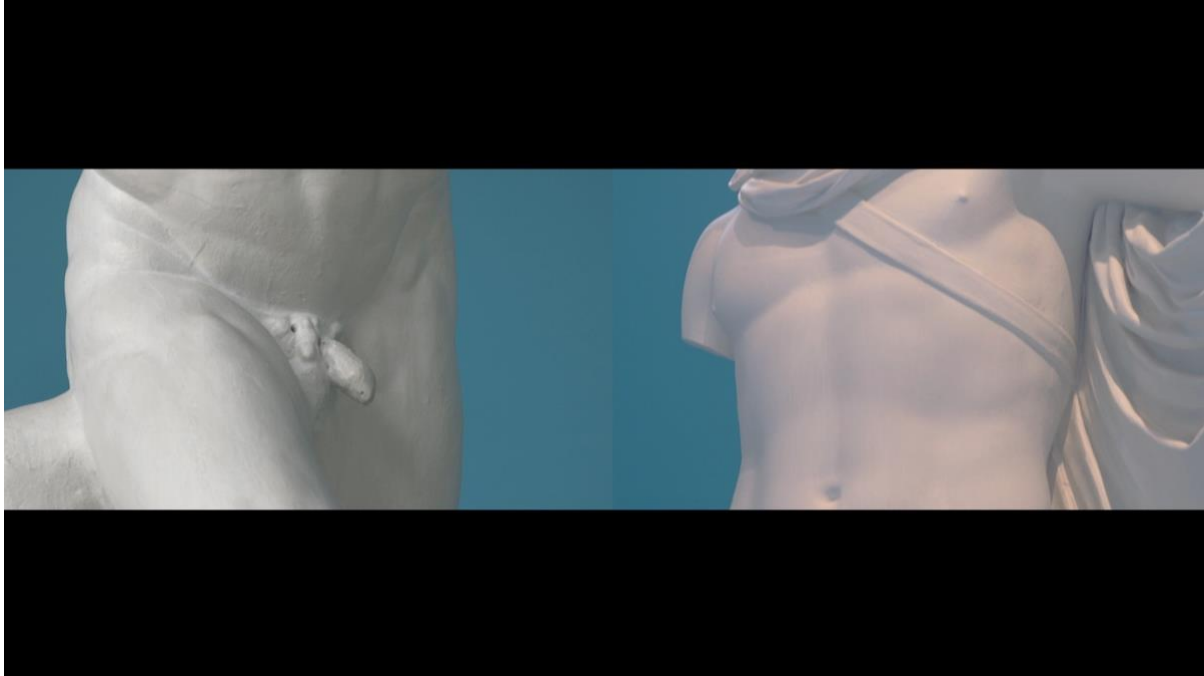


Figure 43: Reproductions of Ancient Greek and Roman sculptures from the Vatican Museums are shown on a split-screen.

Alongside filming the sculptures behind the Head of State, I also shot the sculptures by themselves to be part of another short video which I had planned to comprise archival imagery and my own footage that sardonically linked macho-culture in the gay community in the 1970s to contemporary homonormativity. Unfortunately, most of the archival images were of white male bodies and—taking on board feedback from artist Bassam Al-Sabah—I realised I could not divorce these images from white supremacy within the gay community simply through editing or parody. However, Al-Sabah also observed that the footage of the sculptures I had filmed—and which I had experimented with editing into a split-screen—could work well alongside the expulsion advice, and I could try incorporating this split-screen idea into the main film (see Figure 43). I edited it immediately, and we both felt this worked better and that the split-screen heightened the meaning of the expulsion advice dialogue. In fact, the white male sculptural bodies reinforce the Head of State’s declaration to not “see colour”, a statement that

implies that labels are unnecessary and identity is not important which “is frequently a mark of relative privilege, as scholars have noted about White eagerness for ‘color-blindness’” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006 in Ng, 2013). I abandoned my macho-through-to-homonormativity video experiment, with the core idea of it serving better within this scene in *Expulsion*.

At the mid-point of the script’s development, I worried that the script was too focused on the machinations and bureaucracy of the state and then tried to balance the script out by writing two scenes focused on characters’ introspections and by exploring their internal worlds. Drawing inspiration from Arthur Evans’ *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (1978), I had the idea that the Queer State would hold rational thought on an equal level with pagan beliefs, experiential spiritual knowledge of the psychic realm and the emotional body. From this, I wrote an account from the perspective of the Historian/ Mystic of his experience of being under ‘psychic attack.’ The Historian/ Mystic recounts: “There was a spirit... a folded page, wings, with a force that was pushing air towards me, flapping like a hawk, trying to break into me, infiltrate me.” He determines that this psychic attack was from an enemy state and he wants to find out how many citizens of the Queer State could have been affected by this. While I eventually cut this scene entirely because of the fear of it registering as cheesy on screen, it reminded me how influential *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* was for me. Refocusing on *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* formed the basis of the following scenes which explore queer people’s relationships with nature, queer sexuality and the process of healing learned from growing up in a majority heterosexual society.

The Queer State as a guardian of nature



Figure 44: The Queer State's flag is carried through a disused quarry.

Since homonormativity is intertwined with neoliberal capitalism, which favours individualism and consumerism, there is the potential for queerness to reject those values and to position environmental activism at the centre of queerness. As neoliberal capitalism leads to the destruction of our planet, queerness can critique homonormativity and problematise the respectability politics of homonormativity, because complicity with the destruction of nature is surely not respectable. Thus, centring the environment in queer film becomes method through which homonormativity can be critiqued. Putting this into practice through queer filmmaking would mean centring the environment in the film's script, visuals or plot. This aligns with "the emergence of queer eco-criticism, which seeks to remedy both eco-criticism's blind spot around

questions of gender and sexuality and queer theory's blind spots on environmental politics" (Schoonover and Galt, 2016).

In this scene, a woman (performed by stuntwoman Helen O'Dea) carries the state's flag through the landscape of a scarred former quarry as a voice-over (performed by Oisín McKenna) reflects on the destruction of our environment in a sad but defiant tone (see Figure 44). I intended for this scene to communicate the main driving force behind the Queer State: a dissatisfaction with capitalism; a rage against the destruction of nature; and an urge to be closer with, and to protect, the environment. Imagining the Queer State as striving to exist outside of capitalism, it follows that it would be radically environmentally conscious, and that their politics would be aligned with environmental concerns in opposition to homonormative politics, which value consumption and capitalism.

I identified the Avoca Mines in County Wicklow, a closed quarry, like a scar on the surrounding idyllic countryside, as a potential location for shooting. I had previously photographed the Avoca Mines in 2016. They are visually interesting and on a grander scale than other nearby sites of former mining activity, for example, the nearby Ballinafunshoge where I had shot a short video, *Seeing Colours in an Oil Slick*, in 2014. On a sunny day, the human-made valley can look like a desert, with the turquoise lake looking Mediterranean, despite its bright blue colour coming from chemical leakages. Having closed in 1982, vegetation has grown back in the sparse rocky hills of mining spoils in the Avoca Mines. This area has a suitably apocalyptic aesthetic that would work well with the monologue, which takes stock of what is left of a spoilt natural environment. I envisioned a person carrying the rogue nation's flag through this desolate environment, as the voice-over establishes the Queer State as being a guardian of nature:

“This desolate space.
 Consumed, destruction of previous governments
 And capitalist citizens.
 You cut down the trees so we can’t talk to them.
 We’ve inherited the dust.
 A colonisation of waste.
 Your detritus.
 We lie in it, cover ourselves in it.
 We will make our homes from it.
 We will design ourselves as against you,
 what was not valuable.
 As a past you discarded.
 As nature deemed worthless.
 The moon will pull the tide up around your ears,
 covering you in your own waste.
 These rocks will only be used to crack open your skull.
 To let in the sunlight.
 This land will only be used to defend against attacks on the land.
 A bloody hole in your forehead” (Gaffney, 2020a).



Figure 45: My initial design for the Queer State’s flag and the finished flag in *Expulsion*.

I sketched the first design for the Queer State’s flag in my practical journal (18/03/2019; Figure 45) and noted its symbolism. The pink triangle would represent the symbol of nazi persecution being reclaimed by the gay rights movement and the symbol used by ACT UP. The main body of the flag would be lavender because of the LGBTQ+ community’s long history with the colour. From the late nineteenth century, lavender was used as a coded way to describe gay people, both in self-identifying and pejorative manners (Hastings, 2020). In the 1950s, the

Lavender Scare was a ‘witch-hunt’ of panic about homosexuality that led to the firing of many gay men and women in the United States (Lodge, 2019). Lavender was later reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community who wore “lavender sashes and armbands” during a march in 1969 in New York to commemorate the Stonewall riots (Hastings, 2020). The Lavender Panthers were an armed self-defence group active in San Francisco from 1973 to 1974, formed in response to attacks on the LGBTQ+ population. Described in a sensationalist fashion by TIME (1973) as “a stiff-wristed team of gay vigilantes” made up of “21 homosexuals” and “two lesbians who are reputedly the toughest hombres in the lot”, the Lavender Panthers organised training for local gay people to learn judo and karate. Lavender has thus been a colour of both persecution and resistance, one which resonates with the Queer State.



Figure 46: The IGA’s logo developing in 1980.

My initial design included a transparent triangle in the centre of the pink triangle. Soon after designing this, I found the IGA (International Association of Gay Women and Men, now ILGA) newsletter (1980a, 1980b, and 1980c) and was struck by their logo also having a void in its centre similar to my design (see Figure 46). I incorporated this in my design as a see-through circle in the flag to evoke a void, an eye, a world, and a hole. This move towards ambiguity is mirrored in the development of the IGA newsletter’s logo itself during the 1980s (see Figure 46): the logo at first featured a map of the globe in the centre of the triangle (1980a); which

becomes a very abstracted map (1980b) before, finally, an empty circle at the centre of the triangle (1980c). The clear circle in my flag represents: the denial and erasure of LGBTQ+ history in other states; the depoliticisation of queer culture; the commonality of queer experience; and the utopia of the Queer State where recognition of sexuality and gender identity does not need to be fought for (see Figure 47). Karl Schoonover (2020) connects the ambiguous symbolism of the flag with the uneasy presence of the Queer State:

“Expulsion carefully avoids any full endorsement of the Queer State’s governmental operations, and it is not only through the juxtapositions of Queer Nation and this imagined state that the film foregrounds the Queer State’s ambivalent status. Beginning from its initial images, Expulsion performs its unsureness through an iconography of equivocal symbols. Take, for example, the flag paraded by a Queer State citizen through a depleted landscape. At the centre of the bright colours and triangle of the flag is a circular hole. Does this hole represent an empty duplicitous truth at the core of the Queer State’s project? Or is it that project’s acknowledgment of indeterminacy? A liberatory refusal to settle on queer identity?”



Figure 47: The Queer State’s flag is held above a lake polluted by run-off from the abandoned quarry.

Communal healing: liberating the self



Figure 48: The Head of state cradles the Historian's head as she brings him on a guided meditation.

After the Historian tells the accepted applicant they will “undergo an induction cleanse: a ritual to free you from any internalised homophobia/ transphobia and self-loathing”, the film cuts to the Head of State cradling the Historian as she delivers a monologue that guides him along his own induction cleanse ritual (see Figure 48). This is the only time the Head of State appears vulnerable or emotional as she leads him through the guided meditation, appearing to be following it herself. The Head of State directs the Historian to visualise another version of himself (“the other you”) floating beside him in a sea, and to then force him under the water, letting his shame and guilt fall away with the sinking body. This tender exchange is an outlier in a film where characters mostly navigate landscapes and bureaucracy alone, and where interactions revolve around intellectual and political concerns. Having the Head of State be a

queer woman, who delivers state addresses and leads the healing process shown in this scene, challenges “the nation-as-woman trope [which] only ‘works’ if the imagined body/woman is assumed to be (heterosexually) fertile” (Petersen, 1999). The nation as a queer woman facilitates “quite different understandings of community” (Petersen, 1999).

I envisioned this scene as a community-led healing process; as something positive the Queer State could do for its citizens to nurture self-acceptance (or used to do: there is no clear sequence of events in the film). In contrast to the individualised nature of homonormativity, I wanted this scene to show the community supporting each other to heal from and reject internalised homophobia/transphobia. In doing so, they are striving for self-acceptance outside of the parameters set by the heterosexual majority and parts of the LGBTQ+ community who see homonormativity as the only means of gaining acceptance. Inspired by *120 BPM*'s portrayal of friendships during the HIV/AIDS crisis, I wanted this scene to reference the history of queer women supporting their queer male friends. As examined in Chapter 2, the majority of big-budget or mainstream Western LGBT cinema tends to focus on one segment of the LGBTQ+ spectrum individually, which is at odds with the intersectional nature of most of the LGBTQ+ community. This scene, in showing a loving, emotionally intimate friendship between two segments of the community, aims to provide an alternative to homonormative representations (see Figure 49).



Figure 49: The Head of state cradles the Historian's head as she brings him on a guided meditation.

While the 'coming out' plot was important for LGBTQ+ visibility, it has become a lazy homonormative motif for LGBTQ+ characters to gain approval from their (straight) family and peers. Rather than raising awareness of specific LGBTQ+ issues, it can often act as a virtue-signal for how progressive the straight characters are. In this scene, I have developed an alternative in which the catalyst for a character's growth can be self-acceptance, and this can happen regardless of the outside approval that 'coming out' can provide.

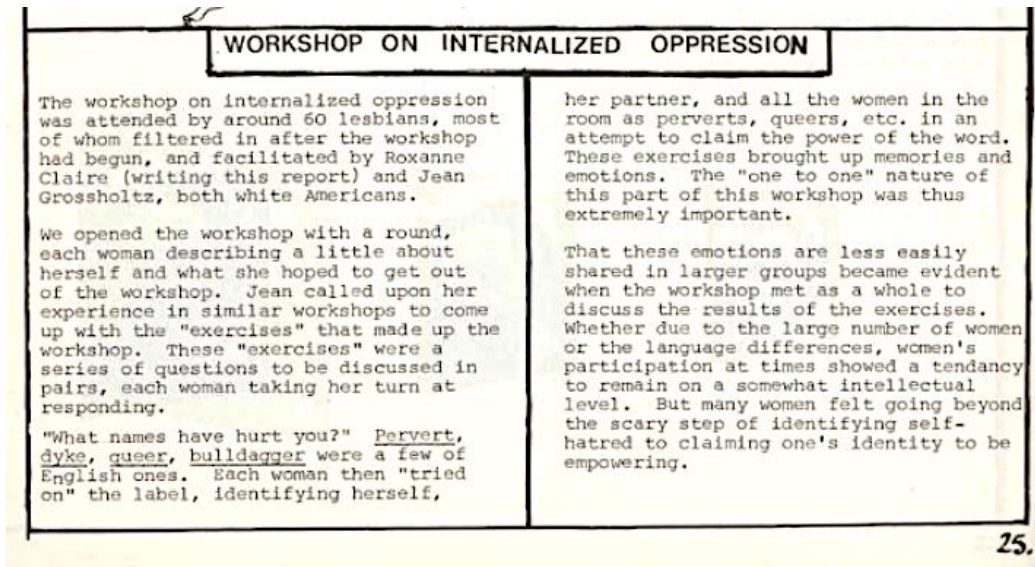


Figure 50: Details of a workshop from a lesbian community newsletter (ILIS, 1986).

After writing this scene, I found an account of a group workshop to confront “internalized oppression” in a lesbian community newsletter (ILIS, 1986, see Figure 50) where a “one to one” break-out session facilitated the participants sharing emotions more privately. The article notes that many of the participants found it “empowering”. As with my flag design being close in design to the IGA logo, I found my concept for the guided meditation scene was very close in intent to this workshop held in 1986. Rather than feeling that this diminished the originality of my work, I felt that this suggested that certain LGBTQ+ experiences (such as, expunging internalised hatred) remain unchanged despite the advancement of rights and more popular representations in the media. Considering this commonality of experience for LGBTQ+ people, I saw the potential for this scene to act as healing catalyst within the museum exhibition, imagining that an audience could follow the guided meditation alongside the characters.

I had written this monologue from my own experience, recounting sensations and visuals I had experienced when distressed and during meditations to soothe myself. While most of the

text explores waves of emotions with abstract descriptors, the Head of State directs the Historian to locate a particular memory, saying, “you see another you in there, scuttling in shame, naked, humiliated.” Analyses of ‘gay shame’ have been explored in popular self-help books (such as *The Velvet Rage*, 2005). Accounts by queer people of their own lived experience, and the “kinds of thinking, perceiving, and feeling conveyed” in them, can “offer contemporary queer readers different approaches for negotiating survival outside of heteronormative institutions and engaging in greater social justice and liberation” (Chisholm-Guenther, 2017). In previous films, I had written from this place, intending to share or reveal these inner thoughts. However, with this scene, it was the first time I felt I was sharing a strategy that could be used by other people; that this scene contained something that could be useful for an audience beyond simply relating to it.

When visualising how the scene would play out on camera, I wrote in the practical journal (6/5/2019) that the actors would be in a pietà-like pose and that the Head of State would pour water over the Historian’s head. I thought this would signify the ‘cleansing’ of the Historian’s internalised homophobia/transphobia in a ritual akin to a reverse baptism, removing the indoctrination of organised religion and societal pressure. However, while on set, I felt the water-pouring would be a gimmick and would only distract from the intensity of the actors engaging with the dialogue and with each other. In conversation with the performers, we decided it was more powerful to have this ritual exist outside of any Christian frame of reference, rather like how the workshop on internalised oppression operated.

Stillness, slowness and sexuality



Figure 51: The dog-man lies on a pile of wood and pallets as the Historian’s voice-over lambasts Christianity’s persecution of women and queers.

When the state’s historian tells the applicants how “Christians hunted down heretics and witches for 1400 years”, the film cuts to split-screen of a man wearing a latex dog-mask lying on a wooden pallet upon a pile of logs—resembling a pyre—in a barn at night (see Figure 51). Besides the dog-man’s slow breathing and the occasional flying insect, the scene is extremely still; a moment of repose in an otherwise dialogue-heavy film. I built up sounds of a fire burning to further suggest a pyre. Subsequent scenes of the dog-man depict him playing with himself under a blossoming apple-tree and loitering at the door of an outhouse. In a film otherwise focused on queer statehood, all the dog-man’s nocturnal scenes are presented without explanation or context as otherworldly interjections where queer sexuality can exist outside of

regulations and categories. This is a method I have experimented with previously, as Chris Hayes (2020) observes:

“In recent years, the artist has adopted a dual strategy of real, emotionally resonant personal stories paired with absurdist, dream-like scenes as he wrangles with the question of how to present concepts in a compelling manner, working out the relationship between imagery, narrative and research.”

All the dog-man scenes were filmed at night and—although I had not seen it at the time of filming—have conceptual overlaps with *O Fantasma* (discussed in Chapter 2): just as Sergio lies amid the garbage in his fetish gear, the dog-man lies atop a pile of logs; both scenes are surreal and nocturnal, with the characters having dehumanised themselves for sexual pleasure.

Da Silva (2014) observes that “nocturnal identities” in *O Fantasma*:

“[...] suggests that these characters are pushed to the borders of existence, to the shadows of urban identities. This also implies that these ‘undesirable’ identities inhabit the unconsciousness of other citizens because the latter know that these ‘abject’ subjects are there somewhere so the borders of such citizens’ existence have to be delineated to avoid being contaminated by the abject or, in Douglas’s (1966) terms, the ‘dirt’.”

As Sergio traverses the garbage dump alone, the Queer State occupies a disused quarry and the dog-man pleasures himself alone on a farm. Similar to how the cinematography in *O Fantasma* lingered unhurriedly, these dog-man scenes are extremely slow and quiet; an atmosphere building without a clear narrative aim. In this manner, “slow cinema wastes our time, asking us to spend time in visibly unproductive ways, outside efficient narrative economies of production and reproduction” (Schoonover and Galt, 2016). Just as “queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, wasted productivity” (Schoonover, 2012), both Sergio and the dog-man exist outside of efficiency and productivity, enjoying waste as they waste our time.

Envisioning these scenes projected large in the gallery, I wanted these images to arrive without introduction, creating an unsettled feeling for the audience that would permeate alongside the lack of dialogue. Installed next door to *Expulsion* in my Crawford exhibition was a 4 minute video work titled *Dusting* (2012), in which I performed myself. Entirely silent, my tongue licks dust off an old ticket stations' windows in Prague (see Figure 52). This older work has a similarity to another scene in *O Fantasma*, where Sergio licks the condensation off a public shower cubicle (see Figure 52). Similar to *Flaming Ears*, the characters are drawn to dirt, sexually desiring what is considered unclean in society, in what is perhaps a manifestation of gay shame or simply a kinky urge to traverse boundaries of respectability.



Figure 52. Left: Sergio licks condensation off a public shower in *O Fantasma*.
Right: I lick dust off a window in a public building in *Dusting*, a video work from 2012.

I have filmed and photographed outdoors at night many times—with and without permission—and I knew the biggest obstacles to realising these scenes would be: the financial cost of being on-location; the ability to access electricity (whether by the mains or a generator); the opportunity to work uninterrupted; and, to ensure privacy for the performer. This concern was the most important because wearing a rubber bondage mask which eliminates all vision and hearing can be nerve-wracking outside of a controlled environment. I decided to locate these scenes on a family member's farm in County Cavan, where myself and the performer could stay for several days and nights. This would allow for a very low budget and provide enough time to

perform the scenes outdoors with privacy. Arriving on 11th May 2018, I did not have a script for the scenes I wanted to shoot, but simply a list of locations and scenarios that I wanted to try filming. As the first shoot for this film, the success to failure ratio was uncomfortably close: only one scene was planned and carried out successfully; one scene was scrapped because of logistics; two new scenes were created with the performer's input after arriving and spending time at the location¹¹; and two scenes were enacted as planned, but I knew immediately they would not be included in the final edit.

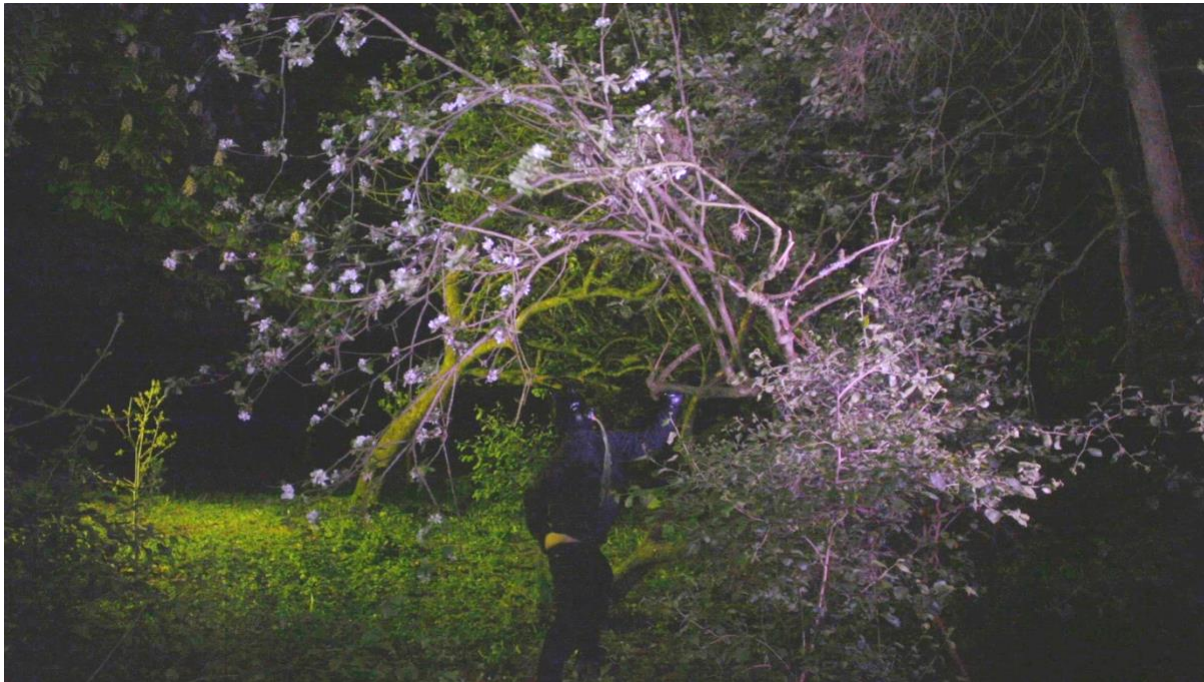


Figure 53: The dog-man plays with himself anally while sucking on a carrot.

¹¹ While I had found someone to perform in this role, they wished to be credited with a pseudonym (“Antonio Ruiz”) to remain anonymous. I agreed to this because the credits would have no bearing on how the character was performed or interpreted.

The single pre-planned scene that was successful was where the performer, in all black and wearing a rubber dog mask, would penetrate himself with a carrot under a tree, while he sucks another carrot in his mouth (see Figure 53). This was inspired by Scott Heron and Erik Paulo's *Laff at Fags* (1985) where the "videomakers perform the most outrageous acts of (safe) sexual abandon" (Hubbarb, 2000). These included "such John Wateresque antics as graphic sex with a carrot and orange" and masturbation scenes (Ferber, 2000). I had planned to see *Laff at Fags* at the New York Public Library with the aim of potentially incorporating some scenes from it alongside my original footage of the dog-man and his carrot. With the research trip cancelled because of the pandemic, the dog-man scene stands alone as an homage to this film, which I have not yet seen. Three months after shooting, I came across Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens' work for the first time at the *Art & Porn* exhibition at Kunsthall Charlottenborg in Copenhagen. I had not been aware of 'ecosexuality' but their piece *25 Ways to Make Love to the Earth* (Sprinkle and Stephens, c.2019) resonated with ideas in my film, particularly how it connects loving nature with protecting it. While *25 Ways* is gentle in its suggestions of making love with nature (for example, to "hug and stroke" trees), the dog-man's antics lean away from ecosexuality and towards the *Laff at Fag's* pornography.



Figure 54: The dog-man loiters at the door of a decrepit outdoor toilet.

The scene which had to be scrapped entirely was supposed to show the dog-man sitting on a chair at the entrance to the apple orchard before he would fall backward to the ground as a car approached, illuminating him in the dark. As the farm is still in use, the locations had altered since my last visit, and the space where I had planned to drive the car was now blocked, and the ground was rocky instead of soft and grassy. When searching for an alternative location or idea to replace this, the performer drew my attention to the crumbling outdoor toilet nearby, which was overgrown with ivy. I thought it was unremarkable, but he encouraged me to imagine him in the costume at the entrance to the toilet with the scene lit at night. The reference to cruising became obvious to me and we decided he would loiter, as if cruising (see Figure 54). I lit the surrounding trees in tropical greens and blues and used a white LED to open up the shadows.

The second scene that was created in collaboration with the performer, after arriving to the location, was one in which the dog-man would lie on a 'pyre' of wooden pallets in a barn,

echoing the burning of witches mentioned in the script. After shooting through the night into the early morning, I noted that the “shoot went smoothly” and, despite it being a last-minute addition, “this scene materialised on camera beautifully [and] felt like the pieces were fitting together”. When shooting, I realised this footage could work with the voice-overs I had written. To facilitate this, I shot wides and close-ups and recorded the dog-man’s heavy breathing in the mask to use in the sound design. The decision to edit split-screens of two of the dog-man scenes was made early in the editing process because, first, it emphasised that there was not a singular viewpoint of his actions and, second, it heightened the uncanny and surreal atmosphere.

There were two scenes which proceeded as planned but failed to have the impact I’d hoped for. When shooting them, I knew they would not make the final cut of the film. The first was one in which the dog-man would lay on the ground with dirt being shovelled onto his face and torso, until he was covered (see Figure 55), in a reference to David Wojnarowicz’s 1991 photograph *Untitled (Face in Dirt)*. The performer could comfortably hold his breath for one minute, and we agreed upon a safety plan where he would raise his hand if uncomfortable, or if he felt panicked, and he could sit up and I would unzip the dog mask immediately. On first take, the dirt filled up the gap in the mask which he breathed through, and we had trouble getting the latex mask off due to sweat. We reviewed the footage and, instead of being unsettling or tinged with horror as planned, the blank expression of the mask made the dirt landing on it seem comedic, appearing as if a mannequin or dummy was wearing a mask. I realised quickly this would not have the impact I had imagined and moved on without further attempts.



Figure 55: The dog-man with dirt shovelled on him in an unused shot.

The second scene that failed was shot at a nearby bogland in which the dog-man, out of costume, would walk through the fauna of the bog, before ‘fisting’ a bog-hole in a close-up (see Figure 56). Despite the bog-cotton and small, but brightly coloured fauna, the scene looked unremarkable on camera. Instead of alluding to ecosexuality and scatological connotations, ‘fisting’ the bog-hole merely looked like someone sticking their hands in the bog to find a lost object. After multiple tries, I realised that this would not result in the evocative imagery I had imagined. I was extremely disappointed as felt I had made a mistake in my choice of camera and had not planned back-ups in case these ideas failed. Rather than using the Canon C100’s sharp imagery, if I had brought my Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera for this shot, it would have created a softer filmic image and could have perhaps captured the bucolic atmosphere.

After numerous attempts, I accepted that the scene was not materialising as I had hoped and realised I had not developed the idea far enough.



Figure 56: An unused shot which attempted to explore ecosexuality in the bog.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've discussed the decisions made about aesthetics and thematics as both director and producer throughout the development of this film, and shared critical reflections to demonstrate my tacit knowledge as a filmmaker. To address the first research question, which asked "what new techniques and/or combination of techniques could be developed to allow queer characters and/or queer stories to resist assimilation into prevalent homonormative cinematic conventions?", I have developed a number of short filmmaking techniques that can challenge and disrupt homonormative tropes in mainstream cinema. These are: addressing and critiquing homonormativity at a scriptwriting level and on-screen; situating environmental

concerns at the centre of queer politics; and exploring self-acceptance—i.e. the commonly shared process of unlearning societal homophobia and transphobia in one’s relationship with oneself—rather than focusing on outside-approval storylines such as the coming-out story.

Expulsion addresses the second research question (“how can a queer film act as a site for critique and transgression of homonormativity in cinema?”) through its questioning of queerness and homonormativity. Through the Queer State covertly denouncing homonormativity, while publicly espousing it for rejected applicants, the viewer is made aware that the Queer State views homonormativity as a lesser ideal than queerness, i.e. one which is beneath their citizens. Yet, despite this condescension, the Queer State’s criticisms of capitalism are a valid—and urgent, considering the climate crisis—critique of neoliberal homonormativity. Thus, the film asks the viewer to consider the vexed relationship between homonormativity and queerness and to examine each character’s reasoning as they progress through ethically probing and challenging scenes. In the ‘expulsion advice’, I aimed to skewer homonormativity in order to reflect on dominant representations on-screen which continue to corral LGBTQ+ characters into narrowly confined archetypes as socially acceptable consumers. *Expulsion*, as an experimental queer short film operating outside the commercial film industry in its distribution through museums, experimental film festivals and academia, has the potential to re-politicise the role of LGBTQ+ stories and create alternatives to homonormative characters and storylines.

Lisa Duggan (1994) wrote that “It is time for queer intellectuals to concentrate on the creative production of strategies at the boundary of queer and nation-strategies specifically for queering the state.” While my practice-led research was focused on cinema, I aimed to queer the idea of a ‘regular’ nation state through film. Karl Schoonover (2020) writes that *Expulsion* has the potential to generate criticisms of statehood for the viewer:

“This unresolved ambivalence towards the Queer State’s justifications and its practices is kept crucially taut by *Expulsion* and, as such, it returns us to the dilemmas of the current moment. Why do we need a guarantee of the status quo’s persistence in the future in order to value human life in the present? Why do we need assurances of our own privilege in order to act humanely? Gaffney’s work does more than stage the incommensurability of a queer state; it shows us the dangers of not facing our own vexed relationship to being governed. One challenge of this moment is being able to imagine participatory democracy as something other than simply majority rule and to reimagine what a state can and should do for us.”

In the next chapter, I will discuss the development of scriptwriting and editing techniques that advance the field through incorporating queer history and the interjection of archival footage to interrupt the forward-momentum of the capitalist co-opting of queerness. This will be discussed through the intercutting of archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk and the re-telling of Arthur Evans’ queer overview of history in *Expulsion*, and the re-claiming of Dr. James Barry as a trans icon in another short video piece.

Chapter 4: Queer(ing) time

In this chapter, I identify methodologies of working with queer archival film. To introduce this argument, theories of ‘queer time’ and ‘straight time’ by José Esteban Muñoz and Elisabeth Freeman are examined, and existing techniques used by filmmakers and artists to re-frame general archival footage are established. A critical reflection of *Far from the reach of the sun* (2018)—a 23 minute experimental short I wrote and directed—explores the development of an editing technique of incorporating footage of recent queer history into fictional film with the aim of deploying the past with the purpose of critiquing the present:

“The time of the past helps mount a critique of the space of the present. This is not revisionary history or metahistory; it is a critical deployment of the past for the purpose of engaging the present and imagining the future” (Muñoz, 2009).

The main body of this chapter follows a practice-led research methodology; identifying how both *Expulsion* and *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson* (a short video piece) critique homonormativity through the inclusion of queer history and establishing editing and scriptwriting techniques that allow queer stories to resist assimilation into prevalent homonormative cinematic conventions. The intercutting of archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk and the re-telling of Arthur Evans’ queer overview of history in *Expulsion* is critically reflected upon, and the forward-momentum of neoliberal homonormativity is challenged through editing methods that present time differently. The short video *Retelling* is critically analysed at a scriptwriting level in relation to trans representation and a post-colonial legacy.

Straight time and Queer time

A film is a series of images edited to represent a sequence of events unfolding in time. Even if the events, or the character's experience of the events, are not in real time, watching the film still uses up the viewer's time. How does the viewer experience time? Muñoz wrote that "straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality" (Muñoz, 2009) wherein the world is calibrated for "heteronormative concepts of biology that follow a logic geared toward reproduction" (Dietze et al., 2018). Similarly, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) writes that "chrononormativity" is the "interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent and for the mundane workings of domestic life." While straight time is considered natural, queer time is thus deemed unnatural, and therefore "queer potentiality [is] not only unrealized but also unthinkable" (Muñoz, 2009). An everyday example of this would be a young queer child not understanding that there are alternatives to trying to fit into a straight world. A cinematic example of this is the steering of LGBTQ+ characters and narratives into relatable experiences of straight time: finding a partner, settling down and having kids. By queering time, both in reality and the cinema, challenges are made to 'straight time' and "visions of other pasts, presents, and futures" (Dietze et al., 2018) are made possible.

While "heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them" (Munoz, 2009), queering time allows alternatives to emerge both for queers and heterosexuals. To queer the future, an intervention in the current movement of straight time must be made. In an extraordinary political action, an ACT UP protest in 1989 "forced the New York Stock Exchange to halt its operations for the first time in history, long before Occupy Wall Street attempted to do the same" (Cheng, 2016). By disrupting the flow of capital in order to draw attention to the HIV/AIDS crisis, ACT UP offered a damning critique of the ruthless and

relentless drive of capitalism and demanded a redirection of time and a new focus for our attention. Freeman (2010) writes that the “logic of time-as-productive thereby becomes one of serial cause-and-effect: the past seems useless unless it predicts and becomes material for a future.” In temporarily stopping the New York Stock Exchange, ACT UP rendered the *present* as unproductive and unprofitable, with the temporary despair felt by the stock exchange workers and stockholders paling next to the existential threat experienced by the LGBTQ+ community facing the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Existing techniques of re-framing archival footage

Alongside period film of Derek Jarman and the staged archives in *The Watermelon Woman*, there are several established practices of incorporating authentic archival footage into film to summon the past. The most common practice is when documentary films include subject-specific archival footage as historical document to lend credence to their narrative. Another common use is in essay films, which can be made up entirely of archival footage, found footage and/or footage from the filmmaker’s personal archives. Essay films are “a form of montage [...] fragmentary and nonlinear, resisting, and at times, actively working to subvert the narrative structures of documentary and fiction film” (Hallas, 2009). Compilation films string loose narratives through clips from archival films, or use it to map out LGBTQ+ film history, such as *Queerama* (dir. Daisy Asquith, 2017) which compiles various LGBTQ+ clips from the BFI National Archives alongside a music soundtrack. Artist filmmakers have been expanding on these uses of archival footage in both fictional and documentary forms. Duncan Campbell’s *Bernadette* (2008) was an experimental documentary composed entirely of archival footage and Christian Marclay’s *The Clock* (2010) was a 24-hour video piece composed entirely of footage

from cinema and television. *The Clock* is screened in real-time, with each clip mentioning the synchronised local time or featuring a clock on screen, resulting in the viewer being constantly reminded of the time they spend watching the film.

Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1989) explored Black queer identity during the Harlem Renaissance in New York, combining staged scenes with archival news footage from the time period. Munoz (1999) notes that the "transhistorical crisscrossing" and "overlapping temporal and geographic coordinates" in *Looking for Langston* can be understood as a "queer black cultural imaginary" and that this "is in no way ahistorical". Yet, from these examples, only Asquith's *Queerama* uses *LGBTQ+ archival footage* and the majority of these were well-known clips from broadcast television and movies.

Finding and accessing LGBTQ+ material in the archive can be challenging because the process of categorising and labelling LGBTQ+ archival material itself can be complex. Not only do "preferred terms [change] over time and are different for every individual" (Watts, 2018) but in 'non-LGBTQ+' archives "LGBT collections may or may not be a priority for detailed cataloguing, preservation projects, and access, and staff members may or may not be knowledgeable about queer culture" (Kirste, 2007). As a result, as Kirste (2007) further observes that "descriptive cataloguing of materials relating to marginalized groups is frequently left off [moving image archives] agendas." Without being able to search by keywords, a lot of LGBTQ+ material is rendered inaccessible to the researcher, artist or citizen, unless they know the name of the author or creator or title of a specific piece. This chapter will establish the emerging queer filmmaking practice of using specifically LGBTQ+ archival footage within fictional works.

Far from the reach of the sun: solidarity across history through the archive



Figure 57: A man lies nude on a morgue dissection table placed in a chapel in a still from *Far from the reach of the sun*.

Far from the reach of the sun (2018, see Figure 57) is a 23 minute short film I wrote, produced and directed in Autumn 2017. It reflects on the church and medical profession's interference with the lives of LGBTQ+ people; employing the speculative fiction of a company marketing a pill that can alter a customer's sexuality to critique and lampoon the pseudo-medical practice of gay conversion 'therapy'. *Far from the reach of the sun* contains archival footage from *The Pink Pulpit* (1996, see Figure 58), a student video documentary about the creation of a church set-up by LGBTQ+ people in Manchester.¹² While I did not get to see *120 BPM* before finishing editing *Far from the reach of the sun*, I employed a similar use of archival footage.¹³ The excerpts I used from *The Pink Pulpit* are mostly of interviews with young LGBTQ+ people who have been excluded from, or persecuted by, their churches. The interviewees talk critically about their experience of organised religion and its effect on their self-esteem and mental health. These

¹² The archival video is held at the North West Film Archive at Manchester Central Library.

¹³ *120 BPM* was released in Ireland in late March 2018.

testimonial scenes in the documentary verbalised the complex relationship between LGBTQ+ people, religious organisations and the medical profession which I was grappling with when writing this film.

While editing the film, I was aware that in the film I'd made previously, *A Numbness in the Mouth* (2016), that the intercutting of 1950s archival footage had had a nostalgic effect. While this was partly because of the saccharine nature of the footage itself, I was concerned that *The Pink Pulpit* could be considered nostalgic due to its VHS aesthetic (with jumping videotape lines at its edges) and the 90s fashions of some of the people featured. However, despite the few joyous scenes in *The Pink Pulpit*, the majority of the personal stories told were of exorcisms, suicide attempts and self-loathing. Thus, the archival footage is not a gateway for escapism but a site for confronting recent history. *Far from the reach of the sun* attempts to draw a direct line to current social realities by putting the archival footage in proximity with the original footage that reflects on elements of gay conversion 'therapy'.

While incorporating archival footage in *A Numbness in the Mouth* did not have the impact I wished, it did successfully expand the film's time period and disrupted the formal properties of the film. The original film footage was shot in anamorphic (2.35:1) and the 1950s infomercial was 35mm film (1.375:1). Keeping both in their original aspect ratios, the film frame shrinks for the archival footage, interrupting the viewer's absorption into the film by drawing attention to its constructed and manipulated nature.



Figure 58: An interview participant studies the bible in a still from *The Pink Pulpit*.

I had hoped the documentary footage from *The Pink Pulpit* would function similarly: allowing for an expansion of the time period of the film and interrupting the cinematic quality of my original footage. As in *120 BPM*, the archival footage in *Far from the reach of the sun* is not introduced and the source of the footage does not appear in an on-screen subtitle, as is customary when archival footage is used as part of a documentary. Unlike *120 BPM*, the archival footage is kept in its original video aspect ratio (4:3), with the frame shrinking from the original footage (shot in anamorphic 2.35:1), interrupting the viewer's absorption into the film by drawing attention to the film's compiled nature. I would suggest that this is similar in intent to the "reframing strategies of defamiliarization, interruption, displacement, and anachronism [that] open up a revelatory space for the intersubjective encounter of bearing witness" (Hallas, 2009) within queer AIDS media. The use of archival footage in this film had more of an impact on the viewer because of its emotional and uncomfortable subject matter and because it linked the

fictional footage back into the archive’s recognisable social reality. The camp humour, surreal images and personally divulging voice-overs and monologues in the original footage thus became tethered to the recent reality that the archival footage recalled, with the viewer having to draw connections between both. This juxtaposition is “demanding an interpretative labor on the viewer’s part to figure out the relationship between these sets of [...] moving images of the past and the present” (Hallas, 2009).



Figure 59: The two religious figures are edited as a split-screen, facing opposite each other with overlapping audio.

The Pink Pulpit features two priests being interviewed separately, both denouncing the LGBTQ+ church in Manchester as denigrating social order and making comparisons with bestiality and paedophilia. Growing up in Ireland in the 1990s, this language coming from religious authority with undue influence was very familiar. I wanted to include these interviews with the priests as evidence of religious organisation’s roles in the persecution of LGBTQ+

people, without giving their opinions the same respect or equal footing as the testimonials from LGBTQ+ people themselves.

In editing, I layered the priests' interview audio on top of each other, putting the talking heads facing each other (see Figure 59). The words were being said, but the message was muddled and sometimes indecipherable. This resulted in the priests appearing to be in an echo chamber of hysteria and hate. I worked with the film's sound designer, Patrick Downey, to bring certain sentences and words to the surface, allowing the viewer to grasp what was being said without rebroadcasting the priests' damaging rhetoric in full. With this textual operation, I hoped to reflect on the priests' position of authority while undermining it and obfuscating their words as they attempt to deny LGBTQ+ people a voice. The aim of including this footage was not to present a 'balanced' set of opinions, as required by a public television broadcasting, but to demonstrate the power and obstacles facing LGBTQ+ people in the archival footage, and the characters in the fictional footage. Emma Cocker (2010) discusses how borrowing from the archive and remixing its content can reveal an artist's "anti-archival tendency":

“The borrowing and reanimation of the archival fragment becomes a way of disturbing the smooth structure of an historical narrative, in order to reintroduce the possibility of other realities in the gaps and pauses.”

The archival video *The Pink Pulpit* is not a neutral historical document itself: there are elements of dramatisation that reveal the presence of its directors, such as when one interviewee describes his church performing an exorcism on him and 'exorcism' sound-effects are edited into the background. By re-cutting the archival film I have performed further interventions into the framing of the stories contained within it and, while *Far from the reach of the sun* retells the stories of the people in the archival footage, it also reframes them by putting them in tandem

with a script which I wrote from my own experiences of the church and medical professionals. When discussing the literary biographies of Eileen Myles, Samuel R. Delany and David Wojnarowicz, Faye Chisholm Guenther (2017) identifies this impulse to record and share queer experiences and personal histories as:

“[An] offering to younger generations of queers as well as to the authors’ contemporaries, and to the authors themselves as a form of self-preservation. The statement in this offering is: This is where I came from. This is how I’ve survived. Don’t forget. And don’t despair.”

The archival footage used in both *120 BPM* and *Far from the reach of the sun* explore LGBTQ+ people’s resistance through protest, activism, and personal and collective resilience. In the archival footage I chose, the anger and disgust expressed by the interviewees towards their churches resonated with my anger towards similar situations in my own life, and as the narrator of the archival footage in *120 BPM* says: “from there, anger exploded.” Perhaps this filmmaking practice expresses solidarity in anger across queer history. Juxtaposed with the archival footage, the political undercurrents of the fictional scenes are heightened. The form of the films becomes unstable, along with the viewer’s relationship to it: an audience’s expectation or desire to passively consume the film as a traditional drama or documentary becomes frustrated.

The original and archival footage in *120 BPM* are of the same subject matter, with the intercutting of the archival footage expanding the form of the film, for a short time, from a fictional narrative into the realm of the documentary. While *Far from the reach of the sun* has a commonality in the theme of both the original and archival footage (i.e. organisations pressuring vulnerable queer people to ‘become straight’), the subject matter shifts from the speculative fiction of a pill that can alter one’s sexuality to a church set up by the LGBTQ+ community in the 90s. In doing so, the intercutting of the archival footage introduces a temporal shift from an

undefined future to the 90s, and a spatial shift from an undefined location to Manchester. In *120 BPM* the director explored a more direct link with the archive by using footage of ACT UP Paris, which he was a member of. As Watts (2018) states: “With the development of queer memory, people have the ability to claim their existence, their history, and their role in a community.” The reappropriation of archival footage in both of films activates a link between the past and the present, allowing the viewer to locate themselves in relation to these LGBTQ+ histories and experiences.

Expulsion: Joan Jett Blakk for President in 1992



Figure 60: Joan Jett Blakk delivers a rousing and impassioned speech to campaign supporters in a nightclub.

Joan Jett Blakk (the drag persona of Terence Smith) ran for mayor of Chicago in 1991 and for president in the USA in 1992 on the ticket of the Queer Nation party (Meyer, 2004). Early in the PhD process, shortly after having noted my rough idea for a fictional queer state, I learned

about Joan Jett Blakk through Moe Meyer's (2004) account of her mayoral campaign in Chicago in 1991:

“Assimilationist gays—many in editorial positions—were especially dismayed by Blakk's campaign strategy, one based on the practice of Camp. Taken for granted to be apolitical, Camp was deemed flippant and demeaning as the foundation for a campaign. [...] The Queer Nation campaign raised some interesting questions. First, if Camp is apolitical why was it appearing in an overtly political and activist situation? Second, if Camp, as generally defined, is merely an aestheticized sensibility characterized by triviality and lack of content, or simply an operation of taste, then why did it so clearly divide gay political opinion, and in such a strongly articulated way?”

The Queer Nation party, by refusing to assimilate and having a disruptive presence, were pushing back against both homophobia within mainstream politics and, it seems from Meyer's account, the assimilationist politics of homonormativity within the LGBTQ+ rights struggle at the time (although, at that time, homonormativity was not theorised as such). The online Media Burn archive has two digitised videotapes of Joan Jett Blakk. The first video (Stamets, 1992a) is about her policies, visions for a future with a drag queen president, and her analyses of politics in the terms of performance art. The second video (Stamets, 1992b, see Figure 60) is documentation of a rally, where she announces running for president and answers voters' questions, before giving a triumphant speech in a nightclub.

After finding these two videos of Joan Jett Blakk, I began systematically searching through national archives in Ireland and the UK, and LGBTQ+ specific archives, for more video material that could be relevant to the film. As 'homonormativity' is a contemporary phrase, I referred to the UK's National Archives (n.d.) research guide for finding “sexuality and gender identity history” for advice on keyword searches. I searched for online and physical material relating to LGBTQ+ keywords in the RTÉ Archives, National Archives of Ireland, BBC Archives, National Library of Scotland, National Archives UK, and the Manchester Central

Library archives (where I had found archival footage for my previous film *Far from the reach of the sun*). I also searched the online material available on the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (LAGNA), the Arquives (Canada's LGBTQ2+ archives), and GLBT Historical Society. Ultimately, these archival searches did not turn up relevant video or film material for the project.

The Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest hosts *The City Nightclub*, a video documentary by Gregory Franklyn. It shows young LGBTQ+ people defending a social space in their city which they feel safe in, and I thought that these defiant descriptions of utopian space could be incorporated within my film. However, during editing, I realised the dialogue was too specific to that nightclub location and it could not be re-contextualised to work within my film's concept. The only footage that was relevant to the film's subject matter was still the Joan Jett Blakk footage. Narrowing my search to find further video documents of her, I found that, as part of the New York Public Library, the Schomburg Center's Moving Image and Recorded Sound division holds a collection of Joan Jett Blakk material made up of "110 video elements and 3 audio elements [that are] not yet described with a research finding aid" (personal communication with NYPL, 28/01/2020). As Kirste (2007) notes, the New York Public Library houses the Royal S. Marks AIDS Activist Video Collection, "which many people would overlook if it were held at a less visible institution." Because the NYPL held both the Joan Jett Blakk material and the AIDS Activist Video collect—a period where queer artists and activists fought to counter mainstream homophobic representations and misrepresentations of the HIV/AIDS crisis—I organised a research trip. However, when my planned research trip was disrupted because of Covid-19 and ultimately cancelled, I decided to use the digitised videos from the Media Burn archive once they granted me permission.

Archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk appears at four separate points throughout *Expulsion*: the first is a direct-to-camera address that follows a scene where applicants are interviewed; the second is a speech given in a nightclub that follows the dog-man sequence; the third is a rally that follows the guided meditation scenes; and the last is of Joan Jett Blakk performing one of her own songs which plays over the film's credits. While the clips are not introduced and do not have information of their origin on screen, dialogue signifies them as authentic archive footage, as opposed to staged footage edited to appear old. For example, in the first clip of her that appears in *Expulsion*, she states, "I'm Joan Jett Blakk, Queer Nation's candidate for president in 1992."



Figure 61: Joan Jett Blakk addresses the camera to discuss her policies and political views.

The direct-to-camera speech includes awkward pauses and unfocused questions from the camera operator, Bill Stamets, emphasising the DIY nature of the presidential campaign (see Figure 61). I purposefully included these moments as they demonstrate Joan Jett Blakk's convivial

demeanour and teasing humour; completely at odds with the stiff and clipped representatives of the Queer State. While each Queer State scene ends in a self-contained manner, I edited each of the archival clips to end with an interjection or a spontaneous interruption. First, the telephone interrupts Blakk's speech to the camera, and she trails off ("... I have to go get the phone"). At her nightclub speech, a performer comes on stage to tell her that it's time for a costume change ("Ok, it's time for a costume change!" she replies). At her rally, when she tells the audience that "we'll turn the pentagon into something a lot more fun than it is now", an audience member suggests "a nightclub!". She laughs and agrees, saying: "A nightclub: THE PENTAGON!" The Queer State does not interact with its audience in such an open manner, instead shutting down and bristling at unplanned questions they ask.

While one of the original archival videos held at the Media Burn archive documents the rally as having happened before the nightclub speech on the same events, I included them in the reverse order in the edit's timeline. This was intended to create a subplot of Joan Jett Blakk's campaign developing from a small, slightly stilted and unsure to-camera performance, to a much more confident and fiery public speech and, finally, a busy rally where campaign staff are visible. Another intervention into the nature of this archival video is that I edited some parts of the rally into a split-screen. This was a decision made partly from a practical perspective: the archival video documenting the rally and nightclub speech is 48minutes long unedited, and my film was planned to be approximately 30 minutes long.¹⁴ A split-screen allowed me to include more footage in a shorter duration, but also allowed for the 'feeling' of the archival video to be communicated to the audience without showing the entire rally (see Figure 62). This resulted in

¹⁴ A 30 minute duration would allow for entry to a large number of short film festivals, whereas a duration of 40 minutes and up would leave the film in the a range between a short and feature film causing difficulties for distribution.

the ability to concurrently show parts of the speech, the audience and panel reacting to the speech, the campaign volunteers setting up the rally, Joan Jett Blakk meeting attendees and blowing out a large pink cake representing the Capitol building in Washington.

At times the dialogue is difficult to hear because the camera moves a lot and the hall the rally is held in is busy, so I processed the sound to make her voice clearer and distinguish it from the background noise. Some sections of speech remain muffled and difficult to make out on the first few listens, particularly when the camera does not remain on her face and lip reading is prevented. I decided to subtitle these clips for viewers who are hard of hearing and, subsequently, subtitled the entire film for accessibility. In these editing interventions I did not wish to make the footage seem more professional or slick but, instead, I wanted to ensure that the ‘drop’ in quality from the sound in the original footage would not be a barrier for an audience less familiar with the footage. Schoonover (2020) notes that:

“The documentation of Blakk’s campaign stump speeches comes in glorious imperfection, analogue video tape footage showing off an intentionally unpolished aesthetic. In this way, the shrill energy, playful scandalmongering, and sloppy fun of Queer Nation’s actual history erupts into the high-polish classicism of *Expulsion*’s Queer State. These two visions of queer disruption are brought side by side.”



Figure 62: A speech and rally are edited in a split-screen to represent the energy and scale of the event in a shorter duration.

If chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010) is the heteronormative passing of time facilitated by institutions that are tailor made for heterosexual families, and LGBTQ+ people experience time outside of these normative structures, then it follows that queer film would present time differently. *Expulsion* does not try to mimic a natural flow of time; indeed, there is little sense of time within the film and it is not clear how long the applicants have been going through their application process. It is also not made clear how long the Queer State has existed and where it exists. As the film cuts from these ambiguous settings to the archival footage, there are no attempts made to anchor the viewer in this leap across time periods and places. These cuts to archival footage do not function like the familiar flashback or flash-forward; it moves from fiction to a document, and back again, without the aim of exposition and plot-advancement.

If homonormativity is the “new neoliberal sexual politics” (Duggan, 2003), does queering cinematic time allow for LGBTQ+ narratives to resist, reject or exist outside of homonormativity? Schoonover and Galt (2016) say that “queer temporality contains the

capacity to resist the certainty of a neoliberal globalized future.” The interjection of archival footage in *Expulsion* shifts the film’s spatial and temporal space, creating an alternative to forward-driven narrative development and allowing for queer history to sit alongside imaginings of queer futures. In doing so, the interruption of archival footage acts as an alternative to the neoliberal impulses of mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema and resists the forward-momentum of capitalism’s co-opting of queerness. Centring LGBTQ+ history and community activism in the film’s narrative brings the archival footage to a new audience, one that might not have sought out this footage or known where to look for it. In communicating LGBTQ+ history in this manner, *Expulsion* demonstrates a technique that can create alternatives to homonormative cinematic temporalities.

Re-telling queer history through Arthur Evans

In this section, I will examine the re-telling of radical queer history as a scriptwriting technique that advances the field of queer filmmaking. After my site-visit to the Crawford Art Gallery, I decided I could use the lecture theatre as a scene in which the Historian presents an overview of queer history, with the participants raising dissent through questions about the state’s ideology. I was inspired by the debate scenes in *120 BPM* where ACT UP Paris’ democratic meetings were recreated, with the activists expressing agreement with the speaker on the floor by snapping their fingers or raising dissent by hissing. While the ACT UP meetings were open and egalitarian, the Queer State’s lecture is held only for the two applicants and there is a clear hierarchy. This is most evident when the Head of State, impatient and irritated with the applicants’ earnest questions and the Historian airing doubts about the Queer State’s methods, shuts down the session with a wave of the hand and says tersely “we’re going to have to move

on, unfortunately.” While the lecture theatre in *120 BPM* was full of activism and dissent, the lecture theatre in *Expulsion* is bureaucratic and controlled. However, the Historian still delivers a paraphrased and summarised reading of Arthur Evans *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (1978), accidentally demonstrating how far the Queer State has strayed from its founding beliefs. *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* undertakes a queer overhaul of history:

“[Evans] uncovers the hidden mythic link between homosexuality and paganism in an elegy for the world of sex and magic vanquished by Christian civilization. From Joan of Arc to the Cathars and the underground worshippers of Diana, the author shows how every upwelling of gender transgression and sexual freedom was targeted by the authorities for total and often violent repression or appropriation. The concluding manifesto calls for pagan reconnection with the living world, the creation of armed anarchist cells, and the destruction of industrial civilization” (Burning Books, n.d.).

While my abbreviated summary cannot communicate the full complex history present in *Witchcraft*, it aims to describe how Christianity, industrialisation and capitalism have successfully led to nature being viewed as a resource and, thus, our connection to nature broken. This information is presented by the Historian as the Queer State’s impetus for establishing itself. The Historian confirms the applicants’ doubts about the application process as they question the impossibility of sustaining some of the more utopian ideas of queer politics (no borders, no hierarchies, etc.) in our global world of capitalism. The second applicant comments on the hypocrisy of the Queer State, asking: “How can you criticise bureaucracy while we go through this opaque application process?”

While I had intended, or hoped, for these scenes to mirror the debate scenes in *120 BPM*, they do not have a similar dynamism. Unfortunately, my lighting plan for the scene had to be improvised on the day because the huge skylight in the room was stuck closed due to a mechanical error and could not be fixed in time for the shoot. Without the only natural light

source, the room was extremely dark. This resulted in me spending more time setting up lighting and adjusting the camera than I had planned for. On a scriptwriting level, I quickly realised that a ‘lecture’ format is not very exciting and that I should have foreseen it as being heavy and dry. I also spent a long time attempting to achieve the full monologue in single takes, believing that this would create an urgency to the scene, which unnecessarily pressured the actor because, ultimately, I ended up cutting into the scene in post-production. However, with a limited amount of time left to film with the actors, I tried to achieve something worthwhile, but was overall disappointed with the end result.

However, I believe that the technique of integrating a queer historian’s radical writings—both in a political and historical sense—allows an LGBTQ+ film to act as a counterpoint to ahistorical and apolitical homonormativity. While queer history is often contested, this scene unapologetically presents it in a didactic manner while rejecting neoliberal politics of consumption. Rather than attempting to show a ‘happy’ or ‘positive’ image of queers that is socially acceptable, the Historian angrily criticises Christianity’s persecution of women and LGBTQ+ people and condemns the violence carried out in the church’s name against them. In the sprawling references made in the lecture scenes, I attempted to link them with the other themes of the film, such as environmental concerns. Ellie O’Byrne (2020) notes that “*Expulsion* connects the patriarchal dominance of the Holy Roman Empire, the oppression of women and queer people, and a capitalist superstructure focussed on exploiting the earth's resources.” Ultimately, the Queer State’s intransigence, when faced with applicants’ dissent, demonstrates the state’s failure to be the utopia it claims to be:

“The history of actually realized utopian enclaves is, from a dominant perspective, a history of failures. Hope and disappointment operate within a dialectical tension in this notion of queer utopia. Queerness’s failure is temporal and [...] potentially utopian, and

inasmuch as it does not adhere to straight time, interrupting its protocols, it can be an avant-garde practice that interrupts the here and now.” (Muñoz, 2009).

Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson, 3min 38sec, 2020.



Figure 63: Still from *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson*

Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson (3min 38sec, 2020) is a video piece I filmed in the Crawford Art Gallery at the same time as *Expulsion*. Originally written as a scene contained within *Expulsion* (see Appendix 2), I separated it from the script to become its own video. Writing the video with the aim of re-claiming the historic figure Dr James Barry as a trans icon, the script instructions for the actors state:

“The scene is trying to articulate the importance of LGBTQI+ history and fostering a sense of LGBTQI+ genealogy, while emphasising how often it is interfered with by straight/homophobic/transphobic historians and writers.”

The video is in the form of a documentation of a tour given by the fictional Queer State. The Queer State uses a painting by neo-classical artist James Barry, Dr James Barry’s uncle, to tell

a story of trans identity with links to the Crawford's collection (see Figure 63). One of Barry's paintings in the Crawford's collection (*The Prince of Wales in the Guise of St George*, c.1789-90) was part of the artist's estate sold at auction after his death, and the proceeds were divided between his sister (the mother of Dr James Barry) and his brother. His sister relocated to London and used these funds to support the medical studies of Dr James Barry in Edinburgh.



Figure 64: James Barry, *Portraits of Barry and Burke in the Characters of Ulysses and his Companion fleeing from the Cave of Polyphemus*, c.1776, oil on canvas, 127 x 102 cm.

However, it was another painting by Barry that captured my attention and which resonated strongly my project's themes: *Portraits of Barry and Burke in the Characters of Ulysses and his Companion fleeing from the Cave of Polyphemus*, c.1776 (see Figure 64). I was struck by the cyclops in the painting having an empty eye socket akin to the "bloody hole in your forehead" that I had written for the opening voice-over. I saw the 'silencing' finger as being both how Dr James Barry probably lived with the fear of being 'outed' and as a symbol of the erasure of his identity in recent times. I had shot the video with the plan of it being installed on

a monitor in the same room that the painting was displayed in the Crawford Art Gallery's permanent collection, functioning as a queer intervention into the museum's collection.¹⁵ I had wanted the 'queer exhibition' to spill out into the stately permanent collection wing and for visitors to mistake the video for a real documentation of a curator's tour of the museum. The script says:

HEAD OF STATE

"This painting is by the artist James Barry. It depicts Ulysses fleeing from the cyclops Polyphemus. Barry painted himself as the figure in blue, being cautioned for his outspoken views. After his death, a lot of his paintings and drawings were sold at auction, the proceeds of which went to his siblings. His sister used these funds for the education of her child, James Miranda Barry, who was born in Cork and went on to become a surgeon and the fourth doctor to successfully accomplish a C-section with the mother and child surviving."

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

"Dr James Miranda Barry was assigned female at birth, but he lived his entire adult life as a man. He was referred to with male pronouns; he requested his body not be stripped when he died in 1865; even his doctor noted him as male on his death certificate. Some accounts state he dressed as a boy from the age of 11 or 12. While the terminology didn't exist at the time, today we would recognise him as being trans. He is written about by straight historians as if he was a woman who masqueraded as a man in order to achieve an education and career that was not accessible for women at the time. However, being inaccurately hailed as "Britain's first female physician" ignores his transgender identity. Instead, he was the first trans physician."

¹⁵ In 2021, *Expulsion* was acquired to become part of the Crawford's permanent collection.

HEAD OF STATE

“Dr James Miranda Barry is our symbolic figurehead, representing both queer individual's tenacity and achievements, and the subsequent disavowal of these by the myopic gatekeepers of history.”



Figure 65: The Historian gives the applicants a history of Dr James Barry in *Retelling*.

While the video begins as an art history tour, it becomes an induction into the state's ideology for the two applicants (see Figure 65). In *Expulsion*, the applicant who is accepted to the Queer State chooses the name 'James Miranda Barry' for their new identity, and is played by gender fluid performer Maoilíosa Scott. In this way, *Expulsion* and *Retelling* function as companion pieces, with *Retelling* continuing *Expulsion's* critique of historical narratives that exclude or obscure LGBTQ+ people and their important political and societal contributions. However,

Retelling extends this criticism to include popular media¹⁶ with the Historian concluding in the video that:

“This is, of course, not the first time that straight historians and the popular media have erased a historical figure's queerness or trans identity. Dr James Barry is one of many queer and trans historical and cultural figures that have been heterosexualized and forced into the gender binary in order to facilitate the exploitation of their stories for profit” (Gaffney, 2020b).

In an *Introduction to Transgender Studies*, Ardel Haefele-Thomas (2019) compiles a detailed account of Dr James Barry’s life, drawing attention to his accomplishments in improving medical treatment and reforming dangerous medical practices, and noting where ambiguity remains (for example, the exact year of his birth). *Retelling* references this research in an aim to instigate a change in how Dr James Barry is discussed in his birth county of Cork. In an interview with the Irish Examiner journalist Ellie O’Byrne (2020), the argument for acknowledging Dr James Barry’s trans identity was presented as something which “we may never know the truth” about:

“[...] a new controversy surrounding Dr Barry has arisen: is he (or she, born Margaret Ann Bulkley, niece of the painter James Barry) a feminist icon, forced to disguise herself as a man to follow a career in medicine, or is he what we would now describe as trans? Books and TV programmes have described Dr Barry as a female masquerading as a man, but RTÉ came under fire earlier this year for including Dr Barry in their *Herstory: Ireland's Epic Women* series, with trans activists accusing the national broadcaster of misgendering and “deadnaming” Dr Barry. To artist and filmmaker Kevin Gaffney, it's clear that Dr Barry was what we would describe today as a trans person. “I can understand why people want to claim him as a feminist icon, because that time was so hostile to women's rights and women's ability to work, but I still think that erases his transness,” Gaffney says. “The terminology didn't exist at the time, so of course James Barry wouldn't have said that he was trans. But if he was alive today, we would say he was trans. He requested that when he died, his body not be stripped. I think it's quite clear that he didn't want to be regarded as anything except a man.”

¹⁶ A veiled reference to the novel *Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of her Time* (Michael du Preez & Jeremy Dronfield, 2016) which positions James Barry as a woman disguised as a man in both the title and book description.



Figure 66: Installation of *Retelling* and James Barry's painting at the Crawford Art Gallery, 2020.

Despite my referencing of academic research about Dr James Barry to the journalist and in the video work's credits, the newspaper felt it necessary to frame the topic as a debate. Yet, the title of the article (*Reclaiming Cork doctor James Barry as a trans icon*) is paraphrased from my intention for the video work, as spoken to the journalist. While the newspaper left some open-endedness to the issue, I believe I had successfully reframed the conversation around Dr James Barry, at least for a short while. Aware of the argument that “the most convincing lesbian, gay, and queer historiographic film and media work has [refrained] from imposing current-day language on archival images while permitting productive comparisons between representations from different decades” (Erhart, 1999), I wanted to draw attention to Dr James Barry's transness while acknowledging that terminology changes over time. Yet, *Retelling* is more didactic and assertive than attempts to “*queer* historical figures by examining how their private lives trouble ‘assumptions of heteronormativity’” (Bessette, 2017, emphasis in original). I made the decision for *Retelling* to be an action against transphobia in the media and academia, where issues of

trans identity are often derailed by prejudiced rhetoric painfully reminiscent of homophobic rhetoric and ‘homosexual panic’ during the 80s and 90s. Writing for *Art Monthly*, Chris Hayes (2020) observes this aim of the work:

“*Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson, 2020*, is a decidedly direct political intervention. The film is a deadpan counterpoint to sensationalist transphobia found in the media, showing a straightforward lecturer about the links between the Crawford collection and the erasure of the UK’s so-called ‘first female doctor’ by mainstream media and historians.”

Unfortunately, the area of the permanent collection holding the James Barry painting was due to be closed to the public for the duration of the exhibition because of social-distancing requirements. Curator Anne Boddeart and I decided to bring the painting into my exhibition space instead (see Figure 66). Because of covid, the painting was delayed on its return from a loan to a museum in Italy and was installed during the run of the exhibition. The neo-classical painting was positioned between *Retelling* and an older work (*Dusting, 2012*), in which I lick dust off the windows of a disused public ticket office in Prague, temporarily sitting in a queer context.

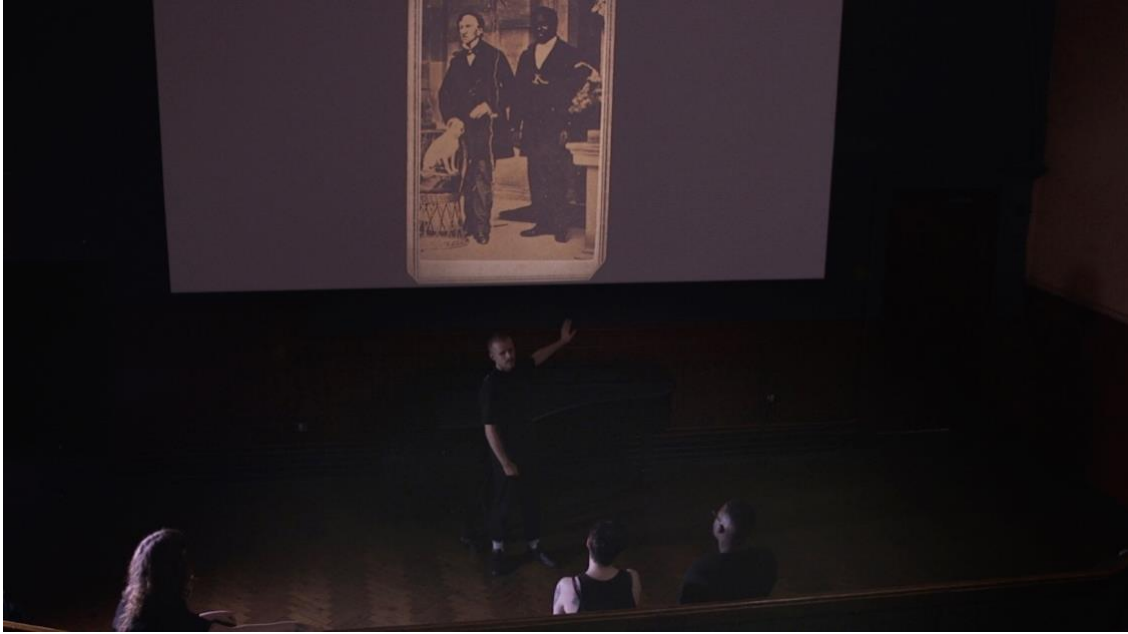


Figure 67: The Historian presents a photograph of Dr James Barry and John Joseph Danson in *Retelling*.

Retelling also critiques the institutional erasure of Black historical figures. Dr James Barry’s servant, John Joseph Danson, is prominent in one of only two known photos of Barry, yet is often dismissively referred to as ‘Black John’ in writings about Barry (see Figure 67). In *Retelling*, the Queer State declares that they have chosen Dr James Barry as their “symbolic figurehead.” The applicant who drew attention to the Queer State’s blind-spots and shortcomings in *Expulsion* does so again in *Retelling*: asking if Barry was in a relationship with Danson because they lived together until Barry’s death and what had happened to the servant after Barry’s death (see Figure 68). The Historian (a white man and a figure of authority within the Queer State) who had previously discussed Dr James Barry in detail, balks at the question, saying that he’s “not sure”. It is clear that the state dismissed Danson as *just* a servant and did not research him to a similar extent as Dr James Barry and had not considered that they could be in a queer relationship.

In this scene I wanted to highlight the racial blind spots of the Queer State and to acknowledge that reclaiming Dr James Barry as a figure of major significance to trans history does not erase problematic racial aspects of historical white queer icons. While researchers such as Haeefele-Thomas (2019) have acknowledged how Barry challenged injustices (for example, attempts to reform medical practices in South Africa while slavery was legal), he was also a benefactor of the colonial empire: receiving income from the British Military and travelling around the world under its protection. Alexander (1994) writes that:

“Radical lesbian and gay movements in metropolitan countries which have demystified heterosexuality, must now take on board analyses of colonization and imperialism, for the effects of these processes loop back to the centre from which they originated.”



Figure 68: One applicant asks uncomfortable questions about the Queer State’s blind spots.

While Barry was ‘othered’ because of his gender, and worked to improve conditions for impoverished people, his whiteness allowed him to succeed in the British Military as a doctor. I would argue that a doctor’s good practices and innovations do not counteract the damage

caused by the British colonial project's exploitation of a country's people and resources, which Barry's work was as a part of. Identifying Barry's work as 'helping' local and indigenous populations living under British rule risks repeating the colonial fallacy that these populations needed colonisation to 'modernise' when colonisation was extremely damaging environmentally and socially with reverberations that continue today. For example, the British imposition of anti-sodomy laws in India and on the African continent resulted in homophobia and prejudice, which endures to this day. Whatever *good* Dr James Barry achieved, it was carried out under the umbrella of the British empire, and these cannot be disentangled from each other for the sake of an inspiring story. With this in mind, the video ends on an ambiguous note, with the applicant responding to the Historian's earlier evasive answer, asking "so, all you know is that he was Black and his name was John?" The rhetorical question hangs in the air as the video fades out, intending to leave this critique for the audience to ponder. While the Queer State always has the last word in *Expulsion*, in *Retelling* the applicant has the last word; with a simple question pointing out the hypocrisy of the state functioning as another "gatekeeper of history".

Conclusion

This chapter identified the emerging queer filmmaking practice of using specifically LGBTQ+ archival footage within fictional film works. The archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk's campaign for the US Presidency in *Expulsion* acts as a hopeful counterpoint to the original footage's dystopian bureaucracy. *Expulsion* does not create the illusion of a steady flow of time that fictional filmmakers are accustomed to crafting. Unlike the common cinematic temporal devices of the flashback and flash-forward, *Expulsion* moves from fiction to historical document and

back again. The cuts to archival footage are not introduced or contextualised, besides the information spoken in the archival footage itself, leaving the viewer to make their own connections between the shifting time and space of the film. In contrast to a neoliberal and homonormative drive towards an apolitical epoch of LGBTQ+ consumer equality, *Expulsion* looks backwards to community activist work and bold political interventions. Positioning LGBTQ+ activists, in their own words, as central to a queer film's narrative acts as a reminder that advancements in LGBTQ+ rights were made because of the work and sacrifice of members of the community and not because of the benevolence of brands and capitalist-driven politicians.

While mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema's neoliberal motivations create a focus on relatable characters and positive representation in order to turn a profit, *Expulsion's* re-telling of Arthur Evans *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (1978) presents an angry criticism of Christianity's persecution of women and LGBTQ+ people. The 'positive' image of 'happy queers' is disrupted in a didactic manner as the damaging environmental impact of capitalism and industrialisation is condemned. Including a radical queer historian's writing (albeit, in paraphrased and summarised manner) acts as a further critique of the apolitical and ahistorical nature of homonormativity; rendering homonormativity as facile in the face of the history of persecution queers have faced. The interjections of archival footage and queer history in *Expulsion* act as interruptions, which create disturbances in the forward-momentum of both the film and capitalism's co-opting of queerness.

Finally, *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson* acts as an injection of queer history into the story of the Crawford Art Gallery's permanent collection. In a critical reflection of how the short video was reported on in the national press, *Retelling* successfully re-framed the narrative about Dr James Barry's identity, at least for a short while.

A post-colonial critique of Dr James Barry accounts for the ambiguous ending of the video, where a rhetorical question hangs in the air, unresolved for the audience. Similar to the didactic nature of the Historian's lecture in *Expulsion*, *Retelling* has an educational lecture in the form of an art tour. Both historical speeches aim to bring queer history to the forefront, and both scenes end with an Applicant to the state questioning a blind-spot or fallacy. In doing so, attention is drawn to how histories are constructed; similar to how the interjection of archival footage in *Expulsion* draws attention to how time is constructed within the film's diegesis. The queering of history and the queering of time within *Expulsion* and *Retelling* are achieved through the editing and scriptwriting techniques I have developed and examined here, and these can be used to generate both anti-homonormative cinema and alternatives to homonormative cinema.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

While there has been much in-depth Film Studies research into queer cinema, and homonormativity within mainstream cinema has been frequently critiqued, this research project aimed to contribute to knowledge by envisioning what an *anti-homonormative* form of queer cinema would look like and how it could be made. To address this gap in research, the following research questions were identified: how can a queer film act as a site for critique and transgression of homonormativity in cinema? And what new techniques and/or combination of techniques could be developed to allow queer characters and/or queer stories to resist assimilation into prevalent homonormative cinematic conventions? As these research questions span both Film Studies and filmmaking practice, in chapter one, *Queer filmmaking practice as a method of enquiry*, I developed an original combination of methodologies to address each facet of the research questions. This included practice-led research, textual analysis, critical reflection, and autoethnography. Critical reflections on my filmmaking process were written in two journals that were examined during the PhD write-up process. Autoethnography allowed me to identify and make visible my influences and background, which would otherwise function as invisible pressure points upon the practical film work.

In chapter two, *Homonormative cinema and queer strategies of resistance*, I examined the relationship between queer artist film, mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema, and how both relate to homonormativity and queerness. Using Queer Film Theory as the theoretical framework and Queer Theory texts to examine homonormativity, this chapter establishes prevalent homonormative conventions in contemporary mainstream cinema. This is achieved through the synthesising of research by Kagan (2018), Ng (2018), Griffiths (2016) and Kennedy (2014), and through original analyses of *Call me by Your Name*, *Pride* and *Stonewall*. The first

homonormative cinematic convention—identified in *Stonewall*—is the erasure or side-lining of LGBTQ+ people—both in terms of casting and historical veracity—in retellings of the LGBTQ+ rights struggle to appeal to a mainstream white, straight, cis audience. This approach appeases the marketplace's demand for homonormative narratives and demonstrates how homonormativity functions at both a commercial and textual level within mainstream cinema.

Building on research by Griffiths (2016), the second homonormative trope identified is the use of a conventionally attractive and gender-conforming white male to act as the identification focus for audience members. While this could be a strategy employed by directors to make LGBTQ+ history more accessible to straight audiences, it also results in a foregrounding of homonormative representation which risks alienating a queer audience that live outside of such conservative parameters. Third, the erasure and/or trivialising of trans people in LGBTQ+ historical narratives is noted as a recurring motif within *Stonewall* and *Boys Don't Cry*. Finally, mainstream cinema's homonormative framework minimises or erases trans people, Black people and people of colour in the LGBTQ+ community through various combinations of: a lack of meaningful roles; the skewing of historical narratives; and, the focus on white homonormative individuals and couples. Hollywood's representation of the LGBTQ+ rights movement is shown to largely be a co-opting of the LGBTQ+ rights movement, while diminishing Black, trans, and people of colour in a sanitised regurgitation of a radical history in order to be mass marketed to the white straight cis-gender consumer. However, both *Moonlight* and *Tangerine* achieved commercial and critical success, which demonstrates an audience's desire to watch stories other than that of the young white gay man coming out, or the young masculine white gay romance, or a straight saviour narrative.

120 BPM is discussed as a film that is unashamedly queer in its representation: showing collective action to raise awareness of safe sex for teenagers; recreating ACT UP Paris' protests; depicting friendships between queer men and women during the HIV/AIDS crisis; showing the political tensions within ACT UP; and, ultimately, foregrounding solidarity within the LGBTQ+ community. Like *Moonlight* and *Tangerine*, *120 BPM's* positive critical reception and decent box office turnover indicates that a cinema-going audience is interested in seeing *other* stories; in this case, the history of radical queer protests and the HIV/AIDS pandemic from a queer perspective, without needing the presence of a Tom Hanks or Matthew McConaughey to make it appealing or profitable. *120 BPM* intercutting of archival videos into its non-historic, fictional plot-driven drama is also analysed. The archival videos used were created by grassroots activists documenting ACT UP Paris' protests and actions, lending a sense of authenticity and history against which to read the original footage in the film and changing the nature of the archival footage from a historical document to become an integral part of an active text. The fictional space of the film is interrupted with the uncomfortable truth of the archival footage undercutting the audience's cinematic pleasure in the storytelling and cinematography. In this re-activation of the archival images, the important stories held within the archival footage are retold to a cinema going audience.

The chapter proceeds to compile existing strategies employed by queer filmmakers as researched by Schoonover and Galt (2016), Guy (2016), Kuzniar (2000) and Muñoz (1999). I discuss the use of Camp as a queer register in the work of Pedro Almodóvar and John Waters, referring to Meyer's (2004) writings on Camp. Almodóvar's use of Camp encourages laughter, removing tension for a straight audience while simultaneously acting as a knowing wink to a queer audience. Whereas Waters' work with *Divine* uses Camp in a more anarchic manner,

defying what both a straight and gay audience expects of a drag performance, aiming to disgust both. Thus, Camp is a register available to queer directors that can be employed to differing effects.

Trash, fags and pyromaniacs

Original analyses of *Knife + Heart*, *O Fantasma*, *Flaming Ears* and *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives* identify strategies and techniques that each film used to resist assimilation into the mainstream and confront or subvert homonormative cinematic representations or homonormativity itself. In *It is Not the Homosexual*, the director Rosa Von Praunheim rejects the audience's need for a 'relatable' main character and instead aims to make them as uncomfortable as possible through a castigating voiceover. By presenting conflicting messages through a loud and damning narration, the audience is forced to consider whether or not they agree with the narrator in an intentionally confusing and frustrating process. This technique draws the viewer's attention to the constructed and quasi-ethnographic nature of the film. *It is Not the Homosexual* confronts uncomfortable issues within the community about self-image and self-worth, with observations so cutting it could be seen as homophobic if it were not so clearly an "insider critique" (Kuzniar, 2000). In another oblique scene, the camera fetishises bikers while the voice-over condemns them, leaving the viewer on unsettled terrain, unsure if they are also being castigated for indulging in the voyeuristic cinematic pleasure or if, indeed, the bikers are somehow worthy of condemnation.

O Fantasma sets out to frustrate the viewer in a different way, constantly shifting Sergio's sexuality in an oblique narrative. We see Sergio, a bin collector, change from active to passive, from aggressive to playing at strangling himself, from sex with women to sex with men.

His character is not the empty cipher of Danny in *Stonewall*, but instead is purposefully inaccessible; we are not let into Sergio's inner world besides his sexual desires, of which there are many. Eschewing conventional plot-driven drama and both straight and queer romances, and mirroring how Sergio refuses to be pinned down, *O Fantasma* moves between cinematic forms: from arthouse cinema, to porn, to slow artist film. Unlike the characters in *Un Chant d'Amour* and *Querelle*, Sergio does not appear to be bound by the same social constraints of what constitutes masculinity or fearful of the social stigma around queer sex, particularly about being a bottom. Sergio's sexual desires intermingle with the trash he collects when he dresses in fetish gear and traverses a dump: his sexual excesses and the excess waste of the dump echo each other as he escapes into it; an open ending to an open-ended narrative.

While *Knife + Heart* is more narrative-driven than *O Fantasma*, it also focuses on uncontrollable sexual urges. It is analysed because of its comingling of sex, porn and death while merging Camp with horror, with a masked killer pursuing Anne, a queer woman who has a knack for making gay male porn. As with *Flaming Ears*, rapid tonal shifts destabilise the viewer's path through what would otherwise be a conventional murder mystery. Alongside the tonal shifts, the film moves between staged porn, unfolding drama, psychic visions and surreal sequences. Unlike the Hollywood films discussed—which attempt to segregate the LGBTQ+ categories for marketing purposes—*Knife + Heart* features the full spectrum of the community who perform for Anne in her porn recreations of the murders. There is a sense of resistance, and a perverse flippancy, in parodying the tragedy that is affecting their lives and which they have no control over. All the strands of the film conjoin in a penultimate scene where Anne enters a male cruising cinema and watches the porn she created about the murderer who is in the audience and who killed her friends and her lover. *Knife + Heart's* final act is a communal sex

scene which recalls the final scene in *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse*, with many naked queers lying around in a utopic space.

Except where *It is Not the Homosexual* was explicit in terms of its social commentary and critiques, *Knife + Heart's* final scene is ambiguous: Archibald (Anne's friend) is dressed as a faun and crawls around the queer men having sex, smiling to himself before smiling at Anne who is directing the scene. Anne turns to see her murdered lover, Lois, and they share a long-awaited kiss on screen. After Lois fades away, the lights turn down and Anne and Archibald share a long, quiet and inexplicable smile tinged with grief; the camera lingering on them and ambiguity filling the screen. The film ends on this open-ended, strangely peaceful, note that is a sharp contrast to the violent and tumultuous story that preceded it.

In *Flaming Ears*, lesbian Camp is paired with an original and always-changing mix of DIY aesthetics. *Flaming Ears* challenges the viewer through its form and content, with its lead character, Volley, revelling in performing nude and pursuing her passion for pyromania; a far cry from the wine-drinking suburbia of *The Kids are All Right*. As with Sergio in *O Fantasma*, Volley creates more anticipation in the film than the plot itself does and she also rejects traditional relationship structures, instead favouring spontaneous sexual encounters. While Jasbir Puar (2006) states that Robin Morgan almost advocates "lesbianism and a woman-centered world as the antidote to terrorism", a female and lesbian utopia has not manifested in *Flaming Ears*. Instead, the world is rife with shootings and general chaos. While *Flaming Ears* employs a similar register of hysterical Camp as a John Waters' film, it is not so narratively focused, nor is it as narratively loose as *O Fantasma*. It instead cuts rapidly to abstract scenes, floating imagery and montages which have obscure connections to the main storylines. Volley's dialogue often floats free from what is happening on screen; her outbursts do little to propel the

narrative but instead create loose associations between the characters and the dirt she colourfully describes. While Almodóvar and Waters use Camp as a device, their films still comfortably fit within narrative fiction, whereas *Flaming Ears*' cinematic form is as challenging and chaotic as its content.

Queer Filmmaking Practice: ethical ambiguity, nature, healing and slowness

Chapter three, *Developing an anti-homonormative filmmaking practice*, details this project's research findings through strategies and techniques that I developed, following a practice-led research methodology, to address how queer filmmaking practice can create a framework for anti-homonormative cinema. This is achieved through a critical reflection of *Expulsion*, a 30 minute experimental film investigating queerness and homonormativity within the fictional set-up of a queer nation state. *Expulsion* provides the dominant evidence of this project's research findings. I wanted my fictional Queer State to incorporate Queer Nation's "camp counternationality" (Berlant and Freeman, 1992) while also failing (prior to the film's timeline) to be an opposing force, becoming instead just another nation state which prioritises *the nation* as "a unifying impulse" over *the queer* which "undermines identity categories" (Macleod, 2018). While Queer Film Studies have examined homonormativity in cinema, this chapter contributes to knowledge by providing detailed insight to the tacit knowledge of a queer filmmaker's practice and research process, and by identifying ways in which homonormativity can be challenged on both a scriptwriting and conceptual level. The chapter examined three of *Expulsion's* motifs: the Queer State's bureaucracy; meditative and introspective scenes; and, surreal and sexual happenings.

The first research finding is a technique developed to enable *Expulsion* to act as a site for critique and transgression of homonormativity in cinema: the direct address and critique of homonormativity at a scriptwriting level and on-screen. In the film's final scene, the Head of State delivers 'expulsion advice' to a rejected applicant to the state, in which she advises him to pursue a homonormative lifestyle and personality in order to succeed, and be accepted, in his home state. While the Head of State delivers her advice on 'becoming homonormative' she simultaneously skewers it, acidly reflecting on social expectations and media representations which corral LGBTQ+ characters into narrow archetypes and perpetual consumers. Yet, the applicants are being expelled in an authoritarian manner by the Queer State. Thus, Duggan's writing on homonormativity is problematised in the context of this scene: the words appear cruel and demeaning; yet they function both as a critique of homonormativity's anti-queerness and a critique of the Queer State's staunch anti-homonormative stance. In doing so, I wanted to create a tension between both polarities and raise a question about the impossibility of ideological purity; one that would stay with the viewer as it is the film's final scene.

Through the Queer State covertly denouncing homonormativity, while espousing it for rejected applicants, the viewer is made aware that the Queer State views homonormativity as a lesser ideal than queerness, i.e. one which is beneath their own citizens. Yet, despite this condescension, the Queer State's criticisms of capitalism are a valid—and urgent, considering the climate crisis—critique of neoliberal homonormativity. Thus, the film asks the viewer to consider the vexed relationship between homonormativity and queerness and to re-examine each character's reasoning in the ethically probing scenes that have passed. Two such scenes are when two applicants are interviewed by the Head of State and another state representative, the Historian, to determine if they will be allowed to remain in the Queer State. The interview scenes

were intended to satirise nation states' ridiculous parameters for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers while also implying that the fictional Queer State had taken on traditional trappings of power. Applicant 2 is rejected, with the implication being that he unknowingly dissents from the state's prescribed notion of queerness. The Queer State thus forecloses the possibility of him *becoming queer*, which should be contrary to queerness' promise of transformation and a lack of respect for hierarchical definitions. In having two white characters reject a Black character, I was attempting to create a self-reflexive and critical moment within the film about the treatment of racial diversity in majority-white Western LGBTQ+ cinema through how the Queer State creates space for *some* citizens at the expense of others. Later, Applicant 2, in turn, rejects the state and their judgements.

When the Queer State allows the accepted applicant the possibility of changing their name and demonstrates respect for gender difference, the Queer State is—on the surface—offering freedom or emancipation for the applicants. Yet, in order to achieve this, the applicant must destroy their papers from their home state, demonstrating that the Queer State has a clear hierarchy in which even accepted applicants have the lesser power. In retaining an “unresolved ambivalence towards the Queer State's justifications and its practices” (Schoonover, 2020) and presenting each character with little backstory and no names, I aimed to foreclose the familiar cinematic experience of relating to a character, instead creating uncertainty to encourage the viewer to keep questioning the characters' and state's motivations.

The second research finding is a technique that situates environmental concerns at the centre of queerness, in opposition to homonormative values. Since homonormativity is intertwined with neoliberal capitalism, which favours individualism and consumerism, there is the potential for queerness to reject those values and to position environmental activism at the

centre of queerness. As neoliberal capitalism leads to the destruction of our planet, queerness can critique homonormativity and problematise the respectability politics of homonormativity; as complicity with the destruction of nature is surely not respectable. Thus, centring the environment in queer film becomes a method through which homonormativity can be critiqued. Putting this into practice through queer filmmaking involves centring the environment in the film's script, visuals and/or plot.

Expulsion aimed to centre environmental issues within queer values and identity through the opening sequence which displayed a flag for the Queer State (an amalgam of LGBTQ+ rights symbols and colours) being carried through a former quarry as a voice-over condemns the destruction of our natural environment. It is implied that the Queer State was founded partly from an urge to protect the environment from the destructive force of capitalism. This theme is further explored, in a more didactic manner, in a later scene where the Historian gives a lecture on the damage that industrialisation and Christianity have done to our relationship to nature.

The third research finding is a technique that has the potential to create alternatives to mainstream cinema's storylines that focus on outside-approval (such as the 'coming out' story), by focusing on the process of self-acceptance. While the 'coming out' plot was important for LGBTQ+ visibility, it has become a lazy homonormative motif for LGBTQ+ characters to gain approval from their (straight) family and peers. Rather than raising awareness of specific LGBTQ+ issues, it can often act as a virtue-signal for how progressive the straight characters are. Unlearning societal homophobia and transphobia, and navigating damaging mainstream media messages, are often constant lifelong processes for LGBTQ+ people. In the meditation scene, I have developed an alternative in which the catalyst for a character's growth can be self-acceptance, and this can happen regardless of the outside approval that 'coming out' can

provide. When the Head of State cradles the Historian's head in her lap, she leads him on "an induction cleanse" —a guided meditation—which is presented as a Queer State "ritual to free you from any internalised homophobia, transphobia and self-loathing."

In contrast to the individualised nature of homonormativity, I wanted this scene to show the community supporting each other to heal from and reject internalised homophobia and transphobia. In doing so, they are striving for a form of self-acceptance outside of the parameters set by the heterosexual majority and parts of the LGBTQ+ community who often see homonormativity as the only—or, at least, the easiest—means of gaining acceptance. This tender exchange is an outlier in a film where characters mostly navigate landscapes and bureaucracy alone, and where interactions revolve around intellectual and political concerns.

Chapter two noted that the majority of big-budget or mainstream Western LGBT cinema tends to focus on one segment of the LGBTQ+ spectrum individually, which is at odds with the intersectional nature of most of the LGBTQ+ community. Taking inspiration from independent films such as *120 BPM* and *Knife + Heart*, this scene shows a loving, emotionally intimate friendship between two segments of the community with the aim of providing an alternative to homonormative representations. I had written this monologue from my own experience, recounting sensations and visuals I had experienced when distressed and during meditations I use to soothe myself. While most of the text explores waves of emotions with abstract descriptors, the Head of State directs the Historian to locate a particular memory, saying, "you see another you in there, scuttling in shame, naked, humiliated." In previous films I had written from this place intending to share or reveal these difficult thoughts and feelings. However, with this scene, I tried sharing a strategy that possibly could be used by other people, one that could be useful for an audience beyond simply relating to it.

The fourth research finding was built upon my existing filmmaking practice, and it proposes using surreal scenes to interrupt the flow of a narrative and/or to complicate the meaning of images on both sides of the scene. In *Expulsion*, a film mostly focused on statehood, images of a man in a rubber dog mask are presented as otherworldly interjections without explanation or context. Knowing the film would first be shown in the Crawford Art Gallery, I intended for these images to create an unsettled feeling for the audience that would permeate the gallery as the quiet, dialogue-free scenes played. The dog-man scenes are “narratively inconsequential time” (Schoonover, 2012), yet they allow for the possibility of queer sexuality to exist outside of the rest of the film, which is mostly focused on regulations and categories. Similar to how the cinematography in *O Fantasma* lingered unhurriedly, the scenes of the dog-man are extremely slow and quiet; an atmosphere building without a clear narrative aim. Just as “queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, wasted productivity” (Schoonover, 2012), both Sergio and the dog-man exist outside of efficiency and productivity, enjoying waste as they waste our time. Similar to how Sergio ‘dehumanised’ himself in the dump in *O Fantasma*, the dog-man conceals his face and lies atop a pile of logs in an old barn and pleasures himself alone amongst trees at night.

Re-presenting the archive and re-telling history

In chapter four, *Queer(ing) time*, theories of ‘queer time’ and ‘straight time’ were examined alongside existing techniques used by filmmakers and artists to re-frame general archival footage. I identified the following existing established practices of incorporating authentic archival footage into a film as a means of summoning the past: documentary films inclusion of subject-specific archival footage; essay films use of varied archival sources and private archival

material; compilation films that string loose narratives through clips from film archives; and, fictional and experimental documentaries by contemporary artists made entirely of archival footage. The chapter then establishes the emerging queer filmmaking practice of using specifically LGBTQ+ archival footage within fictional works through a critical reflection of *Far from the reach of the sun*, a film I made in 2018, which includes archival footage of LGBTQ+ people's resistance through personal and collective resilience.

Far from the reach of the sun is an experimental, speculative fiction about a pill that can alter one's sexuality for life or for temporary pleasure. The film contains archival footage from *The Pink Pulpit* (1996), a student video documentary about the creation of a church set up by LGBTQ+ people in Manchester. The original footage uses the idea of a fictional pill to critique gay conversion 'therapy', and the people in the archival footage discuss suicide attempts, self-loathing and forced exorcisms as a result of organised religion. The intercutting of the archival footage introduces a temporal shift from an undefined future to the 90s, and a spatial shift from an undefined location to Manchester. Unlike *120 BPM* (which stretched the archival footage to fill the cinematic frame), the archival footage from *The Pink Pulpit* is kept in its original video aspect ratio (4:3), with the frame shrinking from the original footage (shot in anamorphic 2.35:1), interrupting the viewer's absorption into the film and drawing attention to the film's compiled nature. I suggest this filmmaking practice expresses solidarity in anger across queer history. Juxtaposed with the archival footage, the political undercurrents of the fictional scenes in both films are heightened. The form of each film becomes unstable, along with the viewer's relationship to them: an audience's expectation or desire to passively consume the film as a traditional drama or documentary becomes frustrated.

In this chapter, the research findings are presented through the definition of three techniques that present time differently to challenge the forward-momentum of neoliberal homonormative cinema, and are discussed through the development of scriptwriting, editing techniques and strategies of resistance that advance the field by creating the framework for an anti-homonormative cinema. *Expulsion* does not mimic a natural flow of time; indeed, there is little sense of time within the film and it is not clear how long the applicants have been going through their application process. It is also not made clear how long the Queer State has existed and where it exists.

The first research finding identified in this chapter is an editing technique that encourages connections with LGBTQ+ history; examined through the intercutting of archival footage of Joan Jett Blakk in *Expulsion*, which appears at four separate points throughout the film. Joan Jett Blakk's use of Camp as a tool for subversion acts as a joyous and anarchic counterpoint from the past to the bureaucratic fictional Queer State of the future. I made several interventions into the nature of the archival footage: first, by presenting events in a different sequence within my film; second, by editing a political rally into a split-screen; and, third, by cleaning up the sound recording to render dialogue more legible. As the film cuts from ambiguous fictional settings to the archival footage, there are no attempts made to anchor the viewer in these leaps across time periods and places. These cuts to archival footage do not function like the familiar flashback or flash-forward; it moves from fiction to a document, and back again, without the aim of exposition and plot-advancement.

120 BPM's use of archival footage created a temporal shift within its narrative, and *Far from the reach of the sun's* archival footage created a temporal shift and a divergence in subject matter. In *Expulsion*, the archival footage shifts the film's temporal space to contrast our current

neoliberal/homonormative and apolitical epoch of LGBTQ+ consumer equality with the community activist work and bold political interventions of Joan Jett Blakk and Queer Nation. This creates an alternative to forward-driven narrative development and allows for queer history to sit alongside imaginings of queer futures. In doing so, the interruption of archival footage acts as an alternative to the neoliberal impulses of mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema and resists the forward-momentum of capitalism's co-opting of queerness. In communicating LGBTQ+ history in this manner, *Expulsion* demonstrates a technique that can create alternatives to homonormative cinematic conventions. Each of these films centre LGBTQ+ history and community activism through the use of archival footage and bring this footage to a new audience, one that might not have sought it out or known where to look for it.

The second research finding is the development of a scriptwriting technique that encompasses queer history at a scriptwriting level and embeds it in the film's narrative; examined through *Expulsion's* concise re-telling of Arthur Evans' *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*. In contrast to mainstream LGBTQ+ cinema's neoliberal motivations to create a focus on relatable characters and positive representation in order to turn a profit, the Historian presents a paraphrased and summarised reading of Arthur Evans' indignant criticism of Christianity's persecution of women and LGBTQ+ people throughout history. I had intended, or hoped, for these scenes to mirror the debate scenes in *120 BPM*, but they do not have a similar dynamism. While my execution of this technique leaves much room for improvement, I believe that the re-telling of queer history within a film has the potential to critique the apolitical and ahistorical nature of homonormativity and—if improved upon—could push back against the depoliticisation of LGBTQ+ issues in cinema. This scene unapologetically presents queer history,

which is often contested, in a didactic manner while rejecting capitalism and our estrangement from nature.

The third research finding is a strategy of re-claiming queer history from mainstream narrative framings and is discussed through a 3 minute 30 second video piece titled *Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson*. The short video acts as an injection of queer history into the story of the Crawford Art Gallery's permanent collection and aims to re-claim Irish-born Dr James Barry as a trans icon (as opposed to—as popular novels frame the story—a 'woman who dressed up as a man'). When writing the script, I decided *Retelling* would be an action against transphobia in the media and academia, where issues of trans identity are often derailed by prejudiced rhetoric painfully reminiscent of homophobic rhetoric and 'homosexual panic' during the 80s and 90s. The video's script was heavily informed by research by Haefele-Thomas (2019) and aimed to foreground trans research. This strategy of intervening in a debate utilised my platform as an artist (given to me by the Crawford Art Gallery) and allowed for the work to act as a provocative 'reclaiming' of Dr James Barry, benefiting from the gravitas of the Crawford's reputation. This chapter analysed the short video at a scriptwriting level in relation to trans representation and a post-colonial legacy.

Retelling was filmed in the Crawford at the same time as *Expulsion* and is in the form of a documentation of a tour given by the fictional Queer State to the two applicants. The Queer State uses a painting by neo-classical artist James Barry, Dr James Barry's uncle, to tell a story of trans identity with links to the Crawford's permanent collection. *Retelling* also critiques the institutional erasure of Black historical figures. Dr James Barry's servant, John Joseph Danson, is prominent in one of only two known photos of Barry, yet is often dismissively referred as 'Black John' in writings about Barry. The video ends after the rejected Applicant asks the

Historian if all he knows about the servant was “that he was Black and his name was John?” This simple scene highlights the racial blind spots of the Queer State and acknowledges that reclaiming Dr James Barry as a figure of major significance to trans history does not erase problematic racial aspects of historical white queer icons. While researchers have acknowledged how Barry challenged injustices (for example, attempts to reform medical practices in South Africa while slavery was legal, in Haeefele-Thomas, 2019) he was also a benefactor of the colonial empire: receiving income from the British Military and travelling around the world under its protection.

While the Queer State makes sure it always has the last word in *Expulsion*, in *Retelling* the Applicant has the last word; with a simple question pointing out the hypocrisy of the Queer State functioning as another “gatekeeper of history”. While the video suffers from the same pacing issues as the historical lecture scenes, it was featured in the Irish Examiner in a piece titled *Reclaiming Cork doctor James Barry as a trans icon*, meaning that I had successfully reframed the conversation around Dr James Barry, at least for a short while. *Expulsion*, as an experimental queer short film distributed through museums, experimental film festivals and academia, demonstrates that alternatives to homonormative characters and storylines, the critique of homonormativity and the re-telling of LGBTQ+ history can find an audience outside of the commercial film industry. The techniques and strategies developed here contribute to knowledge about queer filmmaking practice and how it can confront homonormativity on conceptual, scriptwriting, and performance levels, providing a framework for what an anti-homonormative filmmaking practice could be and how it can operate. While these contributions advance the field of queer filmmaking, further research would benefit from a specifically trans perspective on filmmaking practice and trans representation on screen.

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Un Chant d'Amour (1950). Directed by Jean Genet. France: Connoisseur Video.

Young Soul Rebels (1991). Directed by Isaac Julien. UK: BFI.

Appendix 1: Statement of creative intent

Towards a Queer State, 26/10/2018.

“Some of us have always been human, while others of us need to be recognized as human by those who were always already human” (Schoonover and Galt, 2016).

While homonormativity aims to gain acceptance to heterosexual society through the assimilation to heteronormative institutions, signs and power-structures, queerness aims for a radical re-imagining of - and liberation from - the hierarchies and binaries imposed on citizens in society. What would a queer society look like? Would it be free of the gender-binary, an anti-capitalist society with citizens living in harmony with the environment?

In my film there will be a “Queer State” where people apply for citizenship, with priority given to LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees. To become a citizen of the Queer State one undergoes a rigorous test of one’s queerness, where a result of ‘+20% homonormative’ leads to a refusal of the application on the grounds that integration with the queer population will be impossible. The applicant is then referred to re-join their heterosexual state and are offered guidance on acceptable expressions of their sexuality and identity.

This Queer State was achieved through queer terrorism and civil unrest, yet it is now a mecca for queer people, where society self-regulates and there is no police force – although there is militarised border guards as a necessary precaution. The Queer State is disparagingly referred to as a ‘gay ghetto’ internationally, yet is self-sustainable with clean energy, legal sex work, free sustainable condoms and sanitary products, free PEP and PrEP, recreational drugs are legal, and alternatives to capitalism are constantly being explored and tested. Neighbouring states - once considered the bastions of gay rights - have infiltrated the Queer State with spies to spread discontent, report on developments and push for a regime change from a radical queer society to a concentrated capitalist Pink Pound hub.

Due to the steady influx of citizens to a Queer State, citizens are not expected to reproduce to sustain the population. Complementary therapy is available for citizens to heal traumas resulting from time spent in heterosexual society, with advertisements asking the rhetorical question: “Have you been a victim of the patriarchy?” If a citizen wishes to raise a

child, they are made aware that the child will be targeted by spies and outside fundamentalists' campaign to 'save the innocent'. However, the parent and child will have the full support and protection of the community and, if the child grows up to be heterosexual, they are welcome to stay as full citizens. Future integration issues of heterosexual citizens born in the state are unknown as no children have been raised outside of a heteronormative society.

Archival footage intercuts this original footage in order to show historical precedence for a Queer State, and to act as pseudo-historical documents of the formation of the state. The archival footage will also act as a counter-point to the utopian ideal of a Queer State, emphasising how impossible these ideas are currently and the contradictions between queerness and how our society currently operates.

“[While] utopianism was essential to re-visioning society, it has also been used to avoid social reality” (Straayer, 1996).

As a Queer State develops, and the society there becomes more insulated, what happens to radical queer politics? As an oppositional and disruptive force, what is there left for “queer” to achieve? What would queerness look like then? In order to answer the research questions and to examine the above questions I will devise the characters to represent different positions of agency and political alignment: one will be relieved to have been accepted to the queer state; one will be in the process of applying and will be rejected; one will have lived there for a long time and will have a growing sense of discontentment and dissenting opinion; and the last will be an agent from another state, performing a queer identity while believing in the superiority of their state's homonormative politics and identity.

Appendix 2: Film script

I leave the rest of me behind (working title)

Written by

Kevin Gaffney

8th July 2019, WITH CAMERA INSTRUCTIONS

EXT. AVOCA MINES- DAY

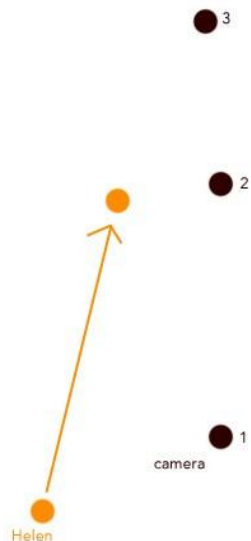
Young woman holding the Queer State flag walks purposefully through the landscape, the flag billowing as she waves it slowly.

HISTORIAN/MYSTIC

(Voice-over)

This desolate space.
Consumed, destruction of previous governments
And capitalist citizens.
You cut down the trees so we can't talk to them.
We've inherited the dust.
A colonisation of waste.
Your detritus.
We lie in it, cover ourselves in it.
We will make our homes from it.
We will design ourselves as against you, what was not valuable. As a past you discarded.
As nature deemed worthless. The moon will pull the tide up around your ears, covering you in your own waste. These rocks will only be used to crack open your skull. To let in the sunlight. This land will only be used to defend against attacks on the land. A bloody hole in your forehead.

CUT TO BLACK.



SHOT 1:

Wide, from the side, of Helen walking through the landscape waving the flag slowly and sporadically. Not like in a parade, but more as you would claim a territory while being unsure if it is safe, with trepidation. She stops at 'edge', rests the flag pole on the ground and observes the scarred landscape.

Notes: Do not frame dead in centre as is too obvious and boring. Can move camera along with her if aperture is high enough to keep focus. Use focus aid on ninja.

SHOT 2:

Crop of Helen from the side as she observes the destroyed landscape. Sense of sadness and regret, but an undercurrent of defiance and anger. The flag billows or rests beside her.

Notes: Observe Helen's spirit, this shot is not about the flag. Do not seem patriotic or like Madonna's American Life video. The focus is on Helen observing her place within this destroyed landscape.

SHOT 3:

Camera is below, a wide looking up at Helen as she observes the landscape.

Maybe she does big sweeps with the flag above her head and emits a guttural scream. Or could seem cheesy, try it with and without?

SHOT 4:

Camera is below, a crop looking up at Helen with flag filling scene. Repeat above just with different framing. Use zoom lens.

OTHER OPTIONS:

Look down on river... use that as background somehow/ Flag standing by itself?

INT. LIBRARY – DAY

Application process. This room is where power manifests and decisions are made in the Queer State. The two state officials sit across the table from each applicant being interviewed separately.

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

To begin your application process,
can you tell us why you want to join
the Queer State?

APPLICANT 1

I'm sick of being subjected to the
government, doctors, psychiatrists, and
always being contested and questioned by
society.

CUT TO:

APPLICANT 2

I've been so dissatisfied with gay culture...
all the consumption and pressure...
(MORE)

APPLICANT 2 (CONT'D) I want to be part of something that is more meaningful.

CUT TO:

HEAD OF STATE How do you feel about corporations that drive climate change sponsoring or marching in Pride parades?

APPLICANT 2

I guess it makes the LGBT employees feel more accepted it's a good thing? And younger LGBT people can then aspire to work in one of these companies...?

CUT TO:

APPLICANT 1

I think a lot of these companies use it as pink washing, when a lot of their business activities cause environmental destruction and modern slavery... I don't think they care about equal pay or the LGBTQ people they exploit in other countries. So I think it's basically a corporate hijacking of a political movement.

CUT TO:

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

What skills do you have that you could contribute to our society?

APPLICANT 1

I sing and play my own music. I'm bilingual.

CUT TO:

APPLICANT 2

I worked in marketing and then set up my own consultancy company.

Historian pushes some papers across the table to the applicants.

HEAD OF STATE

Now if you could answer these multiple choice questions in your own time.

State officials get up and leave, we see the applicants beginning to fill in the forms.

CAMERA NOTES:

Do not do these head on to camera as would be too cheesy and won't work with 'expulsion tour' video as that is straight to camera.

Shot 1: Film on wide lens from behind Maoiliosa (in centre of frame), with Sian and Oisin on either side, two lamps on either side of them. Going for symmetry. Full coverage.

Shot 2: Film on wide lens from behind Gideon, as above. Full coverage. (Sian and Oisin stay sitting so we don't lose their position, chair doesn't move)

Shot 3: Facing Gideon across table, camera positioned between Sian and Oisin. Full coverage.

Shot 4: Facing Maoiliosa across table, same as above. Full coverage.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. LECTURE THEATRE – DAY

Historian presents an overview of queer history to the two applicants alone in the vast room. Slide projector is off. Head of State introduces the lecture.

HEAD OF STATE

You are here because your state has persecuted you, or facilitated your persecution, or because you are tired of being encouraged or coerced into silence, of the gravitational pull away from nature.

Before we process your application to the Queer State, and to combat the misinformation that follows our every utterance in the rest of the world, we would like to present you our overview of history.

Historian steps forward, presses the slide projector on with remote and begins. Slide image:



17

¹⁷ Image source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/12459594224/>

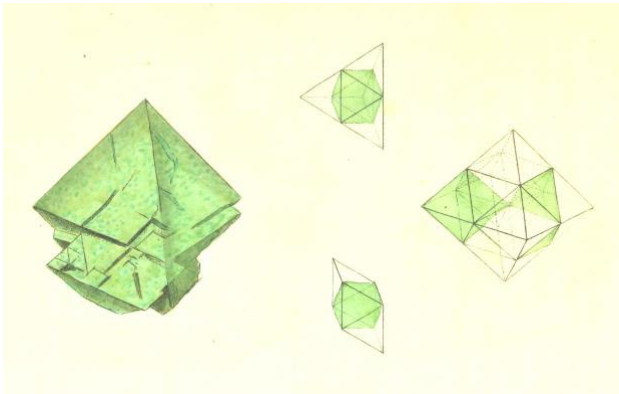
HISTORIAN MYSTIC

In Stone Age cultures tribes had communal ownership of property, government was by voluntary consensus without any hierarchical superstructure, there was an absence of class domination, and no rigid division of labour.

We have become so conditioned through offices, factories and universities that we can't conceive of such a society today.

During the Bronze Age, new states formed that exploited the labour of farmers.

Changes slide with remote.

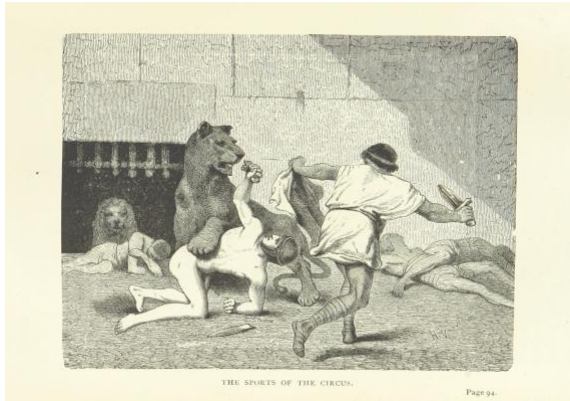


18

Gradually, people became separated from an immediate connection with nature, and intellectual activity was encouraged at the expense of emotional gratification. Class divisions developed, with the ruling classes eventually imposing slavery.

Changes slide with remote.

¹⁸ Image source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/11219596545/>



19

These city states were constantly at war in order to build their commercial military empires. Rome emerged as the most ruthless and violent - conquering nearly all the rest. The values taught in Roman schools were that of self-sacrifice for the state, obedience to hierarchical authority, and suspicion of pleasure and sex. Women and queers suffered under such a regime.

Changes slide with remote.



20

In the late empire, the economy depended on war for its needs, and became increasingly unstable, bureaucratic and out of touch with its people.

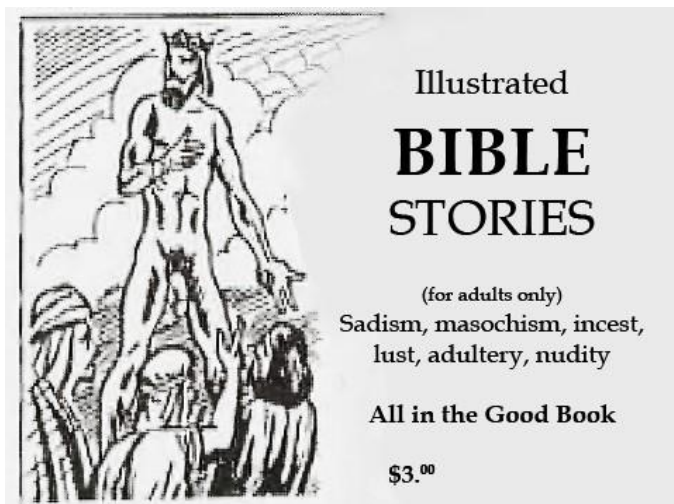
¹⁹ British Library flickr <https://www.flickr.com/people/britishlibrary/>

²⁰ Still from *Wastage of Human Resources*, 1947, United States : Encyclopaedia Britannica Films Inc. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2020600733/>.

HISTORIAN MYSTIC (CONT'D)

All freedom of expression was squelched.
A system of secret police was formed to
spy on the population.

Changes slide with remote.



21

Ascetic religion became an opiate for the pain, enabling people to stifle their real needs and escape the suffering of constant frustration. This suited the government as it kept the people quiet and obedient.

Constantine became emperor and made Christianity the state religion of the Roman empire. As the largest landowner in society, the church became a system of power and property. Christian propagandists called for the destruction of paganism because of the prevalence of homosexuality in the religions of the old nature cultures. The emperor Justinian initiated a an organised massacre against gay men, whom he rounded up in large numbers, tortured and burned.

Accusations of homosexuality became a tool for hunting down political dissidents, as it would again in the Middle Ages, when Christian inquisitors

²¹ Drawn on, edited and re-scanned. Taken from ILGA/IGA Bulletin 6/86, 1986, Norway.

- incensed by sex orgies held for the ancient pagan gods - saw witchcraft and queerness as interchangeable. This oppression of women and queer people was no accident. Their freedom and high status in the old nature religions made them a target of the profoundly anti-sexual Christianity. The Christians hunted down heretics and witches for 1400 years.

Changes slide with remote.



22

Another Christian legacy was the objectification of nature as 'resources' for human use which aided industrialisation and the rapid deforestation of Europe. In the old religions, trees, rocks and animals were viewed as living beings with which people could personally communicate.

Changes slide with remote.

²² Photograph by John Brosseau in Mások, August 1995, Hungary. Available at IHLIA.



23

As nation states grew in power,
 government bureaucracy took over from
 church hierarchy. But, there remained
 the same class domination, militarism,
 racism, exploitation of nature, and the
 repression of women and sexuality.

Now you are totally dependent on
 institutions for meeting your every
 need. Those that do not produce wander
 aimlessly. Few of you can communicate
 with animals and plants, or
 guiltlessly express the full potential
 of your sexual lives. Few of you can
 do what the majority of people
 throughout history have done: grow
 your own food, build your own homes,
 and make your own medicines.
 Do you have any questions?

Applicant 2 raises a hand timidly. The historian nods to
 proceed. He does so hesitantly.

APPLICANT 2

How can you criticise bureaucracy while
 we go through this opaque application
 procedure?

The Head of State bristles with impatience, but the Historian
 is thoughtful and sympathetic.

²³ From *CLIT 007*, June 1983, published by Centre Femmes, Switzerland. Available at IHLIA.

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

I have been critical of the application process for some time, and our society even accommodated some of my requests for change. That is, until a number of agents infiltrated the state, which led to an even stricter set of criteria for applicants to meet.

Applicant 1 raises hand.

APPLICANT 1

If the Queer State regresses to a similar pre-industrial condition it will not be long before it is conquered or eradicated. How can all of this be reconciled with a nostalgia for stone age cultures?

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

Like lambs in a field, we are contained by the structures that surround us, support us. Contrary to our ideals as a state, we are not altruistic-

Head of State steps forward and interrupts.

HEAD OF STATE

This has already ran over so we are going to have to move on unfortunately.

CUT TO BLACK.

CAMERA NOTES:

- Shot 1: Full run through facing participants, capturing responses. Show see of seats behind them(Oisin can use this time to practice and get used to slide projector)
- Shot 2: Full run through in wide from back of auditorium, with applicants in front of camera. For full coverage.
- Shot 3: Full run through, crop, of speakers in front of slides.
- Shot 4: Close up of Historian and Head of State speaking their parts.
- Shot 5: Close up of Applicant 2 and his dialogue.
- Shot 6: Film the slides changing and dissolving.
- Shot 7: Film details of the slides.

Notes: when to use ceiling window opening/closing? Perhaps Head of State closes it to show beginning of Historian's talk. Would

then need to film all the above shot frames with this happening so can cut dramatically.

LIBRARY. INT- DAY

Head of State sits opposite Applicant 2.

HEAD OF STATE

We're so grateful you took the time to apply, but your application has been rejected. Your confidence is admirable but it is intrinsically linked to production and consumption. You have no discernible skills outside of capitalism. You would be considered a liability to our society.

She spreads some graphs and charts onto the table.

HEAD OF STATE (CONT'D) In your multiple choice answers, you've demonstrated a lack of compassion for your community which leads us to believe you will act entirely in self-interest.

Applicant 2 appears relieved.

APPLICANT 2

Ok... thank you... actually I think coming here was a mistake... I didn't know it would be like this..

HEAD OF STATE

(Dismissively)

In any case, we are obliged to show you our expulsion advice.

CAMERA NOTES:

Shot 1: Wide of two characters from the side, with different background than interview (e.g. facing different wall). Do full run through for coverage.

Shot 2: Shoot applicant over shoulder of Head of State. Full run through.

Shot 3: Shoot Head of State over shoulder of Applicant (from same side as the last shot, so camera is moving in same arc) Full run through.

Shot 4: From other side of Applicant, we see him waiting awkwardly, and Head of State entering and making her way to table and sitting down. Could stand on the raised platform to film this from above if possible. Or film from back of room, through two counters to have Gideon framed in wide scene of books.

CUT TO:

INT. SCULPTURE GALLERY – DAY

Expulsion guide performed to camera by Sian, set in the sculpture gallery surrounded by statues from the Vatican. This video is played to every rejected applicant. Sian's character relishes the imagined discomfort of the rejected applicant, and has an abundance of care as she will soon be rid of them. A sense of superiority permeates each of her sentences, a feeling of being judge and executioner. Awkward sculptural nudity in every frame.

HEAD OF STATE

(1. buoyant and selling it,
like an ad for an airline)

To reintegrate with heterosexual society you will have to follow a code of conduct, which can be described as ideal homonormative behaviour. This behaviour will ingratiate you to the heterosexual majority, will give you access to institutional power, and will allow you to acquire capital and an enviable social status.

(2. speaking as if seeing eye to eye, before becoming more sad having to communicate to people with less intelligence) You are a masculine individual. You vote to protect your tax liability and the free market. You are wealthy with an above average carbon footprint. You don't need to rub your sexuality in people's faces. You don't see colour. You do not confront instances of injustice. You challenge nothing.

Life is a series of consumed experiences without much consequence.

(3. Serious and stately) The Queer State is recognised internationally as a terrorist organisation. On returning to your home country, if you are identified as having attempted to enter the Queer State, you will be investigated. Therefore we recommend putting in place a trusted alibi and a robust cover story for your absence. Perhaps you thought it would be like an LGBT resort here. It is better to be perceived as stupid rather than seditious.

(4. rather corporate and sympathetic in a patronising fashion) We understand you will be disappointed with our decision to not grant you citizenship or temporary stay.

However the Queer State must act to protect its own interests, and we hope this assimilation guide will help you protect yourself after your expulsion.

CUT TO BLACK.

CAMERA NOTES:

Sian facing camera, standing still. Crop with awkward nudity in each scene.

Shot 1: Paragraph 1.

Shot 2: Paragraph 2.

Shot 3: Paragraph 3.

Shot 4: Paragraph 4.

Shot 5: film naked male sculptures 'pornographically' for side video. Move camera on tripod up and down languidly.

LIBRARY. INT- DAY

Historian standing behind the counter, the wooden statue stands beside him in the centre of the counters, Applicant 1 on opposite side.

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

We recognise your potential to become an asset to us. So, congratulations your application has been approved. As you know we've had our internet connections under the sea severed, so cultural production is very useful for morale.

My colleague will take you into the processing centre, where you will hand over your documents to be destroyed, and will be issued new documents. You are free to choose your own name and note your gender identity and pronouns for official purposes.

You can of course keep your previous name, although most decide to sever ancestral ties. Do you know what name you would like to take?

APPLICANT 1

Yes, I would like my name to be James Miranda Barry.

Historian notes this, and looks up.

HISTORIAN

And what are your pronouns?

APPLICANT 1

They and them.

HISTORIAN

That is all noted. In time, you will undergo an induction cleanse: a ritual to free you from any internalised homophobia/ transphobia and learned self-loathing. This can be very ingrained and can manifest itself

in many ways, so we all have repeated this process numerous times.

CAMERA NOTES:

Lighting notes: use lamps (scales of justice) and their light, plus LED's for filling, to make it feel like a library at night.

Shot 1: Film from the right, not too wide (so it doesn't resemble other scenes too closely) showing both from the side, with rest of room out of focus. Full coverage.

Shot 2: Film from the right of Maoiliosa's shoulder, crop of Oisín talking.

Shot 3: Film from behind Oisín's shoulder, close up of Maoiliosa.

CUT TO:

INT. SCULPTURE GALLERY – DAY

Guided meditation. Oisín is lying on a the ground, his eyes closed, Sian is sitting cradling his head, speaking softly. Sculptures in background, their bodies like a piéta. Lights shine on the sculptures, and the camera chops into the scene in cuts.

HEAD OF STATE

Lie down on your side, and let your thoughts settle like clothes in a washing machine. The grey water drains away, out of your ear. Let your breathing become heavy..

You are being submerged in a circle, toffee filling it as you descend further. Time moves differently, purposeful, parallel.

Moonlight enters you and is searching for something, some memory. Stopping here and there along its way, like tumbling rocks along the river bed, you feel memories move through you.

Breathing faster, your chest tight like a crab, this memory. The toffee is filling all around your body. Two big hands open your chest plates, revealing your flesh. You see another

you in there, Scuttling in shame,
naked, humiliated.

She begins to slowly pour water on Oisín's forehead, it falls through his hair onto the ground.

HEAD OF STATE (CONT'D)

You are now in a pool of water, sea salt, sweat, it laps over you in cold waves. The toffee hardens and sticks your teeth together.

The other you floats beside you. Recognising him, you reach out and take his hand, pulling him towards you. You hold his shoulders and push him down firmly. The water fills his nose and ears until he can't speak anymore.

His body feels like slimy cold concrete as it sinks.

Let it fall away. Your guilt comes out of your nostrils as sulphur.

You are lighter now. Your connection to him disintegrating in the salt. Let yourself float on the surface. Feel the warm sun on your face. You are happy in this silence.

Camera observes them in silence.

Camera Notes:

Make sure to let shots linger. Certain amount of this will have to be decided after visiting Crawford on the Monday & Tuesday.

Shot 1: Wide, framing pieta-like figures dramatically in the expanse of the room. Mimic the architecture. If possible, have blinds closed and light behind sculptures. Full coverage.

Shot 2: Crop of Sian and Oisín's faces in frame. Full coverage.

Shot 3: close up of Oisín's face and water being poured.

CUT TO BLACK.

GALLERY AT JAMES BARRY PAINTING. INT- DAY

(This scene is trying to articulate the importance of LGBTQI+ history and fostering a sense of LGBTQ+ genealogy, while emphasising how often it is interfered with by straight/ homophobic/ transphobic historians and writers.

Photograph section aiming to grapple with moral ambiguity of historical figures, racial inequality and the championing of LGBTQI+ figures despite lack of intersectionality. Also museums heritage of colonisation.)

Head of State and Historian stand on either side of the painting, talking to Applicants 1 and 2 (or camera?)

HEAD OF STATE

This painting is by the artist James Barry. It depicts Ulysses fleeing from the cyclops Polyphemus. Barry painted himself as the figure in blue, being cautioned for his outspoken views.

(Camera shows James Barry, figure in blue)

After his death, a lot of his paintings and drawings were sold at auction, the proceeds of which went to his siblings. His sister used these funds for the education of her child, James Miranda Barry, who was born in Cork and went on to become a surgeon and the fourth doctor to successfully accomplish a C-section with the mother and child surviving.

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

Dr James Miranda Barry was assigned female at birth, but he lived his entire adult life as a man. He was referred to with male pronouns; he requested his body not be stripped when he died in 1865; even his doctor noted him as male on his death certificate. Some accounts state he dressed as a boy from the age of 11 or 12. While the terminology didn't exist at the time, today we would recognise him as being trans.

He is written about by straight historians as if he was a woman who masqueraded as a man in order to achieve an education and career that was not accessible for women at the time. However, being inaccurately hailed as "Britain's first female physician" ignores his transgender identity. Instead, he was the first trans physician.

HEAD OF STATE

Dr James Miranda Barry is our symbolic figurehead, representing both queer individual's tenacity and achievements, and the subsequent disavowal of these by the myopic gatekeepers of history.

HISTORIAN MYSTIC

This is, of course, not the first time that straight historians and the popular media have erased a historical figure's queerness or trans identity. Dr James Barry is one of many queer and trans historical and cultural figures that have been heterosexualized and forced into the gender binary in order to facilitate the exploitation of their stories for profit.

CUTS TO LECTURE
THEATRE.

CAMERA NOTES:

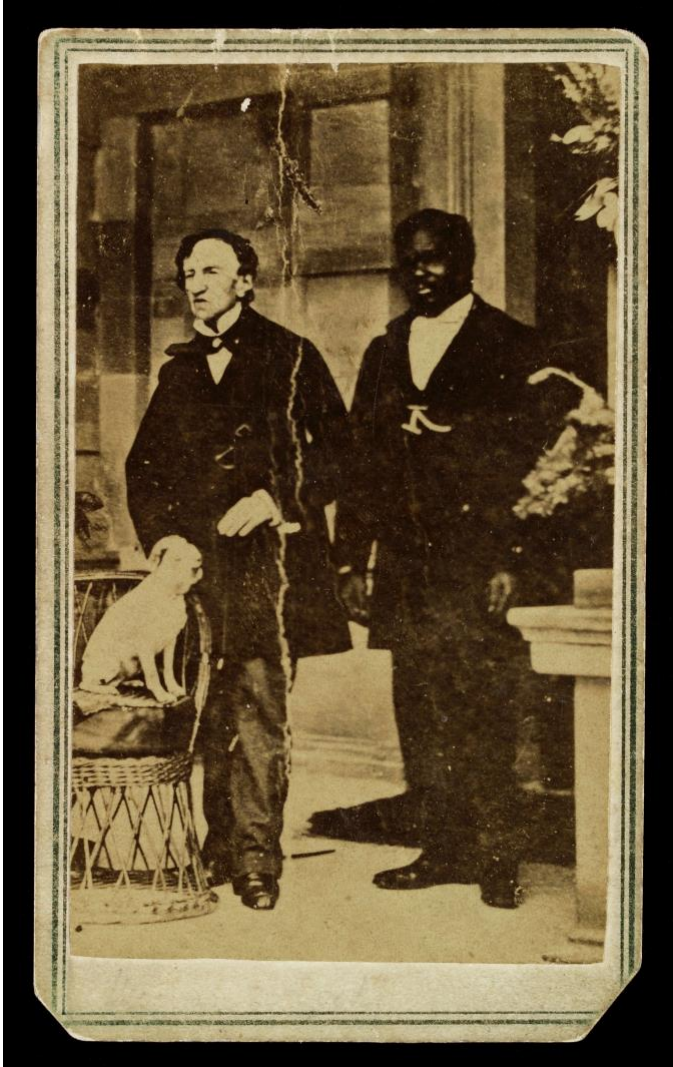
Shot 1: Sian and Oisin stand on either side of painting, delivering 'tour' to camera? Or two Applicants?

Shot 2: Crop or close up of Sian and Oisin delivering to camera.

Shot 3: Film just the painting, and close up details of it... especially cyclops, and the hushing man, can move camera and keep steady, whichever looks best.

Lecture Theatre. INT- Day.

(Slide image of Dr James
Barry is on screen)



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HISTORIAN MYSTIC

Here is one of two known photos of Dr James Barry, he is pictured with his servant and his dog.

(Applicant 1 and 2 glance at
each other. Applicant 2

²⁴ From Wellcome Images, hosted on Wikimedia.

raises hand, face in a
pained awkward grimace)

APPLICANT 2

Were James Barry and the servant in a
relationship? What happened to the
servant?

(Historian reacts awkwardly,
put on the spot)

HISTORIAN

I'm not sure of either actually... in
historical records he is just referred
to as "Black John" and it is mentioned
that he lived with Barry for years.
That's all we know about him at the
moment.

(Applicant 1 is incredulous
and Applicant 2 is taken
aback)

APPLICANT 2 So, all
you know is that he was black and
his name was John?

(Historian looks embarrassed)

And?? Do i leave this hang or expand on it more?

CAMERA NOTES:

Shote 1: Wide of Oisin and slide projected image, from behind
two applicants (them in screen). Full coverage.

Shot 2: Facing applicants (different angle than other lecture
scene?). Full coverage

Shot 3: Film projected image, move down it to the dog.

Appendix 3: Film links

Expulsion:

<https://youtu.be/LT2VgkQo9AQ>

Retelling: Dr James Miranda Barry and John Joseph Danson:

https://youtu.be/mL2_esbvpZ4