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Contemporary French Queer Cinema: Explicit Sex and the Politics of Normalization

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Graduate Program in Film Studies
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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CONTEMPORARY FRENCH QUEER CINEMA: EXPLICIT SEX AND THE
POLITICS OF NORMALIZATION

MONOGRAPH

by

Joanna Knight Smith

Graduate Program in Film Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This thesis examines how recent French queer films may mirror, interrogate and engage with sexual politics in France. The key political changes include the 1999 *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* legislation and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013. The thesis focuses on French queer films which are sexually explicit, including simulated and unsimulated sex acts. Using Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal* and Michel Foucault's conceptions of homosexuality, the thesis suggests that the sexual politics in France ostensibly normalize and desexualize gay and lesbian modes of desire. This thesis ultimately argues that the explicit sex scenes in the films discussed are not gratuitous. Rather they are integral to the director's engagement with contemporary French sexual politics. French queer cinema, as such, remains a key critical lens through which to analyze the global shift towards the legalization of gay marriage and the unpredictable social, sexual, and political implications of normalization.

Keywords

Contemporary French queer cinema, queer cinema, sex in cinema, explicit sex, normalization, PACS, same-sex marriage, Michel Foucault, Michael Warner, François Ozon, Abdellatif Kechiche, Alain Guiraudie, *Young & Beautiful*, *The New Girlfriend*, *Blue is the Warmest Color*, *King of Escape*, *Stranger by the Lake*

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Introduction

1 Sexual Politics in Contemporary France: Foucault, Queer Cinema, and Explicit Sex

There are no societies which do not regulate sex, and thus all societies create the hope of escaping from such regulations.¹

—Michel Foucault

Film is a primary medium through which sex and sexuality are explored and experienced. While films have the potential to normalize certain standards surrounding sex and sexuality, they also serve as opportunities to explore potential deviations from such norms. Many contemporary films allude to or insinuate sexual intercourse; however, fewer films explicitly depict the act of sexual intercourse. Contemporary French examples of films which offer potential deviations from the normalized standards of cinematic sex, offer alternative sexualities, and are sexually explicit, include: *La Vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2/ Blue is the Warmest Color* (Kechiche, 2013), *Stranger by the Lake/ L'inconnu du lac* (Guiraudie, 2013), and *Une nouvelle amie/ The New Girlfriend* (Ozon, 2014). These films are connected through their French nationality and their explicit depictions of non-straight desire. How do the parameters of sexual regulation, as well as the desire to resist from such regulations function within the French context? More specifically, what do these tensions suggest to us about the state and status of queer cinema in contemporary France? How do these films mirror and interrogate what is occurring in France with regard to social and political changes around sex and sexuality in France? As this thesis will suggest, the broader context that French queer film negotiates includes important changes within the French political landscape (PACS and gay marriage), associated social arguments surrounding gay marriage, and, key developments in queer and lesbian film theory. These are large fields in their own right and this chapter does not attempt to comprehensively review all of the literature in each of them. Rather, it provides a discussion of the areas where those fields overlap and how

¹ Foucault, Michel. *Foucault Live Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*. 101.

such intersections affect our consideration of, and appreciation for, the representation of homosexuality within contemporary French cinema. This chapter introduces the key theoretical areas and critical issues present in my study, including 20th century gay politics, screening sex in contemporary French cinema, and recent French queer cinema. My overall objective for the thesis is to demonstrate that the queer films discussed here negotiate political shifts in France through their sexually explicit scenes. The scenes are not gratuitous. Rather, they represent the director's direct or indirect engagement with the politics of normalization and signify the film's ability, or inability, to reproduce the presumed relational norms of contemporary France.

The borders of identity and representation in contemporary Europe are at a pivotal moment of transformation with respect to the changing politics of sexuality, including the legalization of same-sex marriage. This political transition and representation in cinema demands more sophisticated engagement than previously afforded, as Robin Griffiths suggests in *Queer Cinema in Europe*. It is within this contemporary period of change, transformation and debate, in Europe more generally, that the films that provide the texts for this thesis are grounded. Griffiths and other scholars write of the specificity of the European context of queer cinema, suggesting different ways which queer identities are articulated throughout European film. Denis M. Provencher, in *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France*, provides a specified study of queerness in France. He explains the tensions between Anglo-American and French articulations of homosexuality in the post-Stonewall era². Over the past three decades, Provencher argues, France has experienced an “explosion of cultural praxes that correspond to an alleged ‘globalized’ and largely Anglo-American tradition of gay-identity politics...” (1). While French gays and lesbians participate in certain globalizing trends, however, as Provencher explains, they often reshape this globalized experience in

² Stonewall refers to the Stonewall riots, a series of riots, protests, and demonstrations that lasted six days in June 1969 in New York City, between the city's gay community and the police at the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall riots are historic and have come to represent the beginning of a new era for LGBT liberation movements and civil rights. David Carter provides an exhaustive overview of the riots in his 2004 book *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*.

significantly French ways. Examining the historical debates surrounding same-sex relationships in France in relation to key queer theoretical tenets will help to assess the potential French specificity of French queer cinema.

1.1 1999: PACS and *The Trouble with Normal*

In the year 1999 France passed a civil law which would allow two adults to enter into a civil union together. The *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* (PACS) defined the legal construct which provides recognition in law of a range of relationships, including same-sex couples. PACS affords any two people the benefits traditionally only afforded to married heterosexual couples; the defining feature of the legislation is universal availability. These benefits include, but are not limited to, social security, rights and taxation of property, and simultaneous vacation time. The legislation successfully passed in November 1999, after being subject to fierce debates in the late 90s (Stychin, 350). The dominant discourse of French national identity is republicanism, which at its heart, values universalism. Republican universalism engages with the process of normalization for citizenship; citizens are thus first and foremost French. By granting both same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples such legislated rights, the PACS can be seen as potentially normalizing non-heterosexual modes of desire, an attempt at universalization. The PACS establishes as a part of the national identity of the Republic behavior, lifestyles and activities hitherto considered perverse, abnormal and/or subversive. It is legislation that marks a significant change in the body politic. In his analysis of the politics of sexuality and citizenship in France, Carl F. Stychin points to, the centrality of the discourse of republicanism, above all, in the framing of the PACS legislation in France. Republicanism, for Stychin, refers to:

...the dominant ideology in France that privileges the nation state and its direct relationship to individual citizens, and which is founded on the principles of equality and universality (as guaranteed by Article 1 of the Constitution). The individual communes directly with the nation state, leaving little space within the public sphere for groups within civil society to become politicized entities (351).

Stychin asserts that the PACS is a microcosm for wider issues in France concerning citizenship, marriage, communitarianism, multiculturalism, and the meaning

of French nationality in the context of globalization (347). Interestingly, Stychin explains how the republican ideology is at the center of arguments raised by both the supporters and the opponents of the PACS. For example, supporters of the PACS legislation purpose that the legislation not only promotes a range of rights for couples, but also promotes social unity, which is directly connected to the goal of republicanism. In contrast, opponents argue that because heterosexual couples never asked for a new legal status, the PACS gives a special status for gay couples, cleverly disguised in universalist terms (Stychin, 356). Stychin provides an analysis of the ‘normalization discourse’ surrounding PACS, summarizing that, couples turning to universal institutions as a basis for the claiming of rights is often thought to lead to normalization and discipline. However, he contends: “the fact that the PACS is being used pragmatically, particularly by young heterosexual couples- as a prelude to marriage, as a preferred alternative to it, or as a means of simply to gain a benefit or avoid a detriment- underscores the banalization of the PACS, more than it does the banalization of homosexuality” (Stychin, 370). Indeed, over 96% of all PACS have been between opposite-sex couples³. By the end of his article, Stychin suggests that PACS will not necessarily underscore the republican order, and perhaps, the virtue of the PACS legislation is that it may signify, for opposing parties, whatever they appear to want from it (370). Nevertheless, others have suggested that the corroboration of gays and lesbians within state republicanism is what is troubling about the PACS. What is at stake for the PACS in universalism is the *structural* and *symbolic* corroboration of lesbians and gays within the republican model, as Enda McCaffrey explains in *From Universalism to Post-universalism* (292-293). By the end of his essay McCaffrey suggests that perhaps the PACS legislation represents a marriage between social activism and potential for radical critique (300).

Judith Butler, in “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?”, questions the PACS legislation as well as the legalization of gay marriage. Butler’s main concern is the dilemma between achieving social recognition and legal equality of homosexual couples

³ According to INSEE (*Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*) 96% of all PACS in 2013 were between opposite-sex couples.

on the one hand, and the rendering of other queer sexualities illegible on the other. Butler describes the PACS debate as a disruption of the French “symbolic order” suggesting that to understand this debate, it is important to recognize how the figure of the child of nonheterosexual parents becomes a “cathected site for anxieties about cultural transmission” (23). She continues, “Indeed, it is the alteration of rights of filiation that is most scandalous in the French context, not marriage per se” (Butler, 24). By questioning the entire theoretical apparatus of cultural transmission, Butler asks: “But is there a way to break out of this circle whereby heterosexuality institutes monolithic culture and monolithic culture reinstitutes and renaturalizes heterosexuality?” (35). Butler demonstrates how the argument in favor of legal alliance can work in tandem with state normalization of relationality and kinship, while in no way disrupting the patrilineal assumptions of kinship (Butler, 16). For Butler, the recognition of diverse kinship practices can complicate the reduction of issues of nation and culture to a presumably heterosexual oedipal structure.

The films present in this thesis frequently provide explorations and complications of such traditional forms of kinship, family, and sexuality. As such, in queering such normative forms, these films can also be seen as offering a reimagination of both the nation and French culture/identity more generally. Further, the understanding of state universalism and republican individualism is key to the understanding of the PACS in France.

Various universalizing discourses, based on the republican model of citizenship, do not thus celebrate “differentiated” or “individual” rights (Provencher, 1). This model of citizenship contrasts somewhat with the “minoritizing” or “identity politics” model in North America. Along these lines, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the contradictions present in the current understandings of homo/heterosexual definition in her book *Epistemology of the Closet*. She suggests two contradictions in contemporary understandings of homosexuality. The first, sees the homo/heterosexual definition as an issue of active importance for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority (the “minoritizing view”) and the second, sees it as an issue of continuing, determinative importance for a broad spectrum of sexualities (the “universalizing view”) (Sedgwick, 1).

French homosexual subjectivity has had to emerge in specific relation to the dominant republican ideology of national identity in France. This complicates gay politics because homosexual subjectivity must function within an ideology of same-ness, universalism, and potential normativity.

The PACS legislation passed in late 1999. During the same year, across the Atlantic in the United States, Michael Warner's book *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* was published. *The Trouble with Normal* calls into question the political role of same-sex marriage, why gay marriage became a goal for gay rights activists, and most importantly, the trouble with normality and normalization. Warner argues that by making the gay rights movement about sexual orientation, not sexual stigma and sex itself, gay activism has turned into an instrument for both normalizing and desexualizing gay men and lesbians. By tracing the recent history of gay politics and activism, he demonstrates that gay politics have abandoned the historic fight against the stigmatization of sex more generally. Warner additionally describes the persistent shame and stigma that frame sexual identity. For Warner, the politics of shame include silent inequalities, unintended effects of isolation, and the lack of public access. Here, Warner is surely building on the work of Foucault. "Sex does not need to be primordial in order to be legitimate. Civilization doesn't just repress our original sexuality; it makes new kinds of sexuality, including learned ones that might have as much validity as ancient ones, if not more" (Warner, 11). Warner submits that inequalities of shame, especially when legislated, act as a drag on the process of sexual autonomy. And yet, Warner takes issue with the popular assumption that making gay "normal" will remove the sexual shame associated with homosexuality. For Warner, the problem "is that embracing this standard merely throws shame on those who stand farther down the ladder of respectability. It does not seem to be possible to think of oneself as normal without thinking that some other kind of person is pathological" (60).

Warner suggests that gay marriage, and all moves towards normalcy, are bad for everyone, not just gays. Same-sex marriage validates a single type of prescribed relationship (the couple) and makes it harder for other types of relationships to be valued. In short, Warner suggests that marriage discriminates. He argues that same-sex marriage

should not be the only goal for gay rights movements. Warner explains however that the discussion of, or the questioning of, gay marriage is unfashionable and perhaps untimely. “One is apt to feel like the unmannerly wedding guest, gossiping about the divorce at the rehearsal dinner” (Warner 83). He contends that the only people arguing against gay marriage, it seems, are homophobic dinosaurs who consider the debates still about procreation and ‘America’s moral fabric’ (83).

Much can be gained from comparing and contrasting same-sex identity politics in America and France. Eric Fassin discusses gay rights issues, specifically PACS and same-sex marriage, as they are translated differently/similarly in America and France. Fassin states that throughout the 1990s, the “rhetoric of America” was constantly invoked in French public discourse. Fassin asserts, “Today as much as ever, America is indeed good to think of, as a model or (more frequently) a countermodel for French identity politics...” (216). Fassin references vocabulary borrowed from American culture, such as “drag queens” to “coming out” and “queer”, suggesting that the language of queer politics in France is (American) English, albeit with a French accent. Yet, the politics of norms play important roles on both sides of the Atlantic, currently, as well as back in 1999. In the United States, normalcy acts as a justification for the need to defend same-sex marriage; the logic being, by allowing same-sex marriage, all sexual shame will cease. As Warner asserts, however this logic is flawed because it simply allows gays and lesbians ‘entry’ into a normative institution, maintaining a hierarchy of sexual stigma and shame, locating gays at the bottom. In France, such normalcy is even more closely associated with the republican discourse of citizenship which has the effect of seemingly embracing the category of gay while simultaneously denying its sex and sexuality. The PACS legislation and *The Trouble with Normal* mark an important moment in the chronology of the gay rights movement. Since 1999, both France and the United States have legalized same-sex marriage⁴. While Warner’s argument seems to have been lost in the tidal wave of gay marriage legalization occurring in the 2000s and early 2010s, his sentiments remain particularly relevant in relation to the study of French queer cinema

⁴ Same-sex marriage was legalized in France in May 2013 and in the United States in June 2015.

presented in this thesis. What is common to the works of Ozon, Kechiche and Guiraudie examined here is that their use of explicit sex serves as an effective means to engage with the politics of normalization as well as the questions that arise as a consequence.

1.2 Why Marriage? The Gay Marriage Boom in Recent Years

While the PACS legislation marked a pivotal turn in France, more recently, it has been followed by the full legalization of same-sex marriage. France became the fourteenth country globally, and the eighth European country, to legalize same-sex marriage in May 2013. Bronwyn Winter explains that gay marriage has become a major transnational gay rights issue, discussing specifically the similarities and differences of the legalization of same-sex marriage in Argentina, France and Australia. Winter argues that ultimately marriage protects the state more than it does individuals or family members (23). Echoing Warner, for Winter, marriage and the family are regulators of social relations, thus “creating structures in which it is in fact impossible for individuals to become the free and equal citizens that the lofty rhetoric of democracies tells us we should be” (23). Winter concludes that “the least threatening thing to our heteropatriarchal white-Western capitalist states that gay rights activists can do, then, is to demand to marry and have families” (23). So, while the notion that the legalization of gay marriage represents progress may seem axiomatic, the debates still continue over the issue/question *why marriage?*

George Chauncey’s seminal book *Why Marriage?: The History of Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality* traces the history of same-sex marriage in the United States and answers the central question of why marriage became a goal for many gay and lesbian individuals and gay liberation groups. Chauncey explains that not until the 1990s did marriage become the primary gay-rights goal. He explains that the AIDS epidemic and same-sex couples’ efforts to adopt were the driving forces for the right to marry. Marriage would eliminate barriers which existed, such as AIDS patients’ partners being barred from them in hospitals, the entitlement of jointly held property after they died, and gays wishing to share the responsibility of raising their partner’s children. Chauncey explains:

Marriage is only the latest chapter in a long debate over gay equality, not the first, and certainly not the last. But the history of marriage has given this debate special significance for all sides because the freedom to marry, including the right to choose one's partner in marriage, has come to be regarded as a fundamental civil right and a powerful symbol of full equality and citizenship (165).

Chauncey identifies the discourse of equality as an important justification for the legalization of same-sex marriage and the gay-rights movement⁵. From the passage of the PACS in 1999 to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013, the larger implications of equal rights within the French context are similarly evident. However, equality provisions are not in and of themselves sufficient. Echoing Warner's critique, Rees-Roberts explains, "the widespread adoption of the watchword 'equal rights' is a rhetorical trap because equality is not limited to a simple equivalence of rights between homosexuals and heterosexuals... The 'universalist' rights package lacks detail of the socio-economic reality of queer lives and works to favour the juridical rights of state-sanctioned families over those of individual citizens" (92). McCaffrey explains that equality effectively means equality *with* heterosexuality (293). He continues: "...by aiming to match the rights of heterosexuals, homosexuals are seen to not only legitimize themselves in the public sphere but they also disappear (willfully and successfully) into public normalcy" (McCaffrey, 293). Moreover, these larger questions remain particularly pertinent to the specific French model of republicanism, which both fails to consider larger structural inequalities (including race and class) within society and inherently creates a system wherein the State favors family over the individual as its universal norm.

The changes in France reflect a broader shift and re-assessment of laws worldwide; since 2001, twelve European countries have legalized same-sex marriage, of those twelve, over half have occurred since 2010⁶. Since the publication of *Why*

⁵ Interestingly, the popularity of the phrase "marriage equality" seems to support this understanding of gay marriage and the important role "equality" plays.

⁶ The following European countries have legalized same-sex marriage (the name of the country is followed by the year it was legalized in brackets). The Netherlands (2001), Belgium (2003), Spain (2005), Norway (2009), Sweden (2009), Portugal (2010), Iceland (2010), Denmark (2012), France (2013), United Kingdom, Luxembourg (2015), Finland (2014), Ireland (2015).

Marriage? in 2005 there has been a recent global boom in the legalization of same-sex marriage. A persistent concern that remains, however, is the question of whether or not a desexualization of homosexuality necessarily accompanies this path towards normalcy. As Warner explained in 1999, the legalization of same-sex marriage integrates gays into a set of heterosexual norms. Warner suggested that failing to recognize that there is a politics of sexual shame reduces the gay movement to a desexualized identity politics (24-25). Thus, while the gay rights movement has focused its campaign on sexual orientation, it has largely failed to broaden its campaign against sexual stigma in the manner Warner believes it should. This contrast in ideology is potentially significant and raises questions both about our conceptions of normalcy and of sexuality.

1.3 Foucault: Sexuality, Identity and Relationality

For Robert Nye, there are two excellent reasons for considering the history of homosexuality in France and Michel Foucault in the same frame of reference. “First, and most obviously, Foucault was one of the modern pioneers of the history of sexuality... Second, as a gay French male who acknowledged his homosexuality with varying degrees of wariness, Foucault could hardly have imagined that his own situation stood outside the multi-volume history he hoped eventually to complete” (Nye, 225). Michel Foucault was a French philosopher and a *historian of systems of thought*, a title he appointed to himself when he became a professor at the Collège de France in 1970. Considered one of the most influential social theorists of the second half of the twentieth century, Foucault died in 1984 from an AIDS-related illness, one of the first public figures in France to die from the disease. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* was published in 1975 and is an important book in Foucault’s oeuvre. *Discipline & Punish* provides a history of the modern penal system, focusing on the body and questions of power. Foucault surmises the modern approach to discipline by saying that dominant power structures aims to produce “docile bodies”: bodies that not only do what *we* want but do it precisely in the way that *we* want (Gutting, 138). Foucault explains that three distinctive features of modern disciplinary control include hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. The role of discipline is a feature that would return in Foucault’s conceptions of sexuality; not unlike the disciplining powers he

describes in *Discipline & Punish*, sexuality functions in a similar way as a means of control within society. By making sex an object of scientific discipline, sex becomes an object of knowledge, much like criminality. According to Foucault, modern control of sexuality parallels modern control of criminality. Foucault aimed to understand the relationship between this knowledge, discipline, and its effects on the individual.

In what is considered his best-known work *The History of Sexuality, The Will to Knowledge*, published in France in 1976, Foucault critiques the ‘repressive hypothesis’, the concept that western society suppressed sexuality from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. As he argues, “We must... abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression” (49). Foucault contests instead that sexuality is an invention of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, created through specific techniques for the confession of personal desires which were then followed by classification and interpretation. As Lisa Downing explains, for Foucault, sexuality does not belong in the realms of the biological, the genetic, or the psychological, which may come as a surprise for those unfamiliar with Foucauldian thought. Tamsin Spargo explains, a vital feature of Foucault’s argument is that sexuality is a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather than simply biological, origins and is *not* solely a natural feature or fact of human life (Spargo, 12). Foucault argued that from the eighteenth century onwards, sexuality was regarded as something to be regulated and administered, rather than as a natural activity to be enjoyed by all. He was specifically interested in the discursive formation of sexuality and its relationship to systems of power and knowledge. Foucault’s conceptions and theories surrounding pleasure and desires, as well as homosexuality, will be of particular interest in this thesis. Foucault’s thought has been used in interdisciplinary sexuality studies, primarily, for his history and analyses of discourses of knowledge as an alternative to attempts to discover truths about the nature of sexuality, as Lisa Downing explains (110). Thus, while Foucault left an exceedingly large bibliography it is only a particular sample and facet of his work that is utilized in this thesis.

For Foucault, the category of the homosexual came from a particular context in history and, like sexuality in general, must be viewed as a constructed category of knowledge, not as a discovered identity. As he explains:

The notion of homosexuality is a notion that dates from the nineteenth century, and thus it's very recent. And I think it's not simply the notion that's recent. I'd say that the separating out from all sexual practices, from all forms of pleasure, from all the kinds of relationships people can have with each other—the separating out of the homosexual dates, in part, from this period. For example, in the eighteenth century, and again at the beginning of the nineteenth, people experienced their relation to their bodies, to others, they experienced their freedom more as a libertinism than as a kind of precise categorization of a sexual behavior linked to psychology, linked to a desire. Thus, homosexuality—a recent category (*GS*, 386-87).

Foucault primarily focuses on male homosexuality and gay male culture in the context of the 1970s and 1980s. Foucault theorizes that homosexuality, and homosexual culture, provide a space of creation for new types of relationships; the flexibility of homosexual relationships thus offer a greater space to *create* oneself. For Foucault, this aspect is potentially to most threatening element of homosexuality. He argues that, the relational variability of homosexuality is even more socially inadmissible than the act of sodomy.

My impression is that the practice—sodomitic, so to speak, or homosexual—is generally accepted. First of all, people can tolerate the pleasure, but they can't accept the happiness. They accept the practice, that's an observable fact [*fait de constatation*] because sodomitic practice is not only a homosexual fact, since it's also heterosexual (*GS*, 392).

As Foucault explains, what is unbearable to dominant society is not the leaving in search of sexual pleasure, or returning home with someone for the night, but rather, waking up happy. Foucault also elaborates on the crucial distinction between pleasure and desire that was fundamental to his late thought in an interview with Jean Le Bitoux⁷. Foucault favored the term “pleasure” to “desire” because of desire's association with

⁷ Halperin explains that this distinction “constituted a point of disagreement with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as well as with Guy Hocquenghem” (Halperin, 376).

psychology and the premise of lack. The distinction, as Halperin explains, underlies Foucault's effort, in *The History of Sexuality* and to his lifelong struggle, to resist the social and institutional power of modern psychology. Foucault explains that, schematically, "medicine and psychoanalysis have made extensive use of this notion of desire, precisely as a kind of instrument for establishing the intelligibility of sexual pleasure and thus for standardizing it in terms of normality" (GS, 389). He thus considers the action of qualifying or disqualifying of desires to be problematic. As he explains, "Tell me what your desire is, and I'll tell you who you are. I'll tell you if you're sick or not, I'll tell you if you're normal or not, and thus I'll be able to disqualify your desire or on the contrary qualify it" (GS, 389). Foucault suggests, rather, "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (WK, 157). Foucault rejected the normalized relations between individuals and sought to widen our conceptions of both sexual and social relations; he sought a rejection of the discourse of desires and a rejection of the hetero- homo dyad.

The idea that sexual politics might be possible which are beyond the narrow same-sex identitarian agenda, as Downing suggests, and that change the way we think about erotic relationships altogether were already present in Foucault's musings in 1981. Foucault explains:

Rather than saying what we said at one time, 'Let's try to re-introduce homosexuality in the general norm of social relations,' let's say the reverse—'No! Let's escape as much as possible from the type of relations that society proposes for us and try to create in the empty space where we are new relational possibilities.' By proposing a new relational right, we will see that nonhomosexual people can enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations⁸

It would seem that Foucault's approach to homosexuality complicates the underlying normativity of the universalizing or republican impulse and the ostensibly assimilationist gay marriage strategy in recent years. Foucault's influence on Warner,

⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1988, vol. 1, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. pg. 160.

Rees-Roberts, and the queer scholars referenced here is clear. Foucault's conceptions of homosexuality certainly inspired the concerns expressed by Warner that the path to normalcy perhaps desexualizes homosexuality and limits relational and erotic possibilities. Much like Foucault, the films which will be discussed extensively throughout this thesis function in similar ways. The films of Ozon, Guiraudie, and to some degree Kechiche, use varied depictions of explicit sex as spaces of exploration of new relational possibilities. Yet, as this thesis will demonstrate, explicit sex functions in these films to negotiate normalcy. All the films discussed deviate from traditional practices of screening sex, however, their overall objectives differ. Thus, closely examining the sexually explicit scenes will demonstrate the film's mediation of normalcy. A discussion of explicit sex in cinema and in French cinema will situate sex in cinema in a French context. Following this overview, a detailed outline of contemporary French queer cinema will provide a critical foundation for the subsequent chapters.

1.4 Screening Sex in French Queer Cinema

The films discussed in this thesis deviate from traditional practices of screening sex. From the duration of the scenes, to showing unsimulated sex acts, these films raise several questions with regard to cinematic sex. These issues/questions discussed here are tied to French queer cinema specifically. These key issues/ areas of analysis be can be divided into four key intersections. The first will consider the intersections of pornography and sexually explicit art cinema, considering the place of explicit sex in contemporary French cinema in particular. Next, a discussion of the relationship between New Queer Cinema and *French* queer cinema will demonstrate that France articulates queer in unique ways which are reflective of the political moment from the 1990s to today. It is useful to note the gay male specificity of much of the theoretical work cited here. Yet, this specificity is tied to larger questions of representation and scholarship on the representation of women and lesbians in film. Thirdly, the connections between lesbian cinema and queer cinema, both inside and outside of France, will be examined. Here, reference to Chantal Akerman's *Je tu il elle* (1974) will provide the basis for discussion. Lastly, I will return to French queer cinema to discuss the contemporary trend of normativity, focusing on couples, domesticity, and families in this work.

1.4.1 Pornography and Art Cinema

The waters between pornography and sexually explicit art cinema have long been murky and questions of categorization and borders are at the core of this issue. Sex on screen has perhaps caused more controversy than any other aspect of cinema. As Tanya Krzywinska asserts in *Sex and the Cinema*, “The spectacle of cinematic sex is often intended to produce strong reactions, with controversy proving to be an excellent marketing tool” (2). Nevertheless, sex in cinema has long generated detailed discussion in film scholarship. The distinction and classification of pornography and other genre cinema which contains explicit sex is perhaps discussed the most.

Linda Williams has written extensively about a wide range of sex in cinema⁹. In *Hard Core*, Williams works “...to define pornography minimally, and as neutrally as possible, as the visual (and sometimes aural) representation of living, moving bodies engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary intent of arousing viewers” (30). Williams concludes that the very act of screening has become an intimate part of our sexuality. She emphasizes that “the point therefore should not be to discover that screening sex brings us so much closer, spatially or temporally, to ‘real sex.’ Rather, it should be to discover that viewers, and now users, have become habituated to these new forms of mimetic play with, and through, screens” (SS, 326). Questioning *how* we screen sex matters in this regard. Considering the relationship between sexually explicit imagery and contemporary sexual politics will demonstrate that these scenes are central to understanding the film’s engagement in the political moment.

For Krzywinska, one way in which cinematic pornography has been defined in comparison to other film-based representations of sex lies in the extent to which films make the scenes of sexual activity part of the storyline. She continues by explaining though, “this is often less ambiguous than defining pornographic films in terms of whether the sex is ‘simulated’ or ‘acted’” (Krzywinska, 28). The narrative films

⁹ Linda Williams’ texts include: *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* and *Screening Sex*.

discussed at length in this thesis all feature a considerable amount of nudity, long takes, graphic and explicit sex, and in some cases, unstimulated sex, where the actors (or body doubles) actually engage in the sex act. The context in which these film were released is also important. In contrast to the porn which Williams discusses in *Hard Core*, the sexually explicit art cinema that has emerged in recent years in France has often been legitimized by its position within art house cinema and its artistic, intellectual intent. Speaking with regard to *Last Tango in Paris* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972), *Romance*, *The Piano Teacher* (Michael Haneke, 2001), *Intimacy* (Patrice Chéreau, 2001), and *Baise-moi*, Krzywinska argues: “the presence of explicit imagery in these sex-based art films has a resonantly ambiguous – and therefore ‘artful’ – status; titillation is rendered more complex than it is in hardcore. Through the rhetorical frames work of psychological realism, sex and desire become a source of dramatic and existential enigma” (226). This distinction is key for Krzywinska, who explains that fiction therefore, plays a far stronger role in the way that real sex is contextualized in art cinema than in hard-core.

In contemporary French cinema there has been a surge of increasingly sexually explicit films. Kelley Conway, in “Sexually Explicit French Cinema”, writes that there appears “to be an ongoing, national ‘conversation’ occurring in French cinema about the possibilities around the *mise-en-scène* of heterosexual sex in cinema...” (464). Conway links such films to 1950s and 1960s European art cinema because of their ability to push the boundaries of eroticism, their narrative ambiguity, and their distinctive authorial signature (477). She additionally links the films from recent years to the 1970s art cinema, by such notable directors as: Godard, Akerman, Oshima, Bertolucci, and Pasolini. Conway explores the generic affiliations, sexual politics, and reception of three key works of sexually explicit French Cinema: *Romance* (Catherine Breillat, 1999), *Baise-moi/ Rape Me* (Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh, 2000), and *Choses secrètes/ Secret Things* (Jean-Claude Brisseau, 2002). These three films perhaps represent the most frequently referenced films featuring explicit sex in contemporary French cinema. What distinguishes *art* from *porn* are the conditions that lead to its legitimation. It is not the presence or absence of explicit sexuality *per se* that defines the context but rather the purpose and intent. Conway questions: “How do the recent sexually explicit French films imagine sex? How is sex staged and shot? What roles does sex play in films’ narratives?”

(464). Conway's questions become part of the overall objective of this thesis; the examination of how explicit sexuality in French cinema reflects the wider debates and changes in the French body politic. Conway explains that French cinema's recent citations and subversions of pornography have the potential to critique the traditional use of the human body, as well as to critique gender dynamics between men and women (476). Yet, Conway concludes that the generic affiliations, narrative and stylistic qualities of the films she references significantly impact their ability to create meaningful discussions of filmed sex and sexual politics (476-477). Narrative and stylistics qualities are important for examining cinematic sex and the context of the images significant to their discussions of sex and politics.

Another trend in relation to sexually explicit cinema in France is the New French Extremity. This movement, named by film critic James Quandt, refers to a collection of films made at the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s by French directors. These films represent some of the most sexually explicit images in recent European cinema. These images are typically accompanied by excessive violence and their main objective is to shock the spectator. "The critic truffle-snuffing for trends might call it the New French Extremity, this recent tendency to the willfully transgressive by directors like François Ozon, Gaspar Nöe, Catherine Breillat, Philippe Grandrieux-and now, alas, Dumont" (Quandt, *Artforum*). For Quandt, this turn in recent French cinema towards shock and violence is not progressive, but rather, reflective of cinema which is perhaps emptied of actual critical potential¹⁰. While it is important to be aware of the New French Extremity moment in French cinema, the films which will be discussed at length in this thesis are entirely different from these films; the films discussed here are attempting to explore the possibilities of sex(uality), and their meaning comes from exploration. In contrast, it could be suggested that the films which define the French Extremity use explicitness as a *tool* for shock rather than as a subject of investigation. They arguably merely depict sex

¹⁰ Quandt focuses on Dumont's, then, most recent film *Twentynine Palms* (2003). His less than favorable review suggests that Dumont, once compared to Bresson, has succumbed to vague shock tactics in the recent trend in French cinema.

explicitly rather than explore the discourses of sexuality as transgression, by screening sex.

Moreover, given the previous discussion on legislative normalization and the implications that arise from Foucault's work, it would appear to be a mistake to blithely dismiss any use of explicit sex within film as either merely or inherently pornographic. What gives this thesis impetus, they are the unresolved questions of sexualization as they relate to a wider understanding of and appreciation for identity and the nature of the civil society that arises in relation to such imagery. How specifically do the films that form the focus of this thesis interrogate central questions affecting the progressive changes occurring in France? Moving sex from the margins of pornography to narrative cinema, in order to interrogate what may be deemed normal and traditional, becomes one way these films negotiate the sexual politics of normalcy.

1.4.2 French Queer Cinema

Film scholar B. Ruby Rich has written extensively on queer cinema and is perhaps best known for coining the term "New Queer Cinema". New Queer Cinema, named by Rich in the 1990s, identifies a wave of independent films that focused on queer themes and emerged in the film festival circuit, during the height of the North America AIDS epidemic and the AIDS activist movement. Rich explains that in 1992 "There, suddenly, was a flock of films that were doing something new, renegotiating subjectivities, annexing whole genres, revising histories in their image. All through the winter, spring, summer, and now autumn, the message has been loud and clear: queer is hot" (Rich, 15). The films that have come to define New Queer Cinema include: *Tongues Untied* (Riggs, 1989), *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1991), *Poison* (Haynes, 1991), *My Own Private Idaho* (Van Sant, 1991), *Swoon* (Kalin, 1992), *The Living End* (Araki, 1992), and *Zero Patience* (Greyson, 1993), among others. For Michele Aaron, and in line with the political and theoretical reclamation of "queer" itself at this time, the films of the New Queer Cinema rejected heteronormativity, gave a voice to marginalized groups (LGBT), were unapologetic, defied the sanctity of the past and death, and challenged

cinematic conventions¹¹. While this moment/ movement generally referred to North American and British films, within the film festival circuit, these films share similarities with queer films from France from this time period. These contemporary films can be classified within a broader wave of films that gave voice to non-straight pleasures and desires and explored alternative forms of sexuality.

Rich revisits and presents new insights on the topic of queer cinema in her most recent book *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*. She situates François Ozon as a prominent figure in *nouveau* queer cinema, suggesting:

If François Ozon was considered a bad fit for the early days of New Queer Cinema, how telling that he has arrived at this point as a seemingly perfect fit for its aftermath, mapping a trail between the republican and the communitarian that just might suit the queer – or postqueer – cinema of today, in the United States as well as in France, a perfectly exportable French fashion designed to fit without undue alterations (232).

Rich situates Ozon as being inextricably linked to André Téchiné and the late Cyril Collard. She states that these filmmakers are “linked not only by their sexual identities but by a set of histories, concerns, and dissensions every bit as significant as those which, in the United States, have marked New Queer Cinema” (Rich, 215). Focusing on Ozon’s *Le temp qui reste/ Time to Leave* (2005), Collard’s *Les nuit fauves/ Savage Nights* (1992) and Téchiné’s *Les Témoins/ The Witnesses* (2007), Rich identifies shared characteristics and stresses the importance of the similarities between these filmmakers. “The unifying elements for all three include death, rage, grief, and the tortured fluidity of a sexuality in which eros and thanatos eternally change places” (Rich, 216). Ozon’s position, in coordination with New Queer Cinema and French queer cinema, is thus key within this thesis. Chapter one in this thesis will consider his position as a filmmaker in France as well as his filmography. Thus, I wish to introduce Ozon here and engage with his filmography and themes later in the thesis; Ozon functions as a key

¹¹ For more on the characteristics of New Queer Cinema see “New Queer cinema: An Introduction” by Michele Aaron in *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*. See also Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* and Greyson, Gevert, Parmar, et al. *Queer Looks: Perspective on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*.

transitional role between the films of the late 90s and 2000s and the films from the early 2010s, found later in the thesis.

The late 1990s was an era of great socio-political change for lesbian, gay, and bisexual and transgender communities in France; increased medical breakthroughs changed both political activism and sexual practice in the context of AIDS and the PACS legislation changed the state's recognition of existing lesbian and gay relationships (Rees-Roberts, 2). Nick Rees-Roberts, in *French Queer Cinema*, documents forms of contemporary French depictions of queer representations, specifically focusing on auteur films, pornography and DIY digital videos. He discusses queer-themed films by several filmmakers, including François Ozon [including *Les Amants criminels* (1999) and *Le temps qui reste*], Patrice Chéreau [*Ceux qui m'aiment prendront le train* (1998) and *Son frère* (2003)], Sébastien Lifshitz [*Les Corps ouverts* (1998) and *Wild Side* (2004)], André Téchiné, and Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau [including *Jeanne et le garçon formidable* (1998) and *Drôle de Félix* (2000)]. Rees-Roberts provides an insightful overview of a variety of themes across French queer cinema, including: the recent cluster of queer films that are interested in *beur* men¹², the intersections of immigrant poverty and queer sexuality, and the emergence of queer DIY video. Importantly, Rees-Roberts identifies the connections between queer cinema and the socio-political changes in France in the late 90s. He writes: "...the films covered seek to trouble the notion of a fixed gay identity and community or a received notion of family and kinship, in order to establish alternative templates for visions of same-sex intimacy and queer sexualities" (120). Rees-Roberts's book provides important insight into French queer cinema that is crucial to the remainder of this thesis. His ability to mix ideological textual analysis of queer-themed films with the French socio-political context most resembles the intentions of my thesis¹³. This thesis builds upon Rees-Roberts's work through the incorporation of explicit sex in French queer cinema as an additional aspect of inquiry.

¹² The term *beur* refers to French citizens of 'Maghrebi' origin.

¹³ Similar to Rees-Roberts, Darren Waldron investigates French queer cinema in a contemporary context. Waldron's book, *Queering Contemporary French Popular Cinema*, looks specifically at the relationship between queer images and how they are received by audiences. Nevertheless, while Waldron's book is

Both Waldron and Rees-Roberts focus on films which primarily contain gay male sexuality. Rees-Roberts asserts, “whilst the film production covered in this book focuses primarily on gay male sexuality (due to the lack of ‘out’ lesbian filmmakers and of lesbian self-representation), the films in question do not promote a straightforward, affirmative version of gay male subcultures (Rees-Roberts, 5). The lack of lesbian filmmakers and lesbian themed films lends itself to further questioning. How do lesbian cinema and New Queer cinema intersect? Has queer cinema come to represent solely gay male sexuality? The following section will address some of the key issues that are present with regard to lesbian cinema and francophone lesbian cinema.

1.4.3 Lesbian Cinema and New Queer Cinema

Lesbian cinema which has been associated with the New Queer Cinema movement during the 90s include, *Nitrate Kisses* (Hammer, 1992) *Go Fish* (Troche, 1994) and *The Watermelon Woman* (Dunye, 1996). Despite this, lesbian desires remain relatively undefined by the New Queer Cinema paradigm (Pramaggiore, 65). In “Fishing for Girls: Romancing Lesbians in the New Queer Cinema”, Maria Pramaggiore argues: “...it is important to acknowledge that lesbian cinema participates in New Queer Cinema *and* to recognize that contemporary lesbian filmmaking is not characterized with enough precision or specificity by such a term” (65). Similarly, Amy Taubin argues, with regard to the 1992 inception of New Queer Cinema, that “queer cinema is figured in terms of sexual desire and the desire it constructs is exclusively male... indeed, women are even more marginalised in ‘queer’ than in heterosexual film; at least in the latter, they function

similar to Rees-Roberts, with regard to the films they analyze, Waldron’s audience study changes the tone of his book greatly. Waldron offers an extensive overview of films that portray lesbian, gay and queer desires and identities, exploring how mainly French-speaking spectators respond to these depictions. Waldron’s close textual analysis of the films is also accompanied by a qualitative investigation of audience reception, using questionnaires and discussion groups. He asserts, “In my view, the comparison of empirical data produced across a range of research methods demonstrates this instability of reception and identity” (242). He ultimately suggests that while these films challenge social and sexual norms by portraying non-straight forms of sexuality, whether the films are effective depends on what spectators do with those representations (245). Waldron’s book is in dialogue with the current scholarship on contemporary French queer cinema but differs because of his incorporation of an audience study. While his textual analysis will prove helpful throughout this thesis, Waldron’s incorporation and methodology of audience reception is not necessarily suitable for this study.

as objects of desire” (Taubin, 37). While the focus of this thesis is on French queer cinema, we must also understand the potential limitations of the term.

Lesbian film studies are defined at a curious intersection between feminist film theory and queer theory, as suggested by Judith Mayne. She explains, “For queer film theory insists on the wide range of responses to the cinema that are not reducible to the paradigm of sexual difference. However, as many lesbian commentators on feminist film theory have noted the extent to which *sexual difference* really means heterosexuality, so have lesbian commentators on queer theory noted how often *queer* really means gay male” (Mayne, xvii-xix). The relationship between lesbian cinema and queer cinema is complicated by such questions of authorship, filmic depictions of lesbians, and lesbian spectators. Anat Pick insightfully explains,

Screening lesbianism is not simply a matter of making the invisible visible, but of negotiating different *regimes of visibility*. The conceptual shift from ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ to ‘queer’, and then to ‘new queer’, has propelled discussions of what makes a lesbian text, a lesbian perspective, or a lesbian auteur. It has also invigorated thinking about the relation between the ‘margin’ and the ‘centre’ (115).

Pick argues that while New Queer Cinema enables new ways of screening female intimacy in a more popular cultural arena it simultaneously places emphasis on male narratives of desire and fails to foreground lesbian cinema on its own terms. The questions raised by Pick are echoed by Tamsin Wilton’s introductory chapter for *Immortal, Invisible*. Wilton explains that it is obligatory to preface any exploration of lesbian issues with problematizing the definition of ‘lesbian’; how do we define a lesbian film, a lesbian filmmaker, and a lesbian spectator (3)? These questions become important in the context of *Blue is the Warmest Color*, the focus of chapter two. *Blue* is a coming of age story about two young lesbians, containing several minutes of explicit sex. Interestingly, the film is directed by notable filmmaker Abdellatif Kechiche. *Blue* has generated considerable controversy both for the explicitness of the sex it presents, as well as, the potentially privileged positionality of its director; the possible implications that his gender poses for the normative definitions of what constitutes a lesbian film.

Patricia White's *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema* and Andrea Weiss' *Vampires & Violets: Lesbians in Film* similarly represent key texts in lesbian cinema studies. White's book looks at "both the pleasure classical Hollywood films continue to give contemporary lesbian spectators and the ways in which those films and the social technology of Hollywood have constructed our very psychosocial identities and possibilities of self-representation" (White, xvii). White identifies lesbian spectator strategies as well as offers a comprehensive look at lesbians and lesbian desire in Hollywood cinema. Echoing Wilton, Weiss explains that "lesbian images in cinema have been and continue to be virtually invisible" (Weiss, 1). While both texts focus on primarily North American articulations of lesbianism, Weiss also discusses post-war European art cinema's courtship of lesbianism. She explains that the appeal of lesbianism for the art cinema is undeniably powerful, which is important not only for representation, but additionally for women directors relying on the mode of production aligned with art cinema. Weiss references several European art films, including *Entre Nous/ Between Us* (Kurys, 1983), *Je tu il elle/ I You He She* (Akerman, 1974) and *Les Rendez-Vous d'Anna/ The Meetings of Anna* (Akerman, 1979).

Je tu il elle is arguably one of the first films to depict explicit lesbian sex on screen. The explicit sex scene occurs at the end of the film and involves Chantal Akerman herself. *Je tu il elle* is divided into three sections. The first segment is characterized by isolation; Julie (Akerman) sits alone in her bedroom eating a bag of granulated sugar. The rather long period of isolation is followed by her journey to see her ex-lover. After hitchhiking, Julie is given a ride by a male truck driver. During their journey the truck driver asks Julie for a hand job, to which she complies. The camera does not show the sexual act, but rather, focuses on the truck driver's face for the entire scene. The final section of the film shows Julie arriving at the apartment of her lover, eating a sandwich, and having sex. The sexually explicit scene rejects the traditional soft-core, male-oriented eroticization of lesbians traditionally found in cinema. Weiss states that the lesbian lovemaking scene "must be credited for its courage in 1974, especially given that it includes the filmmaker in the scene and rejects art cinema conventions governing lesbian sexuality" (Weiss, 114). Judith Mayne suggests *Je tu il elle* does not inhabit comfortably the category of "lesbian film", rather, potentially resisting such

categorization altogether (136). Mayne explains that Akerman shows the complexity of female sexuality without falling into the “trap” of lesbianism as triumphant; she explores female sexuality without reducing it to the simple binary of heterosexual as bad and lesbianism as good (132-133). Nevertheless, Mayne explains that categorizing *Je tu il elle* presents a problem. She asserts:

The problem of naming *Je tu il elle* is difficult, and compounded by the fact that naming is—as the very title of the film suggests—central to its direction and structure. It may be that what *Je tu ill elle* works with and through is precisely the difficulty of naming, and my own reluctance to categorize the film may be less a function of the film’s own resistance to naming than a reflection of the fact that there exist, in the taxonomy of film types, no categories which adequately describe what *Je tu il elle* is (133).

Je tu il elle and *Blue is the Warmest Color*, contain several narrative similarities. These include: the ending of relationships, explicit lesbian sex, the main characters sexual engagement with a man, and the importance of food and eating. Yet the films are vastly different. While, as Mayne and others have suggested, Akerman presents lesbianism in order to explore female sexuality, *Blue* perhaps shows an aestheticized version of lesbianism from a heteronormative male perspective. Nonetheless, situating *Je tu il elle* in the context of this thesis is important for several reasons. Indeed, considering the subject of categorization in this way can open doors to further questions, questions regarding the identification, representation, and reception of lesbian cinema. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is a film about two lesbians, yet in many ways, this film does not neatly fit into the categorization of “lesbian film”, feminist film, or queer film. Additionally, we must remember that *Je tu il elle* is a Belgian film and thus, does not entirely fit within the French specific borders of this study; the film is francophone yet is not specifically informed by the socio-political moment in France which was addressed at the beginning of the chapter.

Despite the many francophone films that represent lesbian desire, there has only been one book-length study published on the topic, Lucille Cairns’ *Sapphism on Screen: Lesbian Desire in French and Francophone Cinema*. Cairns’ book begins with her addressing this issue, the relatively absent presence of scholarship devoted to non-Anglophone lesbian representation; the scholarly attention has mainly remained in

journal articles and chapters in edited volumes. Cairns' text investigates and traces the spaces of lesbian desire in cinema from France but also from several French-speaking countries. She asserts that a corpus of roughly eighty-nine films, including Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995), André Téchiné's *Les Voleurs/ Thieves* (1995), and François Ozon's *Huit femmes/ 8 Women* (2001) have contributed to contemporary understandings of female homosexuality. This number is quite surprising as it underscores how many lesbian texts exist but remain largely ignored within academic analysis. Cairns states: "As such, they [the films] have contributed to hegemonic constructions of (female) homosexuality in an episteme wherein sexed and gendered identity, including sexual orientation, has become a pre-eminent factor in the constitution of subjectivity" (1).

Cairns importantly explains that her book "is *not* primarily a contribution to French cinema scholarship, but rather is a contribution to gay/lesbian/queer cultural studies *within a French-language cinematic context*" (Cairns, 2). While drawing such neat boundaries may be questionable, as we have seen in relation to *Je tu il elle*, this distinction is important in the context of this thesis. Cairns book will also inform the second chapter in this thesis, which explores sexually explicit lesbian sex in a mainstream contemporary film. Cairns asks, is commercial exploitation of lesbianism really a cause for complaint?

... the airbrushed quality of these highly packaged lesbian ciphers makes one wonder to what extent the average mainstream viewer will link them to extra-diegetical, real-life lesbians. And there's the rub: lesbian thrills can become aspirational consumer options *if* their protagonists look just like canonically pretty, straight girls. For if they did not, they might alienate the boys—and it is the boys who still, by and large, control every aspect of image-production, be it in film, video or television, from inception, creation, distribution and marketing down to consumption (6-7).

Cairns questions have added resonance within this thesis as they relate to the central issues of how sexuality is normatively prescribed and the role of contemporary film in interrogating the presumptive ideology therein.

1.4.4 Domesticating Queer Cinema

Before concluding this introductory chapter, we will return to French cinema of the 1990s, to consider how queer cinema and normativity intersect. The queer films of the 1990s, specifically the late 90s, mirror and interrogate the cultural and political shift of focus from the individual to the couple, as Todd W. Reeser explains. He contends, one of the lessons of AIDS in France had been the lack of recognition of same-sex couples, which made dealing with the disease even more difficult; little recognition was given to partners of patients affected with the disease. Reeser references several films, most specifically, *L'Homme est une femme comme les autres/ Man is a Woman* (Zilbermann, 1998), *La Confusion des genres/ The Confusion of Genders* (Cohen, 2000), and *Ma vie en rose/ My Life in Pink* (Berliner, 1997). “In their cultural context, films such as these implicitly allude to the possibility of legal and stable unions even as (or because) they depict their absence or impossibility” (Reeser, 36). Gay domesticity is additionally questioned in the films of the late 90s. For Reeser “... these works are grappling with the new symbolic order in various ways, employing gay or queer adolescents as projections of gay adulthood back onto a younger generation and forward onto an imagined world in which coupledness will be of prime importance as much culturally as legally” (37). Reeser suggests that some of these films take domesticity so seriously that it appears to be a part of the coming-out process, for example, *Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train* and *The Adventures of Félix*. He asserts that, “in a new French cultural context, sexuality no longer has to be the central element of the coming-out process: rather, an assumption of domesticity can be its culminating point” (Reeser, 44). Reeser demonstrates that the films of this time reflect the cultural and political context of 90s France; much like the films which appear in later chapters in this thesis mirror and interrogate the happenings of the early to mid-2010s. Reeser’s arguments are echoed in the work of Christopher Pullen and his analysis of the films of Ducastel and Martineau.

Ducastel and Martineau are a directing duo whose most recognizable works include, *Jeanne et le garçon formidable/ The Perfect Guy*, *Drôle de Félix/ The Adventures of Félix*, *Ma vraie vie à Rouen/ My Life on Ice* (2002), and *Crustacé et Coquillages/ Côte d’Azur* (2005). Pullen suggests that Ducastel and Martineau contribute

to discourses surrounding AIDS, homosexuality, race, youth identity, the fabric of contemporary family and politics in society, while simultaneously presenting themselves as agents of gay social identity (49). For Pullen, Ducastel and Martineau reveal their political selves “...not just from the aspect of presenting themselves as an openly gay couple making films together as political bodies: they also have inventive and progressive strategies which help to get their messages across” (60). As Pullen explains, these strategies include the musical format in *The Perfect Guy*, fragmented visual iconography in *My Life on Ice*, and the reconfiguration of the road movie in *The Adventures of Félix*¹⁴.

The films of Ducastel and Martineau, and François Ozon, have a prominent place in French queer cinema. The majority of the films which Waldron studies, in *Queering Contemporary French Popular Cinema*, are directed by these directors. Yet, despite their distinctly queer features, the extent to which the films conform to the impertinence of New Queer Cinema may be questioned. Waldron explains that many of the heroes of their films form or continue relationships and establish “new” families by the end of the films, in so doing conforming to the dominant values of monogamy, commitment and collective responsibility (9). While Waldron suggests that such reconfigurations of the couples and the family might be read as progressive, a converse view could argue that the films maintain the very bedrocks of Western kinship of sentimental attachments and familial ties (9). Nonetheless, the films of the late 90s and early 00s in France show the importance of couples, domesticity, and families within France during this time. This thesis aims to explore how more recently the PACS and the legalization of same-sex marriage have been articulated in contemporary French cinema. The ostensible normalization of queer sexualities in contemporary France can be seen in the films discussed in this thesis. As the thesis demonstrates, the films discussed here use explicit sex as an effective means to engage with normalcy and the questions that arise as a consequence.

¹⁴ Interestingly, these same elements can be seen in the classics of the New Queer Cinema films: Greyson’s use of the musical genre in *Zero Patience*, the experimental fragmentation in Haynes’s *Poison*, and Araki’s reconfiguration of the road movie in *The Living End*.

1.5 Final Thoughts

This chapter began by considering the year 1999, which saw the rise of the PACS and the release of Warner's book *The Trouble with Normal*. Since this time the political climate has changed in France, most notably with the legalization of same-sex marriage. Advocates of same-sex marriage argue that queerness is to be readily accommodated within state universalism, suggesting that queers can transform republicanism from within, redefining what is considered normal. Yet, considering the corroboration and incorporation of gay and queer relationships within this dominant model also suggests a normalization of same-sex relationships, valorizing conjugal, monogamous sex and delegitimizing non-marital relations. This thesis aims to explore how political changes with regard to same-sex relations can be seen in cinema.

Chapter one will discuss the filmography of François Ozon. The chapter will consider his position as a “mainstream queer auteur” in contemporary French cinema. His position is key in relation to the films found in chapters two and three because his filmography spans from the late 1990s to today, thereby linking the films of the late 90s to films from the 2010s. This chapter will suggest that Ozon is a “mainstream” figure and, more importantly, offers a “mainstreaming” or normalizing version of non-normative approaches to sex, pleasure, and identity. This chapter will introduce Ozon's entire filmography, however the focus will remain on his most recent films, including, *Le Refuge/ Hideaway* (2009), *Jeune & Jolie/ Young & Beautiful* (2013), and *The New Girlfriend* (2014)

Chapter two will focus on *Blue is the Warmest Color*. Upon its releasing in May 2013, the film was at the center of controversy. This chapter will discuss *Blue*'s reception, exploring key issues in this controversy, and then move to a textual analysis of the film. While the film's explicit sex scenes had been the focus of most of the discussions surrounding *Blue*, this chapter will explore the role that class plays in the film, ultimately suggesting that it is a far more important theme/issue for Kechiche than sex/sexuality. *Blue is the Warmest Color* thus offers a normalization of lesbian romance and sexuality in a gay marriage context. If this is the case, how might we categorize *Blue is the Warmest Color* and how does this normalization affect its categorization?

Lastly, chapter three will discuss the filmography of Alain Guiraudie, focusing on his most recent 2013 film *Stranger by the Lake*. The film takes place at a lake-side gay cruising spot in the South of France. Using Foucault's conceptions of homosexuality and friendship, this chapter will explore the location of the lake and the relationships between the men at this lake. This chapter will suggest that the film complicates the political moment in France, offering a version of relationality which suggests alternatives to the couple and family. The explicit sex in the film and alternative forms of relationality potentially trouble the republicanism of French politics and suggest the persistence of more resistant forms of queer cinemas in France.

Chapter 1

2 Desires, Pleasures, and Screening Sex in the Cinema of François Ozon

At the cinema I like to be entertained, but mostly I like to be jolted, to be thrown off balance about what I think is right or wrong. In my own films I try to show how complex or ambiguous situations can be. I don't take a stand. I pose questions. The spectator is smart enough to look for the answers in himself.¹⁵

—François Ozon

For over twenty-five years François Ozon has been writing and directing films. He is well regarded within the Hollywood film industry, popular within queer cinema circles, and has been arguably the face of the leading wave of new French film directors. Ozon's importance within French queer cinema is well recognized, and thus, he is regularly discussed in literature written about French queer cinema. Yet, his position as a French film auteur, more generally, has been disputed due to the disparate nature of his oeuvre. Mark Hain asks: "Can a filmmaker whose work is so disparate in style and tone really be called an auteur? And furthermore, does the grandiose and rather nostalgic term carry much meaning for a filmmaker like Ozon?" (277). Kate Ince, perhaps in response, instead positions Ozon as France's first *mainstream queer auteur* (113). How is Ozon both mainstream and queer (two terms which seem potentially opposing) as well as a French auteur? Borrowing Ince's term, this chapter will unpack the facets of "mainstream queer auteur", and argue that the *mainstream* element of this designation offers an interesting insight to Ozon's position in contemporary French queer cinema. For Ozon's position as mainstream queer auteur is both reflective of and in dialogue with the larger socio-political normalization of queers in contemporary France. This chapter will discuss Ozon's contemporary filmography, particularly, *Hideaway*, *Young & Beautiful*, and *The New Girlfriend*, examining their sexually explicit scenes, and suggesting their important role in Ozon's positioning as mainstream queer auteur. This chapter will

¹⁵ The above quote is from an interview with French director François Ozon from April 23rd 2014 with Liza Béar, for *BOMB Magazine*.

suggest his filmography has in fact undergone a mainstreaming, but one that hasn't significantly altered his queer perspective. Ozon's recent work instead provides a queering of what may be considered normal within the republican universalist project of PACS and same-sex marriage. His contemporary films function by queering relationality from within the normalized values of monogamy and the family, which are deeply embedded in French republicanism. Ozon queers relationality through sexually explicit imagery. Ozon expands the limitations of 'normal sex' by subverting traditional practices surrounding the screening of sex.

2.1 Contemporary French Auteur

Ozon was born in 1967, around the same time the French New Wave period ostensibly ended. The beginning of Ozon's career also coincides with the revival of the auteur in French cinema during the 1990s (Schilt, 29). Ozon majored in fine arts at the Université de Paris Part I before he received a master's degree in cinema in the late 1980s at France's national film school, La Fémis – where he studied with one of his idols, New Wave patriarch Eric Rohmer (Thomas, 46). Alongside filmmakers such as Arnaud Desplechin, Cédric Kahn, Catherine Corsini, Pascale Ferran, and Gaël Morel, Ozon is a key figure of the *jeune cinéma français* (Young French Cinema), sometimes also called the *Nouvelle Nouvelle Vague* (*New New Wave*: Darke, 157). The fundamental difference between the New Wave of the 1960s and the *jeune cinéma français* is, as Schilt explains, “the fact that the preoccupations of the former were mostly male-centric and heteronormative; in contrast, the latter trend has facilitated the arrival of a new, more diverse generation of auteurs, including women, *beur* (French citizens of North African origin, and queer filmmakers” (30). Internationally, Ozon is best known for his association with Young French Cinema.

Since the 1990s François Ozon has made roughly a film a year. He is best known for the widespread distribution and success of a number of his films, including *Sous le sable/ Under the Sand* (2000), *8 femmes/ 8 Women* (2002), *Swimming Pool* (2003), and *Potiche/ Potiche (Trophy Wife)* (2010). With fifteen feature-length films in just sixteen years and several short films, François Ozon could certainly be considered a leading *auteur* in French cinema. Ozon is occasionally referred to as the *enfant terrible* of French

cinema because of the shocking provocation of some of his earlier films such as his popular fifty-two minute film *Regarde la mer/ See the Sea* (1997), *Sitcom* (1998), *Les Amants criminels/ Criminal Lovers* (1998), and *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes/ Water Drops on Burning Rocks* (1999). Moreover, Ozon's position within French cinema is both unique and ever changing; his films vary from postmodernist pastiche to serious art-house film, from camp to psychological realism. He uses a variety of different genres, forms, and styles, including crime thrillers (*See the Sea, Swimming Pool*), theatrical adaptations (*Water Drops on Burning Rocks, Potiche*), musical melodrama (*8 Women*), a period drama (*Angel* [2007]), psychological dramas (*Under the Sand, Le temp qui reste/ Time to Leave* [2005], *Young & Beautiful, The New Girlfriend*). But while his popularity in French cinema and his ability to work within multiple genres is apparent, his relationship to the history of French auteurism has nevertheless been questioned because of the variable style of his films; his work resists simple characterization because he often adopts different styles and explores different tones. Questioning how Ozon "fits" into the categorization of auteur brings us further understanding of the status of contemporary French auteur.

Ozon's auteurist positioning cannot be solely understood in terms of style and genre, as we can see by simply looking at his diverse filmography. Alistair Fox uses Ozon as a case study to explore auteurism, personal cinema, the Fémis generation, and the very title of auteur. Fox asserts that Ozon's auteurism does not merely reside in a particular style, in cinephilic moments, or in specific autobiographical parallels, but also, and primarily, "in the way that both style and content of Ozon's films are generated out of, and are contrived to express, an authorial fantasmatic related to a personal problematic that is repeated, almost obsessively, and with variations, from film to film" (216). For Fox, Ozon's position within contemporary French auteurism is not based on style alone or the director's personality. Rather, it is derived from the presence of what Fox terms an authorial fantasmatic that is deeply personal in origin, which drives the filmmaking impulse and governs every aspect of the films' enunciation (225). Ozon's authorial fantasmatic comes from a troubled internal state arising from problematic family relations, which are enacted upon through a fantasy of violence, and compensated for through creative representation (Fox, 218). As such, Fox connects Ozon's earlier

shorts, including the first short film Ozon acknowledges in his official filmography, *Photo de famille (Family Photo)* (1988), to his more contemporary films. Ozon's earlier shorts, for Fox, provide convenient material that can be used to demonstrate the key components of the authorial fantasmatic governing Ozon's cinematic imaginary (218).

Several other scholars have discussed the thematic similarities and reoccurring tropes in Ozon's filmography, despite the extreme disparateness. Thibaut Schilt contends that the generically and stylistically hybrid cinema of François Ozon exemplifies "the paradox of contemporary auteurism and reveals that the boundary between auteur cinema and its so-called mainstream counterpart is more porous than one might think" (30). Schilt suggests that Ozon's oeuvre is tremendously diverse with regard to cinematic choices, including generic, formal, and thematic levels, but remains consistent in its desire to blur the traditional boundaries between masculine and the feminine, gay and straight, reality and fantasy, auteur and commercial cinema (5). For some scholars, Ozon's films can be more easily characterized and defined by his choice of thematic concerns than his specific form. Andrew Asibong asserts that Ozon has consciously styled his filmography, thus far, around several reoccurring tropes and themes, most prominently the "emergence of adult sexualities and relations (or non-relations) from out of the spectral carcasses of real or fantasized family members" (3). Kate Ince likewise addresses the importance of the absent father, suggesting that this figure is a reoccurring element in at least four of his films (119). Ozon's films are strongly informed by themes of kinship, desire and violence. They focus on the family, typically bourgeois families, bourgeois culture, and the potential for sexual fluidity, which can often have adverse effects, including murder (*See the Sea, Sitcom*), death (*Under the Sand, Young & Beautiful*), and suicide (*Water Rocks on Burning Rocks, 8 Women*). Nevertheless, as Robert Sklar suggests, Ozon's signature comes from a combination of brutality and comedy in relation to his preeminent subject of the family, or, alternatively, the couple (48). Ozon's films are explorations of the notion of human nature; he explores the implications of the choices his characters make and asks viewers to do the same. Jonathan Romney insightfully suggests that few directors experience the advantage – or burden – of having a manifesto for a surname (1). Ozon's surname resembles the word 'osons' which in French translates to "let us dare". Romney states that "Truth or Dare",

the motto and game, could also be seen as the defining principle of Ozon's cinema. Romney contends, Ozon's "...characters dare themselves, and each other, to reveal their real nature – or, failing that, to perform charade through which that truth will emerge ('true nature', of course, may always prove to be another ephemeral mask)" (3). Importantly, Ozon's work confounds the process of definitive truth seeking and the classification of social and sexual identity; instead, he explores the slippery, unpredictable relationship of pleasures and desire to claims of identity.

Ozon's films are complex renegotiations of desire, as described by Schilt (4). Schilt uses the overarching title of "The Fabric of Desire" to characterize his commentary on Ozon's film career. The term *fabric of desire* becomes Schilt's structuring logic to further understand Ozon's films, *fabric* referring to costuming as well as *structure* or *framework*. Ozon uses fabrics, as explained by Schilt, as a tool to renegotiate desire. Similarly, Ince labels Ozon's career as "Cinema of Desire" and offers an investigation of Ozon's exploration of sexual desire. As Ince contends, "Repeatedly in Ozon's dramas, the structure of the couple, heterosexual *or* homosexual, underpins the action more firmly than does normative heterosexuality, binary sexual difference or stable sexual orientation" (118). Ozon's films have a tendency to complicate and queer seemingly normative structures (the family and couple) and spaces. Two normative spaces become apparent when considering Ozon's films, the home and the beach. Ince considers these two spaces as transformative spaces frequently used in Ozon's films (123). Ince refers here to Ozon's films up unto *5 x 2* (2004) but, as we shall see, these spaces also are characteristic of Ozon's subsequent films. Ozon's films are complex works offering numerous opportunities for interpretation. The characteristics and themes which are most associated with his work include, family, kinship, violence, death, desire, and sexual fluidity. And yet, Ozon's preoccupation with the exploration of sexual fluidity, both heterosexual and homosexual, arguably complicates his reception as a French auteur. To clarify the potentially controversial queerness of his work this chapter presents an investigation into Ozon's representations of sex and sexual identity.

2.2 Ozon's Queer Associations

Throughout the 1990s Ozon made numerous short films which revolve around queer desires, including *Action vérité/Truth or Dare* (1994), *La Petite mort/ A Little Death* (1995), *A Summer Dress/ Une Robe d'été* (1996), and *See the Sea*. The characters of these films are not bound to the normalized categories of homosexuality or heterosexuality, but rather, oscillate between these definitions. Celebration of Ozon as an openly gay filmmaker has been particularly marked in the United States film festival circuit. Several of his short films have won awards at the Los Angeles Outfest Film Festival and the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival¹⁶. Ozon's critical reception as a queer auteur is potentially complicated by his mainstream auteur title in France. Queer cinema traditionally functions outside commercial filmmaking, yet, Ozon's filmography and visions of queer have also enabled his move into more mainstream cinemas. Subsequently, understanding Ozon's approach to queer sexualizes and politics, and tracing his gradual transition to the mainstream, is key to understanding the complexity of Ozon's position as a mainstream queer auteur.

Thibaut Schilt situates Ozon within a relatively recent trend in French cinema that offers less heterocentric visions of the world and that can be situated alongside contemporary political debates on gay rights while also suggesting broader sexual fluidity in new and innovative ways ("Senses of Cinema"). Such films include *Les Roseaux Sauvages/ Wild Reeds* (Téchiné, 1994), *Gazon maudit/ French Twist* (Balasko, 1995), and *Ma vie en rose/ My Life in Pink* (Berliner, 1998). Accordingly, as Ince suggests, during the 90s, Ozon was often designated an openly 'gay' filmmaker (113). And yet, as Ince contends, "Ozon's films distinguish themselves clearly from earlier gay male filmic production in France through never having gay communities as their social setting, through their absence of reference to SIDA (AIDS), and through never having overtly politicized narratives" (113). Ozon's earlier filmography, including his several short films

¹⁶ Willemen states: "Ozon continued making short films which got him noticed at national and international film festivals, winning a prize for young film makers 'of tomorrow' in Locarno in 1996 for *Une Robe d'été*" (8).

and his first features (*Sitcom*, *Criminal Lovers*, and *Water Drops*), can thus be used to explore the queerness of his filmography and his approaches to sex and sexuality.

François Ozon is a provocative, queer auteur because he sees beyond the normative boundaries of sexualities, offering a subversion of normalized relationships and pleasures. Explicit sex is not depicted gratuitously in his films, but rather, is a key element in the development of his characters and their sexual identity. His early filmography offers a queering of the family (*Family Photo*, *Sitcom*, *Water Drops*) while also queering notions of the couple (*A Summer Dress*, *Criminal Lovers*). Ozon situates pleasures as favorable to desires, a concept proposed by Michel Foucault. While both Schilt (“Fabric of Desire”) and Ince (“Cinema of Desire”) situate their understanding of Ozon via the framework to desire, as seen in these titles, the importance of pleasures presented in this study do not run counter to either Schilt or Ince. Rather, this study aims to offer a Foucauldian understanding of pleasures and desires in Ozon’s filmography. Ozon’s work not only presents explicit sex in accordance to the notion of queer pleasures, he also puts pleasure in dialogue with more unsettling, possibly normative visions of sex and desire. Tamsin Spargo suggests that recent critics have turned to Michel Foucault’s later studies in order to explore the possibilities of non-normalizing sexual and ethical practices, but Foucault’s overall model of the discursive construction of sexualities was the main initial catalyst for queer theory (Spargo, 26). Foucault favored the term “pleasure” over the Freudian associations of desires. Foucault rejected desires close ties to psychology and psychoanalysis, particularly the premise of lack. For Foucault, desire was a kind of instrument for establishing knowledge about sexuality and identity as well as standardizing both in terms of normality. Foucault asserted that homosexuality, from sexual acts to identities in the 19th century, became something to discipline, regulate, and normalize. He writes:

In actual fact. The manifold sexualities - those which appear with the different ages (sexualities of the infant or the child), those which become fixated on particular tastes or practices (the sexuality of the invert, the gerontophile, the fetishist), those which, in a diffuse manner, invest relationships (the sexuality of doctor and patient, teacher and student, psychiatrist and mental patient), those which haunt spaces (the sexuality of

the home, the school, the prison)- all form the correlate of exact procedures of power (326).

Foucault rejected the normalized relations between individuals and sought to widen our conceptions of relations. Ozon's films are exemplars of the distinction between "pleasure" and "desire" which was a key aspect of Foucault. The familiar dyad of hetero-homo is destabilized in Ozon's filmography resulting in a critique of normal and normalization. Ozon is able to achieve this through the use of sexually explicit scenes which offer transgressive depictions of the act of sex. In this respect, Ozon's work can be seen as the manifestation of Foucault's ideas on normalized relations within French Queer cinema.

Ozon's exploration of sex and sexuality began early in his directorial career. *A Little Death*, *A Summer Dress* and *See the Sea* explore sexual fluidity, feature characters who engage in sex which is outside the normalized boundaries, both hetero- and homosexual, and depict sexually explicit scenes. Williams asserts that the verb to screen has two meanings, as both revelation and concealment. To screen is to reveal on a screen, but as Williams explains, the second and equally important meaning is to shelter or protect (6-7). "Movies both reveal and conceal. If the history of moving-image entertainment is one of a general tendency toward revelation, of a greater graphic imagination of sex, we must keep the stress on imagination" (Williams, 2). Williams examines sexually explicit scenes, discussing how they offer transgressive depictions of cinematic sex, by referencing several European films, including French films, *Intimacy* (Chéreau, 2000), *Romance* (Breillat, 1999), and *À ma soeur! / Fat Girl* (Breillat, 2001). The sexually explicit sex acts are neither the whole point of the film (as in pornography) nor simply there gratuitously (as in soft-core 'exploitation') (Williams, 20). While Ozon's filmography may not be as explicit as the films listed above (Ozon's films do not show unsimulated sex), the sexually explicit scenes in Ozon's filmography are still sexually transgressive. Important to the understanding of Ozon as a queer filmmaker is an examination of his rejections of the traditional standards of screening sex, as well as his ability to *queer* pleasure.

Ozon's use of sexually explicit imagery came early in his career. For example, *A Summer Dress* features both heterosexual and homosexual depictions of sex. The film is about Luc, a young man on vacation with his boyfriend Sébastien. Irritated with Sébastien and his overly camp behavior, Luc ventures to the beach where he meets a woman wearing a summer dress. She invites him to have sex with her in the woods and he complies. Luc, now naked, follows the woman to the woods. The scene is compiled of four shots showing Luc and the woman together. The first is the establishing shot of both Luc naked and the woman naked with the camera situated behind them. The second shot features Luc putting a condom on and moving on top of the woman; they kiss and begin to have sex. These shots establish what is happening, and what will continue to happen, between these characters; if the scene were to have ended here the spectator would have still known the sex happened. Nevertheless, the third and fourth shots are important. The third shot resituates above the woman's head, showing a close-up of Luc on top of her. Luc looks off screen and sees a man walking through the woods, a public area, who notices them having sex. Luc acknowledges this man's presence but does not stop having sex, seemingly rejecting normalized practices of having sex in public areas. The fourth shot is a long shot capturing Luc and the woman in missionary position. These two final shots are not needed for necessary understanding of the story, but rather, they serve to further destabilize the actions occurring by Luc and the woman. Indeed, the sexual dynamics of this scene are destabilized because of Luc's established homosexuality; the boundaries of sexual identity are thus blurred. Having sex in this specific missionary position denotes the prescribed, procreative position, as Williams describes in *Screening Sex* (138), yet the conventionality of their sex is undermined by Luc's established homosexuality. Ozon not only wanted to make clear that these characters were having sex, which the first two shots accomplished, but also wanted to additionally destabilize viewers expectations of normalized male-female sex. Here, the act of sex may be considered traditional (missionary, male-female) yet, Ozon's depiction of two strangers, one gay and one female, having sex, undermines a conventional reading of the scene.

A Summer Dress ends with Luc returning home to his male partner while wearing the woman's dress, as his clothes were taken on the beach. Upon seeing Luc in the dress, his gay partner becomes aroused and they have sex, further destabilizing the 'fixed'

expectations of sexual identity and cinematic sex. Gibson explains that *A Summer Dress* “suggests both gender and sexual fluidity, portraying characters who are not forced to choose between the inevitable masculine/feminine and gay/straight binaries, nor are they ever punished for the choices they make” (15). The absence of punishment underscores Ozon’s non-normalizing presentation sex. This scene both critiques normalized pleasures and is simultaneously dependent upon our normative expectations for its transgressive power.

Ozon wrote and directed *See the Sea* the following year, in 1997. *See the Sea* is about Sasha (Sasha Hails), a young British woman living in a small village in France with her young child. Sasha allows a drifter, Tatiana (Marina De Van), to pitch a tent outside of her home while her husband is away on business. While the women build a seemingly friendly relationship throughout the film, the film ends with the horrific murder of Sasha. When Sasha’s husband returns home, he finds Sasha bound and dead in Tatiana’s tent. The final shots of the film are of Tatiana and the baby on a ferry together. Sarah Cooper suggests that, with regard to *See the Sea*, where Ozon’s vision ends, the spectator’s critical questioning begins. “*Regarde la mer* reflects us back finally on our own moral frameworks and beliefs, and it is this that enables us to see beyond the view the film offers of both the maternal figure and the sea” (Cooper, 13). This critical questioning is a key element which has been present throughout Ozon’s entire filmography. While watching an Ozon film, the spectator negotiates with their own pre-conceived notions (often binaries) of right or wrong, good or bad, and acceptable or unacceptable. In *See the Sea*, Sasha’s physical act of sexual transgression takes place when she enters the woods, a gay cruising spot, to engage in sex with an unknown man. The sex consists of cunnilingus and the scene ends with a shot of Sasha leaning against a tree, her breathing indicating pleasure. Both *A Summer Dress* and *See the Sea* are from Ozon’s earlier filmography and contain sexually explicit imagery. Yet, these films are tonally very different. *See the Sea*, with its morose ending and violent undertones, complicates the playful sexual fluidity found in *The Summer Dress*. Ozon puts into dialogue themes, such as violence, death, and fluidity, which are not normally associated with pleasure and desire. Ozon’s ability to create this dialogue, and queer pleasures, establishes his queer preoccupations. The absence of punishment found in *A Summer Dress* is surely lost in

See the Sea. While Luc's sexual fluidity is acceptable, Sasha's sexual transgression results in her brutal murder. Sasha's murder and ostensible punishment are complicated by Tatiana's position as a female murderer. Sasha's sexual promiscuity and exploration of sex outside her marriage, in the search of pleasures, is not positively reinforced by the ending of the film, as one may assume with an Ozon film. The tonal differences and endings of these films suggest gendered inequalities of alternative relationality. As such, Ozon's representation of female sex and sexuality may be troubling with regard to gender depictions. These two examples from Ozon's early filmography, *A Summer Dress* and *See the Sea*, suggest the capabilities of sexual transgression are more readily afforded to gay male subjectivities than female sexuality.

Ozon's next three features, made between 1998 and 2000, *Sitcom*, *Criminal Lovers*, and *Water Drops on Burning Rocks*, can be considered exemplars of his queer preoccupations. In addition, these films build the approach to sex and sexuality present in his earlier films. By this time Ozon was a notorious figure in French cinema circles because of his short films. *Sitcom* is a satirical film, playing with the television genre of the sitcom, about a seemingly normal nuclear family. Chaos follows when the father brings home a laboratory rat. Only after the death of both the rat and the father is order re-established. Schilt explains that the film's intentions are clearly to subvert and transgress the norms of middle-class *bonne société*, explicitly presenting or suggesting "every perversion and taboo in the book: homosexuality, interracial adultery, sadomasochism, incest, paedophilia, group sex, even bestiality" (*Senses of Cinema*). Ince connects the queering of the family in *Sitcom* to the queering in Ozon's short *Photo de famille* (*Family Photo*, 1988) (118). For example, in *Sitcom*, new familiar relations are created by the end of the film with the elimination of the father/father figure.

Ozon's next film *Criminal Lovers* received less than favorable reviews. *Criminal Lovers* was "unanimously torn apart by the press, the film was also a commercial flop, despite a marketing blitz" (Bonnaud, 53). The film follows a young couple, Alice and Luc, as they decide upon and follow through with the murder of a fellow classmate. In an attempt to flee the authorities, the couple escapes to the woods only to be captured by a mysterious woodsman. After the woodsman forcibly masturbates Luc and they later have

sex, a troubling relationship between sex and power is created, as explained by Schilt, who considers the woodsman a paedophile (*Senses of Cinema*). Yet, without the woodsman forcibly separating Luc from Alice Luc would not have discovered his primary sexual orientation (Ince, 117). *Criminal Lovers* did not resonate with critics and the film was a commercial failure.

Following the disappointment of *Criminal Lovers*, Ozon made the critically successful *Water Drops on Burning Rocks* in 1999 which was adapted from an early Rainer Werner Fassbinder play. Divided into four acts, the film follows the relationship between a young boy, Franz (Malik Zidi), and his older male partner, Léopold (Bernard Giraudeau), as their relationship falls apart. Ince contends, if Léopold's status as a father-figure is acknowledged, "then dominant, egotistic, malevolent *paternal* sexuality becomes the motor force and dramatic atmosphere of the film, and the desire that drives it to its tragic conclusion" (123). While *Water Drops* does not feature a family of characters, the film can be read as still queering the family, by embodying the positions of a family (paternal, maternal and children). Normative roles and spaces are queered in his earlier works by destabilizing the family and couple structures. The desire and pleasure that Ozon depicts, trouble such norms because they exist outside the prescribed limitations of the traditional family structure and couple. Yet, Ozon's filmography seems to have undergone a change, as he has merged into the mainstream. We may continue to consider his films as queer, as the next section will maintain, however, his contemporary filmography is engaged in more complex ways with the changing sexual political climate in France, notably PACS and the legalization of same-sex marriage.

2.3 Ozon as "Mainstream" Figure: Mainstreaming Approaches to Sexuality and Identity

Considering the 'mainstream' component of Ince's title, mainstream queer auteur, attests to Ozon's unique ability to direct and write films with an auteurist vision while also attracting large mainstream audiences. After adapting *Water Drops on Burning Rocks* from Fassbinder's play in 1999, Ozon returned to writing and directing with *Under the Sand* in 2000, followed by *8 Women* in 2002, and *Swimming Pool* the following year. These three films can be understood as Ozon's introduction to mainstream success.

Under the Sand and *Swimming Pool*, were both internationally acclaimed and extremely successful at the box office and in the film festival circuit. *Under the Sand* and *Swimming Pool* can be defined as a part of Ozon's "trilogy on female desire" along with *See the Sea* (Schilt, *Senses of Cinema*). These three films have much in common. Most importantly, their focus on their female lead's desires are made explicit and all three films contain either scenes of female masturbation or sex. Ozon received nominations for César Awards for Best Film and Best Director for both *Under the Sand* and *8 Women*.

Made on a modest budget (less than \$9 million), *8 Women* has grossed over \$42 million worldwide to date. The film features a large cast of high-profile, French actresses, including: Danielle Darrieux, Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert, Emmanuelle Béart, Fanny Ardant, Virginie Ledoyen, Ludivine Sagnier, and Firmine Richard. The film is a dark comedy including musical numbers from all the leading women as they try to solve the murder of the family patriarch. For Ince, these three films "have seen audience figures and generated an order of box-office revenue that rival French films considered 'popular' successes, thereby undoing the binary opposition between 'auteur' and 'popular' cinema" (133-134). These films mark Ozon's mainstream successes, yet, the films Ozon directed immediately following, *5 x 2* (2004) and *Le Temp qui reste/ Time to Leave* (2005) did not receive the same recognition. Ozon's next feature was an English language film *Angel* (2007), based on a novel by British writer Elizabeth Taylor. The film was not a commercial success and received less than favorable reviews. Peter Bradshaw states "[*Angel*] really is a failure - an honourable failure, arguably, but a failure, and a pretty complete one at that" (*The Guardian*). Whether or not *Angel* was anticipated to be Ozon's next big mainstream success, the film failed to receive any additional popularity because of its English language.

Ozon's most recent films include *Hideaway*, *Potiche*, *Dans la maison/ In the House* (2012), *Young & Beautiful*, and *The New Girlfriend*. In addressing Ozon's more contemporary filmography in this chapter, one of my aims is to consider the ramifications of Ozon's mainstream position, and to suggest that his films mirror the socio-political changes in France in unique ways. Indeed, this mainstreaming can be read as reflecting the political normalization of queer sexualities in France. Ozon's films reaffirm the

values at the core of French republicanism, including family, kinship, and the couple. Ozon queers normal from *within* the normalized values of French republicanism, rather than critiquing normal by directly challenging the political normalization of queers; the following discussion will illustrate this transition.

Hideaway, made in 2009, begins with Mousse (Isabelle Carré) and Louis (Melvil Poupaud) who are young, affluent, drug addicts. After Louis' fatal overdose, Mousse learns that she is pregnant – Carré was actually pregnant during the making of the film. Mousse moves to a secluded beach home, far from Paris, in an effort to come to terms with the loss of Louis and to avoid her mother-in-law's disapproval of her decision to keep the baby. She is soon joined by Louis' gay brother Paul (Louis-Ronan Choisy). When Mousse eventually has her child, she is unable to embrace motherhood and leaves the baby girl for Paul to raise.

The scene in which Mousse and Paul have sex is visually unfamiliar to mainstream viewers; Mousse is several months pregnant, and thus, her body is not traditionally associated with cinematic sex. The scene begins with Paul reaching for Mousse's hand and then cuts to a shot of the two embracing each other, undressed under the covers. As they have sex Paul is situated behind Mousse and her pregnant belly is now uncovered and situated slightly off center in the frame. The scene concludes with Paul and Mousse in the same positioning. Paul lightly caresses her pregnant belly and the scene ends with Paul's hand remaining prominently on her stomach. Ozon here calls into question normalized sex and sexuality, suggesting potential sexual fluidity, especially on Paul's part. Ozon destabilizes traditional cinematic male-female sex through both Mousse's late term pregnancy and Paul's homosexuality. The sex between these characters is transgressive and calls into question traditional sex scenes. Ozon similarly destabilizes the desires of Paul's character. Paul is driven by immediate, erotic pleasures and not bound to the standard desires associated with homosexuality, thus suggesting a sexual fluidity. Mousse and Paul are not asked to choose between gay/straight identities; rather, they express and act upon sexual pleasures. While *Hideaway* may seem to function similarly to Ozon's pre-*Under the Sand* filmography, embracing sexual fluidity and non-normalized desires, the film's ending suggests something else, calling into

question the thematic purpose of this scene. By the end of the film Mousse is unable (or unwilling) to raise her new born child, and she leaves the child for Paul to raise. The tone of the film's ending is optimistic; Mousse leaves the hospital alone while Paul lovingly holds the baby. Despite the fact that the baby is not biologically Paul's child, the physical resemblance between Paul and his brother as well as the fact that Paul and Mousse had sex previously, suggests Paul's paternal position. So, while we may consider Paul and Mousse having sex to be representative of sexual fluidity, considering how the scene functions in relation to the film's ending, a converse view may argue that the film maintains the bedrock of raising a family and aligns the gay man with such a role. French gay rights politics are not directly addressed in *Hideaway* yet, the ending of this film lends itself to such an address. Queer individuals or queer couples raising children is an ending which will also be seen later in Ozon's filmography, specifically in *The New Girl Friend*. Analyzing how these films engage with the contemporary moment in France aids in situating Ozon in France as a mainstream queer auteur.

The same year that same-sex marriage was legalized in France, Ozon made *Young & Beautiful*. *Young & Beautiful* is a coming of age story about Isabelle (Marnie Vaché), a young bourgeois girl living with her parents and younger brother in Paris. Isabelle, seemingly unprovoked, decides to begin working as a prostitute named Lea. However, the police, as well as Isabelle's family, become aware of her double life when one of Isabelle's regular clients, Georges (Johan Leysen), dies of a heart attack while they are having sex. Isabelle stops work as a prostitute and begins a relationship with a young man. She eventually returns to the hotel, where Georges died, to meet Georges' wife. They talk and return to the specific room where Georges died. The final shots of the film are of Georges' wife caressing Isabelle's face as she falls asleep. *Young & Beautiful* premiered at Cannes Film Festival, where it was nominated for a Palme d'Or. The film was praised and well received by festivals and critics, receiving awards throughout the circuit. Several features link *Young & Beautiful* to Ozon's earlier filmography, notably

his return to the beach as a transformative space as well as his depiction of female masturbation¹⁷.

Isabelle loses her virginity on beach on a summer's night while her family is on vacation. This location both enacts an idealized fantasy of sex-on-the-beach as well as serves as a transformative space, as Ince suggests on her work on Ozon. Isabelle has sex with Felix (Lucas Prisor) a young German boy. The scene begins with the couple getting ice cream and sitting on the beach together. They begin to kiss and the scene cuts to Felix on top of Isabelle in the missionary position, both still fully clothed. He questions if she is a virgin, she answers yes, and he tells her to not be afraid. They begin to have sex and the camera is at a high angle above them, watching Isabelle's face, not cutting to see Felix's face. Isabelle looks off screen right, and the camera shifts to follow her gaze. The shot which follows blurs the line between reality and fantasy. As she looks away she sees herself standing on the beach watching herself with Felix on top of her.

As Williams explains, we must remember that filmed sex scenes are constructed, mediated, and performed acts. Ozon's inclusion of Isabelle's imaginary-self functions to remove the spectator from the ostensible realness of this scene and to remind them of its "reel-ness". In this surreal moment, Isabelle's image of herself vanishes within seconds, as does her virginity. Isabelle's face suggests that the experience leaves her feeling cold and emotionally unattached to Felix, despite the expected romanticism of the beach setting. In this early scene of *Young & Beautiful*, Ozon destabilizes the spectator's imagination around normalized, heterosexual cinematic sex.

Isabelle and her family return to their home in the city after their vacation and Isabelle begins prostitution later that autumn. Ozon does not fall into a trap by trying to explain the rational for Isabelle's decision to enter into prostitution; rather, the spectator

¹⁷ The first was Charlotte Rampling in *Under the Sand* in 2000. In *Young & Beautiful*, Isabelle's masturbation is from the perspective of her younger brother; the camera is shaky and situated behind a slightly open bedroom door.

simply joins her once she has already made the decision. In an interview, Ozon suggests that the film is about adolescence not prostitution. As he explained,

I also wanted to show how conscious of their power youth are today. Isabelle knows she's young and beautiful and makes use of it. She organizes those meetings. She's in control. And I wanted to explore this paradox: it's not because one is the object of another's desire that one isn't in control of the situation (Béar, BOMB Magazine).

The pleasure that was absent from the sex on the beach with Felix is later found with Georges in the hotel room. The sexually explicit scenes in which she has sex with Georges contain the depictions of pleasure rarely seen in her first sexual encounter; close-up shots of Isabelle's face in particular suggest satisfaction. The first explicit scene, in which we see Isabelle and Georges together, begins with Isabelle walking down the hotel hallway towards, presumably, the hotel room where she meets George. The following shot depicts cunnilingus from a long shot as both Isabelle and George are naked on the bed. Isabelle's long brown hair and youthful appearance is placed in contrast to Georges' white hair, mature face, and confidence. Here, Ozon does not include shots of the couple undressing or foreplay but rather transitions directly to the act of sex. The stark contrast in age between Isabelle and Georges works in conjunction with the abrupt shot change, from hallway to bed, to subvert both normalized standards of male-female cinematic sex as well as normalized sexualities. However, more importantly, Ozon's engagement with authoritative, gendered controls over pleasures is key in this film.

Isabelle's pleasure calls into question desire as power. The reaction to Isabelle's prostitution is multifaceted in *Young & Beautiful*. Firstly, for the police she is a victim as she is still under-age. Secondly, for her mother as well as her therapist, she is sick and must choose between seeing a therapist and being institutionalized. Her mother and therapist represent the moralizing framework that *Young & Beautiful* ultimately interrogates. Foucault emphasizes that sex has historically been something not simply judged but rather administered. Isabelle's sexuality is thus seen as constructed through the exercise of power relations by social governance. This governance is what Ozon critiques in *Young & Beautiful*. Isabelle's sexuality contrasts with the lyrical romance and imagery of Rimbaud's poem "No One's Serious at Seventeen", a poem that her class is

studying at the beginning of the film. Ozon is clear in situating Isabelle within a place of power within the film. Yet, one could question the more complex implication of this position; does Isabelle really have power in this film? Or are the powers of desire located elsewhere? Does the power that Ozon claims to have invested in Isabelle arise from her youth in contrast with her older client? Or from her gender? Or is it merely a temporary and transitory financial exchange? These elements are in play within *Young and Beautiful* but remain unresolved and implicit within the film.

In contrast, the explicit sex functions in *Young & Beautiful* to explore queer desires, but ultimately, the film does not destabilize the authoritative control over the desires it addresses. Rather, Ozon focuses upon normalizing sex as an attempt to control sexual desire. His film mirrors the political normalization of queers in France and in showing authoritative powers over desires suggests that such acceptance is normalizing. In so doing, Ozon questions whether normal is what we want: his is the new face of normal. But normal connotes control over desire and a continuation of the dominant political normalization of queers. Ozon's next film, *The New Girl Friend*, focuses again on a female protagonist. While *Young & Beautiful* ends ostensibly open-ended, *The New Girl Friend* ends "happily ever after" with the coupling of the two lead characters.

Ozon's most recent film *The New Girl Friend* premiered at Toronto International Film Festival in September of 2014. The film begins with the death of Laura (Isild LeBesco). She is the mother of a young child and the wife of David (Romain Duris). Soon after Laura's death, her best friend, Claire (Anaïs Demoustier), discovers that Laura's husband has been dressing as a woman. While Claire is shocked at first, she soon becomes accepting and the pair become close friends. Claire and Virginia (David) soon develop romantic feelings for each other. Their relationship becomes sexual, and the final shots of the film hint at their new relationship: Virginia walks beside the now pregnant Claire, hand-in-hand, as they meet Virginia and Laura's daughter at school. The

reconstructed family walks away from the camera, happily holding hands¹⁸. Justin Chang praises *The New Girl Friend* as a suggestive essay on the complexity of sexual identity, the mutability of desire, and a situation that is wondrously fluid. Chang states, “Convenient explanations like ‘homosexuality’ and ‘transvestism’ (and darker ones like ‘necrophilia’) hover teasingly over the story like thought balloons, but nothing is decisively pinned down in a film that likes to indulge multiple interpretations without settling on any one in particular” (*Variety*).

Ozon engages with several sex and gender conventions throughout the film’s sexually explicit scenes. The first explicit scene begins with Claire, her husband Gilles, and David having dinner at a restaurant. Claire attends the dinner wearing a low-cut black dress, while David observes that Claire typically dresses in a masculine fashion. Once the dinner is finished Claire and Gilles return home. A scene of dialogue in the car on the way to their home is followed by a cut to them in bed having sex together. The establishing long shot is dark and a single key light highlights their bodies. At first glance it is difficult to decipher which body is Claire and which body is Gilles, though it becomes clear that Claire is on top of Gilles. She slowly leans up from laying on his body to reveal her naked chest. The shot cuts to a close-up of Claire’s face, indicating her pleasure. A close-up of Gilles’ face follows. His face is in shock, presumably because they have not had sex like this since Laura’s death. The scene continues until Claire reaches orgasm. She rolls off of Gilles, they are both breathing heavily now, and she asks “did you come?” He responds by saying “No, but that’s okay”. While both Claire and Gilles’ bodies are those of traditional cinematic sex, toned, slender, and muscular, their positioning as well as Claire’s subsequent reaction after she finishes, renders it as non-traditional cinematic sex. Along these lines, Leo Bersani questions the importance of positioning during sex. “If the penetration necessary (until recently...) for the reproduction of the species has most generally been accomplished by the man’s getting

¹⁸ The film premiered at TIFF in 2014 and later travelled throughout the festival circuit, being shown at several festivals, including, the San Sebastian Film Festival and the London Film Festival. The film won the Sebastiane Award for best film at the San Sebastian Film Festival

on top of a woman, it is also true that being on top can never be just a question of a physical position—either for the person on top or for the one on the bottom”¹⁹. Sexual positioning, as Bersani explains, is never a question of simply physical positions but is also closely tied to the gendering of power. Claire’s positioning on top for the duration of this scene destabilizes the traditional power imbalance between masculinity and femininity, while Gilles’ reaction, shocked and surprised, is potentially humorous for an audience²⁰.

Another important moment of explicit sex in the film does not occur in the narrative of the film but rather in Claire’s imagination, during a day dream. After a tennis match with her husband and David, they retreat to the locker-rooms. Claire then sneaks into the men’s locker-room after finishing her shower. Her hair is wet and she wears only a towel wrapped around her. She walks through the seemingly empty locker room with her face and body heavily shadowed. She passes a naked man as the camera focuses on his naked bottom. The darkness of the hallway is replaced with the lightness of the pale blue tiled shower, where David and Gilles are standing showering together. Claire sees the men and watches them from the hallway, unseen. A long shot of them shows their seemingly perfect, tanned, now soap covered, bodies. David and Gilles are kissing passionately; Claire moves slightly away from the door but does not stop watching. They continue as David turns Gilles towards the wall of the shower, still passionately kissing and feeling him. The shot cuts to a close-up of David turning his head to acknowledge Claire’s presence; this glance breaks the fourth wall, and the spectator’s inconspicuous position is thus also compromised. The shot quickly cuts to an extreme close-up of Claire’s closed eyes re-opening, ending her erotic daydream. She opens her eyes to see Gilles and David simply showering and quickly runs out of the locker-room. This scene

¹⁹ Bersani references Foucault, suggesting: “And for the woman to get on top is just a way of letting her play the game of power for a while although – as the images of porn movies illustrate quite effectively – even on the bottom, the man can still concentrate his deceptively renounced aggressiveness in the thrusting movement of his penis” (Bersani, 23).

²⁰ At a 2014 screening of *The New Girl Friend* at TIFF, members of the audience laughed during this scene. Presumably, laughter functions as a register of shock in this case.

is important because it represents Claire's sexual fantasies. It also foreshadows the next sexually explicit scene, when Claire and Virginia meet at a hotel.

Towards the end of the film, Claire and Virginia decide to meet at a hotel. They meet, have a drink, and go to a room in the hotel. Once in the room, they begin to kiss and slowly undress. Several shots and moments are devoted to this process of undressing. Virginia's corset, bra, and fake breasts are central to these shots. Once on the bed, the camera tilts from the floor to their head, showing their similar high heels. The camera, now on the other side of the bed, then tracks Claire's hand as she moves her right hand down Virginia's body. The camera stops when Claire feels Virginia's penis, which is now visible and erect. Claire immediately jumps from the bed, gathers her clothing and leaves the hotel room, explaining that she can't have sex with Virginia because she is still a man. This scene begins with the presumption that Virginia and Claire will have sex. Instead, the scene ends abruptly and suddenly when Claire remembers that Virginia has a penis. After Claire leaves the hotel, Virginia exits the hotel alone and is hit by a passing car, leaving her in a coma in the hospital. It is not until Claire dresses Virginia in her dress, wig, and make-up, thereby accepting Virginia as a woman, does Virginia awake from her coma. Considering this "denied" sex scene and "awakening" in relation to the ending of the film is very interesting. *The New Girl Friend* ends with a fast-forward seven years. The final image of the film is of Virginia and Claire (who is now pregnant) walking towards a sunset each holding a hand of their young daughter and wearing wedding rings. This concluding shot surely bring to mind the phrase, "they married and lived happily ever after."

The marriage and the pregnancy do not happen in the narrative of the film but are nevertheless important to the story. Virginia and Claire, now married and expecting a baby, can be considered to be redefining what is normal. Here, Ozon does not destabilize normality (same-sex marriage, family, monogamy) but rather reclassifies what is normal (queer relationality and transsexuality). Much like the republican normalization of queers, which has taken place in France since PACS and the legalization of same-sex marriage, *The New Girlfriend* presents a mainstream normalizing view of queer relations. Very effectively, Ozon is queering normal from within the parameters of normal.

Within France, advocates of same-sex marriage have argued that queerness is to be readily accommodated within state universalism, suggesting that queers can transform republicanism from within, redefining what is considered normal. Ozon's contemporary films appear to be doing exactly this, redefining normalcy, and yet, as we have seen, queering normal from within. Established as an auteur and clearly recognized as a leading figure within queer cinema, Ozon might also be seen to be mainstreaming the politics of normalization in France.

Chapter 2

3 Is Blue the Warmest Color? Kechiche's Sexually Explicit Investigation of Social Divisions in France

The 66th annual Cannes Film Festival took place in May 2013. The Palme d'Or was unanimously awarded to a French film titled *La Vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2* (*The Life of Adèle- Chapters 1 & 2*)/ *Blue is the Warmest Color* and directed by Abdellatif Kechiche. *Blue* is a coming-of-age love story about Adèle (Adèle Exarchopoulos), a young French teenager, who falls in love with an older, blue-haired, art student named Emma (Léa Seydoux). The Palme d'Or jury, chaired by Steven Spielberg, awarded the Palme d'Or jointly to Kechiche, Exarchopoulos, and Seydoux, rather than traditionally to the director alone²¹. The decision to acknowledge Exarchopoulos and Seydoux suggests the essential creative role they played in the making of the film. In addition, it perhaps marks an attempt at balancing the prevalent hierarchy between director and actor, more specifically, auteur and actress. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is based on a French graphic novel, of the same name, written and illustrated by Julie Maroh. It is the first and only film based on a graphic novel to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes. As such, it brought great attention to the graphic novel and generated increased awareness of both the novel and its subject matter. The film has generated much controversy because of its sexually explicit scenes, the contested relationship between the two lead actors and Kechiche, and feminist critiques of the film's deployment of the "male gaze". This chapter begins by unpacking the commentaries on and the varied reception of *Blue*, specifically discussing reviews that exemplify the controversy surrounding the film. It then provides a detailed textual analysis of the film in order to both identify the limits of the immediate reception the film garnered and to posit the value of other, alternate, assessments, such as, the film's focus on class, and its relationship to recent French politics.

This chapter aims to situate *Blue* within the contemporary French political climate, suggesting that the film presents a normalized representation of lesbianism,

²¹ Exarchopoulos and Seydoux are the only women besides Jane Campion to win this prestigious award.

fitting within the politics of post-PACS legislation and the legalization of same-sex marriage in France. Such a normalization of homosexuality likewise complements the republican model of citizenship in France. Moreover, this chapter suggests that commentaries seeking issue with the film should primarily focus on this normalization i.e., the normalization of sexualities, deeply embedded in French society, rather than be distracted by some of the concerns provoked by the film's initial release. As I will argue, class is ultimately more important for Kechiche than sex/sexuality. For *Blue* consistently focuses on social division and the inability for love to occur between social classes. By using lesbianism as a framework with which to explore questions of class and French society, Kechiche normalizes lesbian romance and desire in a gay marriage context. Moreover, it is important to illustrate how this persistent social division functions in relation to the film's explicit sex. The explicitness of the sex functions to demonstrate intense passion; Kechiche aims to make clear the passion between these characters, and suggests that their inevitable break-up is caused by class division, not loss of passion.

David M. Halperin analyses the queer theories and politics of Michel Foucault in *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Halperin asserts that homosexuality, according to a Foucauldian vision of "*un gay savoir*", is not something to get right but an eccentric positionality to be exploited and explored: a potentially privileged site for the criticism of normative/traditional cultural discourses (60-61).

(Homo)sexual identity can now be constituted not substantively but oppositionally, not by *what* it is by *where* it is and *how* it operates. Those who knowingly occupy such a marginal location, who assume a de-essentialized identity that is purely positional in character, are properly speaking not gay but *queer* (61-62).

Homosexuality as a positionality thus has the potential to expose and to destabilize normalized discourses of sexualities. Darren Waldron similarly defines queer as "a rhetorical term embracing acts, behavior, identities and subject positions that can be described as unapologetically non-normative" (5). Unlike the films of François Ozon, which attempt to expand the limitations of normal and to expand the limits of sexual pleasure, *Blue is the Warmest Color* reflects the political normalization of same-sex relations in France. While *Blue* does not feature marriage (or PACS) it does, nevertheless,

mirror the normalizing rhetoric occurring in contemporary France. Thus, while the film features sexually explicit sex scenes between two women, which potentially subverts the traditional screening of cinematic sex, the film is perhaps limited as a queer text because of its perpetuation of the patriarchal tradition for representing women on screen.

Consideration of *Blue* as a queer text is further complicated by its ostensible normalization of lesbians through the alternate focus on social class division.

3.1 “Seeing You Seeing Me”: The Controversy over *Blue is the Warmest Color*

Blue is the Warmest Color was the center of controversy at Cannes even before winning the Palme d’Or. The film premiered at Cannes on May 23rd and was Cannes’ most buzzed-about film, presumably because of its sexually explicit scenes (Silman). Aside from the explicit nature of the film, Kechiche also received criticism for his interactions with the two main female leads, Exarchopoulos and Seydoux, during the shooting of the film. In particular, it is alleged that the working conditions that Kechiche maintained were unnecessarily rigorous. During interviews following the release of the film, both actresses spoke out about the demanding and “horrible” working conditions on the set of *Blue*. Seydoux explained that the conditions were particularly bad during the shooting of the longest sex scene in the film, which took ten days to film. Exarchopoulos states: “Most people don’t even dare to ask the things that he did, and they’re more respectful — you get reassured during sex scenes, and they’re choreographed, which desexualizes the act.”²² “Thank God we won the Palme d’Or, because it was so horrible,” added Seydoux. In response to these allegations, Kechiche stated that his Palme d’Or win was a short lived moment of happiness: “I think this film should not go out; it was too sullied” (Patches). Kechiche’s position as auteur places him in a position of power, and we may rightly question this privileged position: in Kechiche’s drive for cinematic “authenticity” who benefits and who suffers? Interviews with Exarchopoulos and Seydoux suggest that both actresses suffered during the making of the film. Yet, both

²² Stern, Marlow. *The Daily Beast*. Later during this interview Seydoux explained that Kechiche threw a monitor after the women laughed during a scene.

actresses also received the Palme d'Or, acknowledging their creative roles in the film. This decision could potentially undermine Kechiche's auteurist status because the creative vision no longer belongs solely to him. Nevertheless, in light of subsequent critical analysis of the "male gaze" in *Blue*, the issues of power and control raised by both actresses still remain significant.

And while the film's narrative arguably perpetuates the normalizing rhetoric which is popular in contemporary France, it has also been widely criticized for perpetuating the long standing patriarchal codes for representing both lesbians and women more generally on screen. Such feminist critiques have been most frequently targeted at the film's extended, explicit sex scene. The sex scene which has received the most scrutiny and attention occurs an hour and thirty minutes into the film and lasts roughly seven minutes. The scene begins with a medium-long shot of Adèle and Emma, focused on their torsos, standing naked in front of Emma's bed kissing. Their young, conventionally pretty, bodies are further examined through Kechiche's camera movement. The camera 'looks' up at their faces and then down at their hands. The camera stops to focus on their derrières, which are round and firm. These shots are followed by Adèle and Emma moving to the bed. The scene continues with the camera resituating around them and 'looking' at them as they have sex; the camera moves up and down and left to right. There is no score in this scene and the only sounds are those of Adèle and Emma's deep breathing and moaning. Tanya Krzywinska asserts that shot length and non-ellipsis editing are just a few ways which films can reject normalized sex in cinema (29). The scenes in *Blue* reject traditional structures of screening sex; the scenes with explicit sex are void of music and ellipsis editing, and the duration of these scenes are much longer than traditional narrative cinema sex. However, if *Blue* is giving representation to lesbianism, which is presumably a good thing, and subverting sex in new and non-traditional ways, then what is the objection? As Lucille Cairns questions, is the commercial exploitation of lesbianism really a cause for complaint? (6) As Cairns answers in *Sapphism on Screen*, it is the boys who still, by and large, control every aspect of image-production. This must not be forgotten but we can also see beyond it.

While many reviewers praised *Blue* as a masterpiece, several critics took issue with the film's (and Kechiche's) depiction of women, gendered relations, and lesbian sex, including Manohla Dargis, Julie Maroh, and Amy Taubin. Both Dargis and Taubin provided less than favorable reviews of the film during its release at Cannes, and Maroh's widely-cited blog post condemned the film as porn. These early reviews heavily influenced later responses to the film during its release in North America.

Manohla Dargis' first, less than favorable, review of the film, written during Cannes, asserted that "the movie [felt] far more about Mr. Kechiche's desires than anything else". She also suggested that Mr. Kechiche "...seems so unaware or maybe just uninterested in the tough questions about the representation of the female body that feminists have engaged for decades" (*New York Times*). In October, Dargis wrote a second review of the film, stating that she was adding to her "399 dissenting words" about the film. Dargis added, "In truth, it isn't sex *per se* that makes *Blue Is the Warmest Color* problematic; it's the patriarchal anxieties about sex, female appetite and maternity that leach into its sights and sounds and the way it frames, with scrutinizing closeness, the female body" (*New York Times*). Dargis compares the explicit sex in *Blue* to the explicit sex in Chantal Akerman's 1975 film *Je tu il elle*. She explains that Akerman filmed the sexually explicit scene in medium long shot without any of the visual codes (close-ups, fragmented bodies) used in mainstream pornography (*New York Times*). For Dargis, her primary issue with the film is its issues pertaining to broader patriarchal modes of representations, which she considers the film to implicitly endorse as it does not explicitly seek to destabilize them.

Julie Maroh, author and illustrator of the original 2010 French graphic novel, posted a review of the film on her blog shortly after the film's premiere at Cannes. On the blog she condemned the film's sex scenes as ultimately "brutal and surgical," and "cold" (Maroh). Under the subheading of "About the banging", she added:

It appears to me that this was what was missing on the set: lesbians. I don't know the sources of information for the director and actresses (who are straight, unless proven otherwise) and I was never consulted upstream. Maybe there was someone there to awkwardly imitate the possible positions with their hands, and/or to show them some porn of so-called 'lesbians'

(unfortunately it's hardly ever actually for a lesbian audience). Because—except for a few passages—this is all that brings to my mind: a brutal and surgical display, exuberant and cold, of so-called lesbian sex, which turned into porn, and made me feel very ill at ease. Especially when, in the middle of the movie theatre, everyone was giggling. The heteronormative laughed because they don't understand it and find the scene ridiculous. The gay and queer people laugh because it's not convincing at all, and found it ridiculous. And among the only people we didn't hear giggling were the potential guys too busy feasting their eyes on an incarnation of their fantasies on screen (Maroh).

Maroh notes several problems with the film, largely connected to the depiction of lesbians and its sexually explicit scenes. She takes issue with the sexualities of the individuals involved in the making of the film, the film's pornographic potential, and the status of “lesbian-porn” itself. She criticizes the film in particular because of its depictions of female sexuality. Dargis, in her second review of the film, “Seeing You Seeing Me”, also discusses Maroh's response at length. For Dargis: “She [Maroh] was raising a red flag about an essentialist view of female sexuality, in which women, with their holy orgasms, are thought to embody an innate and eternal mystery” (*The New York Times*). Maroh's disapproval of *Blue* was thus repeatedly echoed in the comments of other reviewers and carried an additional gravitas as she was the author of the source material upon which Kechiche based his film.

Amy Taubin, writing for *Film Comment*, states that *Blue* is missing recognizable contemporary young women, regardless of their sexual preference²³. Taubin contends, “More than 40 years of struggle over the representation of women seems to have made no impression on Kechiche” (49). Taubin references one scene in the film where Adèle and Emma go to a museum and look at neoclassical sculptures of female torsos. Taubin explains that the inauthenticity of the female characters comes from their reactions to the art. She writes: “I can't imagine a female art-student today looking at such a sculpture without a trace of irony—without posing the question: through whose eyes am I looking?” (49). Taubin concludes her discussion of *Blue* by suggesting that the lesson to

²³ Taubin additionally reviews other films which premiered at Cannes in 2013, including, *Young & Beautiful*, *Venus in Fur*, *A Castle in Italy*, *A Touch of Sin* and *Only Lovers Left Alive*.

be learned is that male directors who focus on female sexuality should not run their mouths off at Cannes (49). While Taubin's review is short, her questioning of patriarchal arrogance is clear. This sentiment is present in other reviews, in several different forums, including feminist organizations. By December of 2013, *The Women Film Critics Circle*, an association comprised of women critics and scholars, inducted *Blue* into the *WFCC* Hall of Shame. Their official statement about *Blue* argued: "A three hour movie, and Kechiche is so busy salivating over his actresses that he can't bother telling a coherent story. Hype for this film makes me nauseous...It's so obvious a dude with a fetish directed this, it's not only unappealing, it's creepy. His overcompensating hubris isn't worth the praise this is receiving" (*WFCC*). A host of feminist and LGBT blogs echoed these remarks (e.g., *Autostraddle*, *BitchFlicks*, */bent: a queer blog*, *Out Magazine*). While some influential reviews, like those of Dargis, Taubin, and the *WFCC*, were negative, they were by no means the only passionate response to the film. For example, Richard Brody of *The New Yorker* contends that Kechiche brought trouble on himself because the sex scenes were actually "too good", not because he filmed two women having sex. He states: "The problem with Kechiche's scenes is that they're too good—too unusual, too challenging, too original—to be assimilated (despite Dargis's protests to the contrary) to the familiar moviegoing experience" (*The New Yorker*).

Whether or not Brody is entirely justified in these assertions is questionable. There certainly is a lot of validity in the feminist critiques of the film, particularly their attention to the male gaze, power dynamics and troubling gender relations stirred up by *Blue*. Undeniably, *Blue* was controversial and garnered great publicity from this controversy. And yet, how does Brody's defense suggest other critical approaches to the film that still tend to its representation of sex, gender, and romance? B. Ruby Rich, in her essay for *The Criterion Collection* release for the film, noted, "These disclosures fractured the initial red-carpet alliance and threatened to cast a shadow over the film on the eve of its U.S. release, even as American audiences began to line up around the block for the chance to make up their own minds" (*Criterion*). Rich explains that the film actually plays as a classic European art film, concerned with the oldest subject around: young love and coming-of-age. While Rich's essay on *Blue* is an insightful prelude to the DVD released by *Criterion*, it does not fully tackle some of the more complicated

questions surrounding the film, the director, the actresses, the male gaze, and the film's relationship to queer cinema. Rich summarizes,

To say that *Blue Is the Warmest Color* continues the history of troubled representations would be a massive understatement: the criticisms of its scenes as 'not real' are underlined by a poverty of vernacular. What would 'real' mean, exactly? The paucity of examples makes debate problematic; in their place, we get heightened rhetoric, edicts issued as absolutes, and a stunning lack of particulars (*Criterion*).

Rich's questioning of representational "realism" is important and certainly worth developing and is further complicated by the overall lack of representation of women on screen in general. We cannot be sure of the events which took place prior to Rich's decision to write the essay for *The Criterion Collection*. However, several issues can be raised about this decision and endorsement. What does it mean to have Rich, arguably the most well-known name in New Queer Cinema scholarship, endorsing this particular film and this particular representation of lesbianism? How does *The Criterion Collection's* position and respectability in cinema affect the reception of this film? With Rich's essay for *Criterion* in mind, we can assume she does consider *Blue* to be a queer text. If this assumption is correct, it may suggest the fluidity of the category of queer cinema, while also, pointing to the expansion of the parameters of that category decades after the New Queer Cinema movement. Rich's defense (or legitimation) of the film opens the door for a closer look at the controversial "realism" of the film's sex scenes. Rich's authority in queer cinema studies suggests that more is at stake in this film than the troubling representation of women. With this in mind, we cannot simply dismiss the film for its problematic representation of women, but instead, investigate what else the film may be negotiating.

Linda Williams positions *Blue is the Warmest Color* alongside *Stranger by the Lake* (2013) and *Nymph()maniac* (2014) as three recent examples of European cinematic explicit sex. She begins her article with a discussion of *Blue*, synthesizing two recurrent arguments circling around the film: is the level of sexual explicitness enough for it to be considered porn? Or, can the film be defended as art? Williams introduces Manohla Dargis's arguments about the film in order to dismantle them. Williams takes issue with

Dargis's endorsement of Maroh's claim that the film borders on pornographic and Dargis's discussion of *Je tu il elle* in comparison to *Blue*. Williams compares *Blue* to the aesthetics of pornography specifically:

I submit, rather, that the problem is not how the sex is performed or photographed or lit in *Blue*. Nor is it the deployment of any specific positions. Looked at closely, the sex scenes are actually rather chaste if considered only in terms of what is actually seen rather than what viewers (or critics) *think* they see (13).

Williams takes issue with Dargis' presumption that fragmentation *in itself* is inherently exploitative, suggesting that this is both wrong and out of date (16). Williams asserts: "the mise-en-scène of sex acts in contemporary pornography is now often much less fragmented than sex acts portrayed in mainstream Hollywood or independent 'art' films" (16). She further explains how she sees *Blue* as having "relatively explicit sex", a term she uses to explain sex which is neither pornography nor the R-rated acceptable norm. Whether or not *Blue*'s sexually explicit scenes are relatively explicit or not, Williams's discussion of these images and Dargis' review exemplify how explicit representations of sex(uality) remain problematical.

Indeed, the two questions raised by Williams are not the primary issues for Dargis, and the issues of categorization do not answer the broader critique of patriarchal structures of representation. Perhaps, one way to hybridize Williams and Dargis's claims would be to suggest that *Blue* destabilizes normalized tropes of cinematic sex while simultaneously perpetuating anxieties about its representation in cinema; Kechiche rejects the standard way of showing sex but remains comfortably in his position of privilege as male authority, directing Exarchopoulos and Seydoux. The objectification of women in cinema and the prevalence of the male gaze is not a recent issue in the field of cinema studies. Rather, the objectification of women has long been discussed and resisted in women studies and film studies; consider Mulvey's pivotal 1975 essay and her concept of "the male gaze" (Mulvey, 11). Kechiche's control, manipulation, and construction of the sexually explicit images in *Blue*, while potentially problematic (depending on how you characterize his film), prompt further analysis, beyond that of the scrutiny it has already received, and arguably because Williams's, Rich's, and Dargis's short essays beg

for further analysis of the film. Reconsideration of the sexually explicit scenes, in fact, must also be accompanied by an analysis of the entire film. In what narrative and stylistic context are we seeing these images? The next section of this chapter provides a detailed textual analysis of *Blue is the Warmest Color*, which is in dialogue with the controversy, in order to further examine the film's representation of lesbian desire.

3.2 Passion, Love, and Social Division

Although receiving the Palme d'Or for *Blue is the Warmest Color* is a prestigious accolade for Abdellatif Kechiche, Kechiche is no stranger to prestigious awards. Kechiche has received Césars for best film and best director for *Games of Love and Chance/ L'esquive* (2003) and *The Secret of the Grain/ La graine et le mulet* (2007). *Games of Love and Chance* and *The Secret of the Grain* focus on the lives of marginalized groups of immigrants of Arab and African origin. In a recent article on the director, Norindr argues that "Kechiche should be seen as an important French auteur who reflects on contemporary issues that affect the working people of France, those of Maghrebian descent included" (Norindr, 56). Richard Porton additionally explains "despite the fact that much of the French population remains woefully ignorant of the everyday lives of the burgeoning immigrant community, Kechiche's idiosyncratic blend of social commentary and romantic comedy challenged without threatening, a mass audience" (Porton, 46). Kechiche's films are popular amongst audiences, film festivals, and award shows, bringing social and political commentary to mass audiences. A central theme Porton and Norindr both identify in their work on Kechiche, is his preoccupation on filming contemporary issues in France, positioning him in contemporary French cinema as provocateur. *Blue is the Warmest Color* represents his most recent provocation in contemporary French cinema. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is Kechiche's most commercially successful film to date with box office receipts of over nineteen million dollars.

Kechiche's *Blue* is based on Julie Maroh's graphic novel, *Le bleu est une couleur chaude*, first published in 2010 in French, with a subsequent English language version in 2013. As is often the case with adapted novels, Kechiche's film differs from Maroh's original source material in several important ways. The novel begins with Emma

returning to Clémentine's (she is renamed Adèle in Kechiche's *Blue*) parents' home after Clémentine's sudden and untimely death. Emma reads Clémentine's diaries, which are filled with the memories of their relationship. The story unfolds through flashbacks from Clémentine's diaries as Emma relives these first moments of their young love. The central character in the novel is Emma and the focus is on her journey through Clémentine's diary. Each important moment in their relationship was recorded by Clémentine, and the novel presents an emotional reliving of those moments alongside Emma. The film adaptation is largely loyal to the graphic novel but deviates from it in some key respects, such as giving Adèle narrative primacy. In the novel, Clémentine's parents become aware of their daughter's sexuality and ask Clémentine to leave their home and never return. From this occurrence onward, Maroh's *Blue* and Kechiche's *Blue* begin to diverge, the most notable divergence occurs when Clémentine becomes ill and dies in the hospital. Before Clémentine's mother arrives at the hospital, Emma is not allowed to see Clémentine or to know the status of her illness. This plot point comments on the basic rights refused to same-sex couples, echoing the AIDS epidemic and the conflicts that often occurred between doctors and the partners of those suffering from AIDS. The ending, and the scenes leading up to this ending, are changed in Kechiche's version. The novel concludes with Clémentine and Emma forgiving each other and remaining together until Clémentine's death. The final words of the novel are from a letter Clémentine wrote to Emma: "Beyond death, the love that we shared continues to live".

Kechiche's version of *Blue* deviates from its source material by foregrounding Adèle as the film's anchor in the love story between Adèle and Emma. We first meet Adèle as she leaves her suburban home, in Northern France, one morning before secondary school. She first takes the bus and then the train. These images are used throughout the film to establish Adèle's routine. Adèle meets Emma one day while crossing the street. The scene begins with Adèle leaving her home, echoing the images from the beginning of the film. Kechiche repeatedly shows Adèle on public transit or walking as a device to suggest her lower class status. Adèle and Emma see each other while they cross the street traveling in opposite directions. The sequence begins with a close-up of Adèle's face as she looks off screen right. The camera cuts to show Emma

with her arm around her girlfriend. Adèle crosses the street and the camera returns to the close-up of Adèle's face. As they lock eyes, the camera leaves Adèle's face to show their paths crossing. Emma continues to walk away as Adèle remains in the middle of the sidewalk; Adèle's disorienting feeling is emphasized as several people pass-by and cars honk for her to continue walking. This early scene demonstrates Kechiche's ability to capture intense emotion on screen and formally introduces the theme of "love at first sight" to tell us what the film is all about: intense love despite or perhaps fueled by class differences. Kechiche questions, "Can one really get out of one's own social origins, if you're like Adele? And can she be understood by Emma's world? It's a very important question for me. I almost want to say I'm obsessed with this question and have been for a long time" (Qureshi, *National Public Radio*).

In the years that follow, Emma and Adèle date despite the differences in their backgrounds: Adèle is working class, Emma is from a more privileged and intellectual family. They become a couple who live together, and while Adèle becomes an elementary school teacher, happiest when engaged with children, Emma immerses herself within an artistic and intellectual circle to further her career as a painter. The relationship between the two consequently stagnates. Adèle is no longer as infatuated with Emma, and Adèle, for her part, is displaced and incongruent in the intellectual circle of Emma's artistic friends. After a period of perceived neglect, Adèle has sex with a male colleague. Emma responds to this incident by forcefully kicking Adèle out of their apartment, thereby ending their relationship. Much like the sequence in the beginning of the film, when Adèle and Emma see each other for the first time, Adèle wanders the street outside their apartment lost and visibly disoriented. The scene is composed of several close-ups of Adèle's face crying and aimlessly looking for help. While Adèle is left heartbroken and alone, Emma soon begins to date another woman from her artistic circle. The film ends with Adèle attending Emma's art gallery show and then leaving the gallery soon after she arrives, as there is no place for her in Emma's life.

Throughout the relationship, Kechiche emphasizes the differences between Adèle's working class background and Emma's elitist upbringing. The contrast carries with it the implication that Emma's sophistication will always be considered superior

within society than Adèle's more prosaic ambitions. Ultimately what Kechiche is doing is exploring how sophistication and concepts of passion, desire and pleasure are conflated with class status within French society. By privileging Adèle's perspective, Kechiche favours the passions associated with lower classes, notably more basic, immediate passions and pleasures. In doing so, Kechiche disrupts the hierarchy of elitism as superior, replacing it with the passions associated with the working class.

Blue is the Warmest Color is fascinated with close-ups, and regularly brings the audience closer to Adèle. "The close-up makes truth obligatory" as stated by Kechiche (Badt, 149). Kechiche's preoccupation with the close-up in *Blue* is also key to ensuring our identification with Adèle. *Blue* explores, quite apparently, young love, heart-break, pleasures, erotic awakening, and growing-up. Several other themes are present in this film and are characteristic of Kechiche's filmography, including social class division in French society as well as education. The film's engagement with these issues should not be overlooked, as they are important in relation to the film's controversial reception. Anthony Lane suggests that Kechiche's film asks: "what if love gets in the way? How does the wish to be utterly alone with the loved one, and the dread of being alone when the loved one leaves, fit into that wider, more sociable vision?" (Lane, *The New Yorker*). *Blue* is about the viability of a romantic relationship despite social division: can two individuals from different social classes remain together? Kechiche's answer to this question would seem to be no. Adèle and Emma's story does not end happily, at least not for Adèle. For Kechiche, it would appear that the reality for the lower classes is that life remains unhappy, despite whatever changes an individual undertakes.

Blue begins in Adèle's French literature class where classmates are reading from Pierre de Marivaux's *La vie de Marianne*. A classmate reads: "Will I always digress? I think so. Impossible not to. Ideas take hold of me. I am a woman. I tell my story. Consider my words. See how little I misuse the privileges this gives me". The French title of the film, *La vie d'Adèle – Chapitres 1 & 2*, changed by Kechiche, echoes the title of this book. Adèle's teacher then explains the concept of love at first sight, "*coup de foudre*", and the narrative thus follows with Adèle and Emma's first meeting. Throughout the film there is considerable time spent in the classroom. In the beginning of the film

Adèle is a student and then she becomes a teacher. Adèle's educational background is placed in contrast to Emma's much different schooling. Emma attends an art school, *École des Beaux-Arts*. When Adèle learns this she asks: "Are there arts that are ugly?" From Adèle's perspective, education is not bound to the walls of a school or institution. Adèle's love of schooling, and her desire to become a teacher, come from her passion to foster education which is not bound to institutional schooling. Her work with young children is meant to give them much needed love and to inspire in them passion for learning. Potentially troubling is Kechiche's romantic view of the working class; Adèle is an embodiment of Kechiche's holistic view of lower class life. For Emma, in contrast, education is defined by intellectualism. Emma's intellectual re-assurance comes from those around her; characters such as Joachim, a local art gallery owner, function as figures to that she strives to impress. Emma's sense of validation is ostensibly more cerebral and intellectually derived, yet it's also dependent upon the praise of her intellectual peers as well as those who can further her career. Adele's simplicity is symbolized by the purity and exuberance of young children – the intellectual can dismiss her as naïve but the humanist sees her as authentic and unpretentious. The film's strength comes from its ability to also complicate this dichotomy through the exploration of passion to potentially transcend the differences it portrays.

Kechiche's treatment of food and class in the film is significant. Throughout the film, Adèle and several other characters are seen devouring food, from candy bars, gyros, spaghetti to oysters and hors d'oeuvres. Adèle is first seen eating dinner with her family near the beginning of the film. The sequence begins with a close-up of Adèle chewing with her mouth open, with a ring of sauce around her mouth, looking off-screen at the television. The following shots are of her mother and father both eating and watching television as well. Adèle is seen licking her knife and asking for more pasta. The final image of this sequence is a medium shot of the family eating and watching television together. This early sequence functions on several levels; the first aim of this sequence is to convey the realism and everydayness upon which the film is built. This is both an aesthetic choice, as Kechiche is preoccupied with filming how people live, as well as a narrative choice. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this sequence works in tandem with later sequences in the film; as it establishes a class-coded dinner ritual for Adèle's

family. This dinner scene is placed in contrast to the later dinner at Emma's parent's home. Emma's family serves oysters in their luxurious home filled with paintings; these elements foreground their affluent lifestyle in contrast to Adèle's upbringing. The difference in socioeconomic class is signaled by the type of food being served as well as the discussion during dinner. When Emma's step father asks Adèle what she would like to do for a career, Adèle responds by explaining she would like to teach nursery school. As Dargis argues, the patriarchal anxieties about sex, female appetite and maternity are troubling in the film (*The New York Times*). While Kechiche's film may raise questions regarding maternity, raising children, and having a family, he does not offer answers to these questions or engage with them. Instead, these questions remain patriarchal anxieties, which seep into the film during scenes like this one and undermine his goals to critique social divisions. Female sexualities that do not conform to patriarchal norms (heterosexual desire) potentially challenge patriarchal structures. Kechiche's normalized version of lesbianism is perhaps an attempt to address these patriarchal anxieties about women's sexuality. After Adèle's response, a close-up of both Emma's parents reveals their positions towards this decision; neither seems impressed by this decision, rather, they assume she is afraid to pursue a career without the guarantee of a job. During this dinner scene, Emma also teaches Adèle how to eat oysters, the only kind of food Adèle admits she does not like²⁴. Kechiche raises issues of refinement and "proper" eating in this scene. Types of food, eating habits, dining etiquette, and related discussions, all function to suggest that despite intense love between individuals, love cannot transcend social divisions and, perhaps, there is no escaping social class.

At Emma's home they eat oysters fresh from the food market Trière (a place which Adèle only knows by name), discuss wine, and their love of paintings and culture. In contrast, in Adèle's home they eat pasta and Adèle's parents speak of the difficulties of making a career from painting; Adèle's father says: "The ones who make a living off it are all dead." Emma and Adèle are representative of distinct social classes which

²⁴ Emma makes a sexual innuendo about oysters, during a picnic with Adèle earlier in the film, suggesting that they remind her of something else.

Kechiche communicates to the audience via food and eating within the homes of the two lead characters. This conventional romantic trope, a forbidden love of sorts, is situated in a contemporary French setting. Kechiche uses Maroh's novel as a starting point to question the capabilities of love despite social division. Kechiche's consistent class-based critique in the film is that love between social classes is not sustainable, despite intense passion and pleasures. Rather, Kechiche suggests through the normalizing actions of eating and differing class rituals that romantic love, in and of itself, is incapable of surpassing social divisions. By focusing on a relationship between lesbians, Kechiche contemporizes this conventional trope, situating the narrative in the context of French discussions of PACS and same-sex marriage legalization. For Kechiche, the subject of his film is class division: the object he uses to explore this subject is a lesbian romance. In so doing, he reflects the degree to which political change has altered the understanding of normalized sexuality in France.

Later in their relationship, when they are living together as a couple, Adèle cooks spaghetti for Emma's colleagues and friends in celebration of Emma completing her degree. Lane contends that Emma wants for Adèle to make a place for herself "in a world of higher culture and [among] the folks who inhabit it" (*The New Yorker*). After Emma's friends leave the party, Emma tells Adèle that she wants her to be a writer. Adèle refuses, explaining that her journal is private and she writes for herself. They end the conversation and Adèle tells Emma she wants to have sex with her. Emma dismisses her and closes her eyes to fall asleep. This moment foreshadows their inevitable breakup, as Adèle's resistance to changing her career becomes clear. Kechiche situates food and eating, with its connections with class and French society, before sex in the film; both meals at Adèle's home and Emma's home are followed by the women having sex. While this can be understood as Kechiche's attempt at questioning the perseverance of passionate love despite class division, there seems to be more at stake with regard to the representation of female sexuality. We can once again consider the film's patriarchal anxieties about sex and female appetite, and the association created between literal and sexual appetite by returning to Dargis's review. For Dargis, Adèle's hunger is contained, prettified, aestheticized (*The New York Times*). Dargis explains that Kechiche employs a selective aesthetic that shows Adèle slurping her food but, importantly, denies her the same

“sloppy appetite” in the sex scenes. In consequence, “...the movie’s carefully constructed realism is jettisoned along with bodily excesses and excretions in favor of tasteful, decorous poses” (*The New York Times*). The contrasts between “sloppy” realism and tasteful decorum serve to illustrate how class differences are manifest and influence the representation and experience of sex in this film.

After the dinner party Adèle is framed alone standing in front of the sink cleaning dishes. The camera cuts to Emma laying in their bed reading a scholarly journal. Adèle enters, screen left, and begins to brush her hair. She says to Emma: “your friends are nice. They’re funny. They talk about so much stuff. They seem so knowledgeable. So cultivated. I felt uncomfortable.” The camera cuts to Emma, her face obscured by the journal she is still reading. From behind the journal she says, “You were perfect.” Adèle undresses and lays down next to Emma, with her head on Emma’s chest. They continue to speak about Emma’s desires for Adèle to have a passion of her own, one more similar to those held by Emma. Emma says to Adèle: “I’d like for you to be... for you to be fulfilled.” The fulfillment which Emma speaks of is presumably intellectual and cultural fulfillment. Adèle’s passion comes from her love of Emma and her work/students. The discussion between Adèle and Emma perfectly summarizes the intersections of sex and class in *Blue is the Warmest Color*. For Kechiche, where there is no shared passion there can be no sex. Ultimately, Kechiche is suggesting that despite Adèle and Emma’s love for each other, their relationship is not sustainable across class divides. Kechiche here situates these class divisions within the intimate space of their bedroom; their bed becomes the literal intersection of the public and private.

The analysis provided here about class division is largely absent from the more strident discussions of *Blue*. The aspects of sex and sexuality are most often discussed because the scenes are longer and more graphic than those typically seen in mainstream cinema. These scenes are unique and lend themselves to immediate discussion. Manohla Dargis discusses Adèle’s appetite; her work with children; the absence of a score; and her silence at specific times in the film as metacommentary on the female bodies on display in *Blue* (*New York Times*). While Dargis’s discussion of the film is valid, there are other alternate ways of reading the film that do not negate her analysis, rather, try to move

beyond it. The intersections of intellectualism and sex, the passions of Adèle and Emma, as well as the legalization of same-sex marriage in France point to a larger commentary on French society, not bound to only sex and sexualities. As Kechiche suggests, with regard to his preoccupation with social divisions,

It is indeed one of the recurring themes in my films, and has become almost an obsession: where is the social difference? Perhaps it's a finger on the pulse of a world to which I feel I belong, the class to which Adèle also belongs - the working class. Emma belongs to an elite class: intellectual, artistic. Each of my heroines is defined by her social class. The difficulties they have with their relationship, that which causes them to break up and ultimately what the film is about, is their class differences, since it generates a difference in their personal aspirations. It's not at all their homosexuality, which would be more or less tolerated, or understood, by the world around them (*Mongrel Media*).

Perhaps the film is best understood as an *adaptation* of a lesbian graphic novel, primarily adapted for the purposes of societal commentary on normalized expectations within a period of change and civil discourse. The film is true to its graphic novel source in the sense that its representations are explicit and personalized. But it is not only the sex that is presented as such: through up-close and extended scenes of passion expressed through food, education, and sex, Kechiche is seeking to force the audience to confront the implications for class struggle within the changes in normalized expectations inherent within the imminent enactment of both PACS and legalized marriage in France.

The normalization of sexualities, which is deeply embedded in society, is further intensified because of the legalization of same-sex marriage in France in 2013. The act of normalizing in this context is what is perhaps more troubling about *Blue is the Warmest Color*. (Homo)sexual identity, as explained by Halperin, can be constituted by its location outside “normal” and its occupancy in a marginal location. Kechiche situates a potentially non-normative sexuality, lesbianism, within a broader framework used to critique social, class, and political discourses, rather than specifically destabilize cultural discourses surrounding sex and sexualities. By removing queer identity from its oppositional positionality, its subversive capabilities are potentially undermined. Nonetheless, the institutionalization of same-sex desires, present in *Blue*, was simultaneously occurring in France in 2013 with the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Kechiche uses explicit sex in order to investigate social divisions. The sex scenes, with their duration and explicitness, function in order to show the intense passion and love between two individuals, individuals who are from two different classes. Importantly (for Kechiche), the passion which is apparent in the sexually explicit scenes is insufficient to transcend class divisions. By using lesbianism as an object to explore the subject of social class, Kechiche is indirectly normalizing same-sex desires. This construction of same-sex desires is reflective of the political normalization of gays in France.

This chapter began by situating *Blue is the Warmest Color* at Cannes and the film festival circuit in the year 2013²⁵. Despite Steven Spielberg's rejection of the idea that politics had influenced the jury's decision, this seems hard to believe and unlikely. Spielberg stated: "As you know, the characters in this film do not get married...Politics were never in the room with us." It seems implausible that the jury would have been unaware of the ongoing controversy in France around the legalization of same-sex marriage. Whether politics were in the room with Spielberg or the other members, the awareness of gay rights issues and LGBT marriage is on the minds of most French citizens as well as most global citizens. In this regard, *Blue* extends, illustrates and confronts the reality of this changing dynamic through an intimate examination of the relationship between two young women.

²⁵ *Blue* did exceptionally well in the film festival circuit. *Blue* screened at Telluride and TIFF and was shown at LGBT film festivals, including the BFI London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and the Outburst Queer Arts Festival. It received eighty-one wins and sixty-eight nominations from ceremonies and festivals throughout Europe and North America. It was nominated for a Golden Globe for best foreign language film, won a Dorian Award for LGBT Film of the Year and Foreign Language Film of the Year from the Gay and Lesbian Entertainment Critics Association (GALECA) and won FIPRESCI Film of the Year at the San Sebastián International Film Festival. It was nominated for eight awards at the César Awards in France, including Best Film and Best Director, and Adèle Exarchopoulos won Most Promising Actress.

Chapter 3

4 Explicit Sex and Queer Landscapes in *Stranger by the Lake*

Stranger by the Lake is the most recent feature film from director Alain Guiraudie. Released in 2013, the film won the best director prize in the Un Certain Regarde section at Cannes and the Queer Palm²⁶. The film is set at a cruising spot for men located on a picturesque beach on a lake in the South of France and is about a man's love for a mysterious killer. Using the premise of a murder, and set in rural France, *Stranger by the Lake* is a film about queer relationality and gay male cruising culture.

The assessment of *Blue is the Warmest Color* and *Stranger by the Lake* as contemporary forms of French queer cinema is more relevant as LGBT rights continue to be at the forefront of global public policy and recent legislation in France. Chapter two suggested that *Blue* reflects the political normalization of queers in France, with the PACS legislation and same-sex marriage; the film ostensibly normalizing same-sex relationships through its emphasis on class divisions over sexual identities. This chapter suggests that Guiraudie engages with the specific French political climate of 2013 differently than *Blue*. Rather than mirroring political normalization, *Stranger by the Lake* complicates the political moment in France by exploring both explicit sex and alternative forms of relationality that potentially trouble the “republicanism” of contemporary French politics.

The queerness of *Stranger by the Lake* is tied to its presentation of a literal *space* and *place* for the exploration of gay-male sexuality, cruising subculture, and homoerotic relationships. In this context, the term *space* refers to a geographical location that becomes a *place* once specific significance is given to it. For example, the generic space of the beach (which could become a *place* for several things, such as family interactions or childhood memories) becomes *the place* for gay male cruising in *Stranger by the Lake*.

²⁶ *Stranger* was later nominated for eight César awards, winning the Most Promising Actor award for the film's lead, Pierre Deladonchamps, making *Stranger by the Lake* Guiraudie's most acclaimed film to date.

The space of the lake becomes a cruising place within *Stranger* and, in turn, serves as a place for the creation of new forms of queer relationality, such as friendship across generational gaps, casual hook-ups, and peeping toms. Using the generic landscape of the beach to explore these relations, Guiraudie queers this prototypical space.

As I will suggest, this use of space, and particularly the relations that Guiraudie embeds in this specific place, are best understood by considering Foucault's radical conceptions of homosexuality and friendship. Guiraudie also uses figures of authority, especially the police inspector (who represents the state, power, and control), to explore the relationship between normalcy and queer sexuality. For Guiraudie, the inspector functions to police normalcy, while also offering a unique, interested position from which to observe gay male cruising culture. The camera's positionality likewise becomes important in this observation. While the camera identifies with the inspector, it also identifies with the male cruisers, functioning as an active cruiser itself. Moreover, the explicit non-simulated sex in *Stranger by the Lake* significantly deviates from traditional cinematic sex. *Stranger* thus challenges the very nature of traditional social intercourse—and cinematic conventions—within the space of a rural French landscape. Queer relationality is explored within a ritualistic narrative, each day is structured the same, and in the context of a supposedly normalized space. As in much of his earlier work Guiraudie significantly does not focus on traditionally urban queer spaces. Rather, he situates gay identities and relations in rural France. Moreover, he explores gay male cruising within a prototypical French location, the beach at a lake, a space normally associated with the French traditional family, and consequently queers these rural landscapes.

Guiraudie's depictions of queer relationality are distinctive because the narratives of his films are often set outside the metropolitan landscape of traditional depictions of gay culture. As Rees-Roberts suggests, in "Hors milieu: Queer and Beyond", recent films such as *Les invisibles/ The Invisibles* (Lifshitz, 2012), *Avant que j'oublie/ Before I Forget* (Nolot, 2007), *Notre paradis/ Our Paradise* (Morel, 2011), *Le roi de l'évasion/ The King of Escape* (Guiraudie, 2009), and *Stranger by the Lake*, all operate at a critical distance from assimilationist gay culture and from the hypervisibility of young urban males (442).

Rees-Roberts discusses both age and place, including the articulation of cross-generational and non-metropolitan queer relations, in these films and suggests that they trouble the recurrent tropes of contemporary queer texts, namely: masculinity, youth, physicality, affluence, coupling, and metropolitan life (458). Such films, he argues, “all seek to queer (to trouble or go beyond) a consensual, pre-packaged image of same-sex intimacies, indicating as a whole the productive diversity of queer representation on the French cinema screen” (458). Rees-Roberts’ understanding of both *The King of Escape* and *Stranger by the Lake* are useful in the current chapter, as his essay insightfully examines both films. Building on Rees-Roberts’ work, this chapter will examine how the *Stranger by the Lake* negotiates normalcy in the contemporary political context of France.

4.1 Queer Relationality

Michael Warner’s influential *The Trouble with Normal* suggests that those who think queer life consists of sex without intimacy are usually only seeing a tiny part of the picture through a homophobic stereotype (115). Warner explains that gay social life is not necessarily as ritualized and institutionalized as straight life and each new sexual relation is potentially an adventure in nearly uncharted territory. Warner’s critique of the politics of the gay marriage debate stems from this conceptualization of the value of gay social life. Throughout *The Trouble with Normal*, Warner suggests that straight culture has much to learn from gay alternatives (116). For Warner, the supposed gay way of life consists of relations that have been historically positioned in opposition to the framework of normative institutions and ordinary social obligations (116). As such, he argues: “Queers should be insisting on teaching these lessons. Instead, the marriage issue, as currently framed, seems to be a way of denying recognition to these relations, of streamlining queer relations into the much less troubling division of couples from friends” (Warner, 116). Warner explains that the troubling and hetero-normative division of friendship and the monogamous couple is intensified by the marriage issue. Michel Foucault’s radical notions of homosexuality are key to Warner’s critique of normality. As Foucault argues, given that homosexual relationships have been excluded from normative traditions, homosexual culture has historically provided a potential place for the creation

of new types of relationships²⁷. For Foucault the disappearance of friendship as a social relation in the eighteenth century and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are part of the same process of normalization (170). As Warner recognizes, the relational dynamics that Foucault examines remain valuable for contemporary discussions of gay politics.

Foucault's analysis of homosexuality and friendship appear in *The History of Sexuality*, a three volume study, from the late 1970s and the early 1980s, as well as *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. *The History of Sexuality* provides an extensive examination of sexuality in the Western world and suggests that the advent of homosexuality is intimately connected with the depreciation of friendship. As Foucault explains:

For centuries after antiquity, friendship was a very important kind of social relation: a social relation within which people had a certain freedom, certain kind of choice (limited of course), as well as very intense emotional relations. . . . I think that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we see these kinds of friendships disappearing, at least in the male society. And friendship becomes something other than that. You can find, from the sixteenth century on, texts that explicitly criticize friendship as something dangerous.... And one of my hypotheses...is that homosexuality became a problem – that is, sex between men became a problem – in the eighteenth century.... I think the reason that it appears as a problem, as a social issue, at this time is that friendship had disappeared. As long as friendship was something important, was socially accepted, nobody realized men had sex together.... [T]he disappearance of friendship as a social relation and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are the same process ('Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity', 170).

Foucault theorizes that homosexuality, and homosexual culture, provide a space for the creation of new types of relationships. In Foucault's terminology, "The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships" ('Friendship as a Way of Life', 308). The task of creating subjectivities is thus a task that is bound up with the creation of relationships

²⁷ See Kingston, Mark. "Subversive Friendships: Foucault on Homosexuality and Social Experimentation."

with others (Kingston, 9). Foucault suggests that gay male cruising practices in particular, provide an excellent example of these new expansive modes of relationality. He denounces the tendency to relate questions of homosexuality to the problem of finding oneself, of asking ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the secret of my desire?’ Rather, he proposes, homosexuality should foster the establishment, invention, and multiplication of new relationships that attempt to resist the normalizing effects of power. Foucault’s concepts about relationality trouble the presumed stability of the self, as well as its potential deployment in orientation-based identity politics. For Foucault, the reason why homosexuality is not simply a form of desire but, rather, something desirable, is because of its pleasure-focused, socially and sexually expansive capabilities. In “Friendship as a Way of Life”, Foucault notes the moralizing tendency to reduce cruising culture and homosexuality to a necessarily impersonal immediate pleasure: two men meet in the street, seduce each other, and get off shortly thereafter, and then move on (309). He suggests that this image of homosexuality denies the possibility of the formation of any new alliances, and attachments; it’s thus a vision of homosexuality that persists because it does not pose a threat to normalized society. Foucault rejects the automatic associations of homosexuality with an attraction between young men; rather, he examines the potential for same-sex intimacies across age boundaries. Two men of noticeably different ages, he argues, could “face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them towards each other. They would have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure” (309). For Foucault, it is the homosexual way of life, more than the sexual act itself that makes homosexuality “disturbing” (309). He concludes: “...Institutional codes can’t validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there’s supposed to be only law, rule, or habit.” (309).

Leo Bersani’s analysis of homosexuality and homophobia has long been in dialogue with Foucault’s work. And yet, as Rees-Roberts explains, “Bersani’s own inflection of Foucault’s articulation of queer relations is itself more pointedly antisocial than the original hypothesis” (449). Rees-Roberts continues by explaining that Bersani’s

reading, in *Homos*, of the correlation between specific sex acts (rimming) and positions (anal penetration) with forms of social betrayal in Jean Genet's 1947 novel *Pompes funèbres* posits a central relational negativity (450). In his recent essay collection *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, from 2010, Bersani engages with Foucault's ideas of homosexuality, specifically gay male cruising. Bersani suggests, "Cruising is sexual sociability. The danger associated with cruising is not that it reduces relations to promiscuous sex, but rather that the promiscuity may stop. Few things are more difficult than to block our interest in others, to prevent our connection to them from degenerating into a 'relationship'" (57). The cruising spot of the lake in *Stranger* produces queer relationality. Guiraudie puts emphasis upon the construction of a place within which queer relationality can be explored. The explicit sex is likewise framed as an extension of the film's exploration of queer relationality. The setting of *Stranger by the Lake* becomes a space potentially free from the normalizing discourses of heterosexuality and, thus, a place for the creation of new queer relationships, yet still ostensibly within the context of a hetero-normative French culture.

Robin Griffiths similarly describes the central role that social space and location play in the maintenance of queer communities, cultures and identities in *Queer Cinema in Europe*. Griffiths contends that queer identified social spaces and/or locations "are places of appropriation, exploration and a renewed visibility that have come to represent both a means of, and a barrier to, understandings of queer sexuality and identity in the postmodern era" (17). The importance of space and location in queer culture has also been examined by Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, which describes and theorizes queer culture and queer temporality in relation to subcultural spaces and the emergence of transgender visibility. Halberstam suggests that queer uses of time and space often develop in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction (1). Halberstam references Foucault's radical formulation of queer relations and queer networks and asserts that these relations in space and time mark out the particularity and indeed the perceived menace of homosexual life (1). Halberstam defines queer as "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (4). Although framed through the lens of transgender identities and communities, Halberstam's conceptions of

queer time and place are also relevant to an analysis of gay cruising rituals in *Stranger*. For Guiraudie explicitly uses a repetitive time structure within the film in which events unfold at the same location over a series of sequential, similarly patterned days. In doing so, he is not only queering rural space, but he is also exploring queer temporalities. For example, we never see the characters work in the film; we only see them arrive and leave the lake. The ritualistic quality of *Stranger* expands and explores this understanding of queer temporality. Guiraudie is not alone in seeking to move beyond standardized imagery within French queer cinema and Rees-Roberts highlights this trait in the title of his essay *Hors milieu: Queer and beyond*.

Mark Turner's *Backward Glances: Cruising Queer Streets in London and New York* provides an exploration of the history of male cruising in urban spaces, specifically the streets of major cities. Referencing cultural material, including novels, poems, pornography, paintings, and finally, the internet, Turner provides a understanding of what it means to cruise modern Western cities. Turner explains, "...cruising is the moment of visual exchange that occurs on the streets and in other places in the city, which constitutes an act of mutual recognition amid the otherwise alienating effects of anonymous crowd" (9). Turner's analysis is helpful while considering the cruising phenomenon (and rituals) in relation to Guiraudie's specific interest in non-urban gay cultures. *Stranger* is specifically situated in a rural French landscape as means to challenge this conventionality. Rees-Roberts asserts that this non-metropolitan location represents a new theoretical mode of inquiry, specifically a queer relational focus on spatiality and orientation. As Halberstam explains, "... it is not always easy to fathom the contours of queer life in rural settings because, particularly in the case of gay men, queers from rural settings are not well represented in the literature that has been so much a hallmark of twentieth-century gay identity" (41). Situating cruising in spaces that are not normally associated with such activity is an extension of Guiraudie's practice of challenging normalized notions around queer.

4.2 Thematic and Stylistic Characteristics of the Cinema of Guiraudie

When *Stranger by the Lake* was first screened at the Cannes Film Festival, Alain Guiraudie was still largely unknown to North American audiences. In the fall of 2013, B. Rich suggested: “Indeed, *Stranger* is such an audacious film from an underrecognized filmmaker that it might be time for a retrospective to assess his trajectory” (70). Shortly thereafter, both in January of 2014, the *Harvard Film Archive* and *The Film Society of Lincoln Center* held retrospectives on his career²⁸. During these retrospectives, Guiraudie’s short, medium, and feature films were all screened, beginning a larger North American discussion of a filmography which has not yet received the attention it deserves²⁹. However, despite these retrospectives, Guiraudie’s work remains hard to access and largely unknown to a wider film audience³⁰. The few writings that exist on Guiraudie’s career typically frame his work in relation to that of iconic directors, suggesting the strength of his authorial vision. *Stranger* is the film that has most notably incited these crucial analyses and comparisons. Paul Dallas states that *Stranger* is “a dark, erotically charged psychodrama [that] owes its greatest filmic debts to Hitchcock’s richly metaphorical mysteries, as well as to Renoir’s poetic-realist depiction of provincial life” (82). Rich explains, with regard to *Stranger*, “Guiraudie paints a world of desire and danger that’s one part Chabrol, one part Antonioni, that is, if either director had gone in for full-frontal male nudity or explicit sex” (69). *Stranger by the Lake* exemplifies Guiraudie’s stylistic and thematic hybridity. Guiraudie’s longshots, distanced objectivity,

²⁸ *Film Society Lincoln Center*’s “Alain Guiraudie: King of Escape” retrospective occurred January 24-30 2014. “Old Dreams in Strange Times- The Films of Alain Guiraudie”, Harvard’s retrospective occurred shortly after, from January 31- Feb. 8, 2014.

²⁹ Guiraudie’s first two short films, *Les héros sont immortels/ Heroes Never Die* (1990) and *Tout droit jusqu’au matin/ Straight On Til Morning* (1994) are semiautobiographical (Pendleton & Grundmann, 16). Running roughly ten minutes, they are about young men living in the provinces, finding their way. The third of these short films, *La force des choses/ Force of Circumstance* (1997), sometimes referred to as *The Inevitable Strength of Things*, is entirely different from the two previous shorts. *Force of Circumstance* is “a whimsical glimpse at a fantasy world of brigands, dandies, and soldiers” (Pendleton & Grundmann, 16)

³⁰ The films shown at the two retrospectives remain largely unavailable to North American audiences. For example, I was unable to get access to these short films while writing this thesis.

suspense, and contemplation over action, all situate him alongside iconic predecessors such as Antonioni, Chabrol, and Hitchcock. His stylistic and thematic hybridization, alongside the sexual specificity of his work, would seem to suggest a more singular position in contemporary French cinema. Through a discussion of Guiraudie's filmography, we can observe several key thematic concerns, specifically his use of rural spaces, non-normative bodies, figures of authority, and his broader exploration of queer relationality.

Born in 1964 in a small town in Aveyron, a department in south-central France, Guiraudie has lived in this region his entire life and characteristically works in and around this area of France³¹. Guiraudie's career has spanned nearly three decades, beginning with short films in the 1990s. As Lim explains, Guiraudie has long been a singular voice in French cinema: "gay, anti-bourgeois, at ease in nature, a true regionalist, an outsider in almost every sense" (Lim, 63). Guiraudie has made three shorts, two hour-long films, and four features. His films focus on the lives of middle-class or working class men and the homoerotic and heterosexual relationships between them. Guiraudie films are not occupied with portraying the lives of the "glossy urban hipsters" typically associated with the gay community, as Pendleton explains (*Harvard Film Archive*). Guiraudie instead works with a variety of characters and body types: old, young, skinny, overweight; this is key element in Guiraudie's filmography that makes his work relatively unique in gay cinema. Guiraudie's stories are all set in small communities in rural France, in and around his home town. Moreover, the people who live in these small villages are often cast in Guiraudie's films. They are typically farmers, tractor salesmen, and factory workers. As Pendleton and Grundmann explain in the introduction to an interview with Guiraudie: "... Guiraudie gives us working-class or middle-class men in the provinces, whose mundane looks and range of body types add to rather than mitigate against their intriguing qualities" (16). Guiraudie's films do not depict gay male urban culture, which seems to represent the norm of representations of gay male subjectivity in cinema.

³¹ A *department* is a key territorial unit in France, much like a county or province.

Guiraudie's films counter the marginalization that it produces by focusing on gay male culture outside of the urban setting.

The characters of Guiraudie's films are *everybody*; they are not traditionally beautiful and are not urban sophisticates but are quirky and likeable all the same. Guiraudie's films are comedic in an understated manner; his characters are not traditionally funny or comedic, and yet significantly, they remain figures of identification. His work often blurs the line between reality and fantasy, certainty and dreams, and he takes pleasure in probing the territory between these spaces. Deviating from some of his earlier filmography, *Stranger* predominantly features bodies that are quintessentially beautiful, muscular and toned. Yet, Guiraudie comments on those ideals through Henri, as his body contrasts with the toned bodies on display in *Stranger*.

By the early 2000s, Guiraudie had written and directed two medium length films, both gaining him recognition in France; the second was nominated for a César Award for Best Short Film. The first, *Du soleil pour les gueux/ Sunshine for the Scoundrels* (2001) is a tale of a young woman, a gay shepherd, a bandit, and a bounty hunter (played by Guiraudie). Much like in his later film *The King of Escape*, the young woman in *Sunshine for Scoundrels* falls in love with the gay shepherd. "*Sunshine for the Scoundrels* announces Guiraudie's fascination with loners and oddballs, his extravagant imagination and his affection for the rough landscape of France's Massif Central, whose ruggedness gives the film the flavor of an eccentric Western" (Pendleton, *Harvard Film Archive*). The second of Guiraudie's hour-long films, *Ce vieux rêve qui bouge/ That Old Dream that Moves* (2001) (also called *Real Cool Time*) follows a love triangle between three men: a young man hired to dismantle a machine, a middle-aged supervisor, and an older factory employee. Much like *Stranger*, the camera never leaves the sole location of the factory grounds; the film oscillates between the factory, the locker room, and the picnic area. Praised by Jean-Luc Godard, *That Old Dream that Moves* is about homoerotic desire set against the backdrop of a postindustrial landscape. *Dream* thus subtly juxtaposes the sexual and the socioeconomic (Pendleton & Grundmann, 16). Guiraudie's attention to class in relation to non-idealized bodies is additionally important here. These bodies, as explained by Pendleton and Grundmann, "are usually ignored by mainstream

cinema and pornography alike” (16). For Guiraudie, sex and sexuality on screen is not limited to the young and beautiful, but rather, male bodies which are afforded little attention in mainstream cinema are sexualized and given a voice where there is traditionally silence. Guiraudie characterizes *Sunshine* and *Dream* as representing two modes, between documentary and fiction, dream and reality, the light and the serious. He explains: “My approach to *Sunshine for the Scoundrels* was the imaginary, the fable, heroic fantasy, injected with the social and the real. For *That Old Dream That Moves*, it was the opposite approach: starting with the social, then making it shift towards the imaginary” (Pendleton, *Harvard Film Archive*).

Pas de repos pour les braves/ No Rest for the Brave (2003), Guiraudie’s first feature film, is also his most surreal film. *No Rest for the Brave* follows the adventures of young Basil, who believes if he falls asleep and wakes again he will die. Basil travels between two small villages while seamlessly alternating between reality and fantasy. Guiraudie blurs the lines between Basil’s reality and his fantasies so much that it is unclear if Basil is a mass murderer or a young lover of a much older man, Roger. “*No Rest for the Brave* resembles a cross between Cocteau and Carax, its main character a male Alice who’s fallen down a wormhole, not chasing a White Rabbit but running from death, the little death of the workaday world” (Pendleton, *Harvard Film Archive*). *Brave* earned Guiraudie a cult following in France, however, as explained by Pendleton and Grundmann, Guiraudie has since distanced himself from the film, considering it to be the last film of his youth as he has since shifted towards increased realism in his work (16). *Voici venu le temps/ Time Has Come* (2005) Guiraudie’s second feature film is an expanded version of *Force of Circumstance*. *The King of Escape*, Guiraudie’s third feature, is a satirical story about Armand, a pot-bellied, middle-aged gay man who falls for a young girl named Curly. The film functions as a key text to examine both the thematic concerns of Guiraudie’s earlier works as well as Guiraudie’s most recent, *Stranger by the Lake*.

4.3 *The King of Escape*

In *The King of Escape* Armand meets Curly when he saves her from potential rape. The two fall in love and run away together, and yet the extent of their running away

is primarily them running through the woods together. Their love affair eventually ends and they return to their small village. In line with Guiraudie's interests, *The King of Escape* provides comical sexual commentary, bringing more diverse male bodies to the screen, rural location, and explicit sex. *King* explores gay male cruising as well as figures of authority, both themes are further developed in *Stranger by the Lake*. The camera likewise carries similar functions in *King* and *Stranger*: to both *cruise* and *observe*. Because the films are examinations of gay male cruising, the camera actively participates in the cruising rituals. The camera often looks at other male cruisers and other male cruisers often look directly at the camera. Yet, the camera also shows the perspective of, and identifies with, the figure of authority, the police inspector. The officer functions to police normalcy and to observe the practices of gay male cruising. Importantly, Guiraudie does not situate the spectator in a singular position, as cruiser or police inspector; rather, he moves the camera between these positions to explore queer relationality in the face of potential normalization of queer sexualities. *The King of Escape* is interesting in this regard because the camera, and by proxy the audience, is not bound to a single position in the film. Guiraudie does not solely align the camera with Armand's loving, cruising-inspired, perspective; rather he also situates the camera in positions of observation and governance, associated with the inspector. This shifting of perspective foregrounds the policing of both queer spaces and pleasures, while perhaps also implicates the audience in both practices of cruising and policing sex. *The King of Escape* aims to destabilize normalized expectations about homosexuality and desire more generally. Armand is ultimately in trouble with the law because of his relationship with Curly. While this relationship is within the boundaries of normalized heterosexual desire, an older man with a (much) younger woman, Armand here is condemned by law enforcement for deviating from his presumably innate homosexuality.

The first image of the cruising spot in *King of Escape* is situated from the road. The camera faces the space and observes the parking. The camera in *King* begins on the outside, on the road. This establishing shot is followed by a view from within the parking lot, following Armand as he drives into a parking space; this method of arrival later becomes important when he deviates from this ritual. Guiraudie first allows the camera to observe the cruising location, rather than immediately situating the camera within the

cruising space. The camera rests at medium distance in front of Armand and Jean-Jacques. They discuss Jean-Jacques' encounters with an older man (who is considered legendary at their cruising spot) and the new drug called "doo-root". From the cars in the parking lot to the trees and atmosphere of this space, this cruising spot represents a central place in the film. The camera, and audience, is not automatically positioned within the cruising location. Instead, the camera observes from a distance before entering the cruising spot to begin cruising alongside Armand.

Curly is positioned as an outsider at this gay cruising spot. We first see her sitting on the grass wearing a purple dress; she has long brown hair and a youthful appearance. She is not leaning against a car like the other men, and she is not positioned in the same frame, at any time, with the other gay men. When Armand and Curly later attempt to have sex at the cruising spot, Armand arrives by bicycle, deviating from his traditional means of arrival. This change of transportation cues another key change that is about to take place; Armand arrives at the cruising spot to, presumably, look for another man, but he is instead surprised by Curly. They walk into the woods, Armand's bicycle still in hand, and they attempt to have sex. Armand, however, is unable to perform. The couple lay on the ground together, Curly's arm resting on Armand's large chest, and they discuss first time anxieties. At this point in the film, it is presumed by the police, that Armand has had sex with the underage Curly. Nevertheless, the police arrive and take Armand to meet Paul, the police inspector. Significantly, this turn of events represents the beginning of the policing of Armand and Curly's sex and sexuality in the film.

During the sequence when Armand meets the inspector, he is sitting in the inspector's office, situated in front of bookshelves. The shelves of organized law books represent order, governance, and the State, to which Armand is situated in contrast, with his back to them. The camera is, nevertheless, situated behind the desk in the position of the inspector. Both the office and the inspector who inhabit this space represent order and the State. After talking about Armand, the inspector asks: "What if I said that you liking older men leads me to believe you also like young girls?" The question would appear to be irrational, but the police inspector remains serious in his tone. And from this point in the film, the inspector overtly polices sexual pleasure, showing up whenever Armand is

sexually aroused. The close connection between sex and governance and normalization is thus established and satirized.

King contains relatively explicit sex scenes, the term coined by Linda Williams to signal sex which is neither pornography nor the R-rated acceptable norm, but explicit based on what viewers (and critics) *think* they see (Williams, 13-14). The film depicts implied fellatio and unprotected sex, and these moments are often interrupted by the inspector. Throughout the film, the connection between the law and sex is unmistakable, suggesting the close relationship between governance and sexuality. When Armand tries “doo-root” (a mysterious root that increases energy and libido) for the first time, he rushes to the woods to masturbate naked in a river. The inspector soon arrives and notes: “That’s no way to have kids.” This is but one specific aspect of sex, masturbation and pleasures outside of a reproductive imperative, the inspector polices. Later, when Armand is giving his male boss a blow job at work, the officer enters the room calmly and coolly says: “Follow me, Armand, come on”. Once outside the building he insists: “I can’t let you do just anything”. Even when the police inspector is not physically present, his omnipotence is palpable through the use of sirens and helicopters in the film. Moments after receiving a blowjob from Curly in the woods, for example, the sound of sirens and helicopters noticeably increases.

The tone of *The King of Escape* is lighter than one would expect from a film that takes on complex questions such as the relationship between governance and sexuality. By the end of the film, when Armand and Curly finally have sex, the seriousness is undercut by their discussion of the inexpensive lube Armand purchased at the Supermarket and Curly’s reminder to Armand about the repercussions of unprotected sex with a woman. The final sex scene of *King*, however, remains its most titillating. Here we see Armand in bed with three other men, and one of the men is slowly revealed to be the police officer. The men share a blanket and lay in bed naked together. The final words of the film are those of the inspector as he asks Armand to come closer to him. The police officer in *King* is thus a symbol of much more; he is a character imbued with the power of observation, law and governance, and normalization. At the same time, the bedroom scene also suggests the hypocrisy (or futility) of attempts to govern sex and sexuality.

Guiraudie embodies these themes within the character of the inspector, a figure he later returns to in *Stranger*.

Stranger by the Lake's tone is far more serious, adding suspense and mystery to Guiraudie's depiction of homoerotic desire and its policing. The ridicule and frivolity present in *The King of Escape* are replaced in *Stranger* by murder and intrigue. At the same time, the shift in focus serves to extend the director's exploration of the normalization of sex and sexuality rather than to diminish those interests. Similarly, the camera functions to position the spectator as both an inspector and the cruising protagonists. The spectator is denied sole identification with the cruising protagonists, the inspector, or the other cruisers. Rather, the camera is situated in these varied positions throughout the film. *Stranger*, however, presents the policing of sex in a slightly different manner because there is an actual crime committed (the murder). Thus, *Stranger* is best viewed as an extension of the director's four main recurrent themes. Guiraudie continues to queer this rural (non-urban) lakeside space by focusing on a cruising place for local gay men. Yet, *Stranger* represents a shift in Guiraudie's depiction of explicit sex; the tonal and visual differences in the sex scenes are notable here. While *The King of Escape* is a comical ridicule of sexual governance, *Stranger by the Lake*'s thriller preoccupations change the tone of the film to much more serious. Here, the interactions between Franck, Henri, and Michel offer an opportunity to further discuss Foucault's conceptualization of homosexuality and queer relationality, void of the carefreeness found in *King*.

4.4 Queer Relations by the Lake

Stranger by the Lake follows Franck (Pierre Deladonchamps), a regular at a gay cruising spot located on a lakeside in the south of France. Franck meets Michel (Christophe Paou), a muscular mysterious handsome stranger, as well as, Henri (Patrick d'Assumçao), a recently divorced, noticeably out-of-shape middle aged man. Franck and Henri become friends, often sitting on the beach talking. Michel and Franck actively cruise each other, unlike Franck's relationship with Henri. On the second night of the film, however, Franck witnesses Michel drown his lover in the lake. Despite this awareness, Franck continues to regularly visit the cruising spot and he soon develops a sexual relationship with Michel.

Stranger's queering of the lakeside/beach setting, a prototypical location of French cinema, also extends to the formal level. *Stranger by the Lake* is told over a ten day period, and the film's structure is based on precision and repetition. This ritualistic behavior is actually key to the thematic and aesthetic functions of the film. The days begin with a long shot of the parking lot as Franck's black Renault pulls into a parking space. The film locations are limited to four sites: the beach, the lake, the woods, and the parking lot. Each site denotes a specific social interaction: the beach, for meeting and talking; the lake, for swimming; the woods, for cruising and sex, and; the parking lot, for arriving and departing. Yet, by the end of the film, the lake, woods, and parking lot, also become potential sites of violence. The social interactions are key, and Guiraudie places importance on the conversations and interactions between the individuals in these ostensibly "safe spaces".

Stranger's first shot is of Franck driving into the parking lot. He exits the car and walks into the woods. Following this establishing shot of the parking lot are tracking shots located in the woods, following Franck to the beach. Once on the beach, the camera re-situates in front of Franck and the other men on the beach. The camera becomes a cruiser, watching Franck arrive and walk onto beach. Franck undresses and talks to a friend tanning naked on the beach. Guiraudie repeatedly shows the men at the lake fully naked, and male nudity functions to show the several bodies types present at the beach. As is typical of Guiraudie's filmography, he depicts bodies that are not traditionally glorified in mainstream cinema. Franck and his friend speak of the weather and comment on the "good turn-out", referring to the number of men present. Franck then takes off his clothes and goes for a swim in the lake. With this seemingly quick interaction, Guiraudie establishes the beach as more than simply a generic space in French cinema, but rather, as a subcultural site/place.

The first shot of Henri is a long shot from the water from Franck's point of view. Henri's body is much like Armand's from *The King of Escape*, yet we never see Henri completely nude as we do Armand. Henri is middle aged with a potbelly. The beach becomes Henri's primary domain; he is bound to this location, and the conversations shared with Franck happen on the beach. On the first day, Franck approaches Henri from

the lake and asks if he can join him; he then sits with him on the beach, notably distanced from the other men. Their conversations begin by addressing the temperature of the water and swimming in the lake. Henri inquires about the silurus, a possibly mythical type of predatory catfish believed to be found in the lake, and a potential cypher for HIV and sexually transmitted infections. Franck explains he has never seen one in his time at the lake. Rees-Roberts suggests that Henri's metaphorical reflection on chance sets up the film's more tentative handling of sexual risk (455). Throughout the ten day length of the film, their conversations eventually extend to homosexuality, love, relationships, and sex. Henri and Franck discuss Henri's previous relationships, with men and women, as well as Franck's homosexuality on the second day. While the shot type, medium- long shot, is the same from the first day, their clothing has changed. Franck is now naked and Henri, initially presented wearing a shirt and shorts, is now shirtless. On the third day, after the murder in the lake the night before, the camera is situated behind Henri and Franck, emphasizing the change which has taken place in the lake. They discuss the differences between cruising and creating casual conversation. Franck inquires about what Henri does for sex and Henri explains that he goes without. Following this question there is a close-up shot of Henri, unlike any previous shots of him. This moment is followed by an immediate image of the lake. These images transmit the impression of Henri as a potential companion, peaceful and unthreatening, but also undesirable.

Henri explains to Franck on the ninth day: "You make my heart race but I have no desire to sleep with you." Henri and Franck never have sex in the film, but moments like this function to bring the viewer closer to Henri. For Henri "...companionship has replaced sexual desire, and yet he proves to be the most romantic one of all" (Dallas, 83). While Dallas' comments are helpful for understanding Henri's character, questions arise with regard to the audience's relationship to Henri. Why do we find comfort in Henri? What does this comfort mean in relation to normalized standards of romance? Guiraudie here explores the relationship between individuals of noticeable age differences and non-aestheticized body-types, as in *The King of Escape*. Similarly, for Foucault, two men of differing ages can develop a formless relationship that exists outside of normal conventions and labels.

In contrast to Franck and Henri, Michel is ultimately unknown. He is situated in contrast to Henri physically and emotionally. Michel is tall, tanned and handsome, with his *Boys in the Sand*-era mustache (Williams, 17); he is Henri's counterpart. As Richard Lippe suggests, "with his traditional handsomeness and physical perfection, Michel can be considered a masculine ideal..." (71). *Stranger* addresses the connection between sex and death predominantly through Michel's character. He is representative of the idealized man, while also being the killer in the film. This connection could suggest Franck's dangerous sexual fantasies, and as Rees-Roberts explains, this parallel is further elaborated when Michel is seen drowning his lover after Franck climaxes in the previous sequence (455).

Michel is first seen while swimming in the lake. Franck is sitting on the beach with Henri and sees Michel from a far distance. Michel then gets out of the water, naked, puts shorts on, and walks into the woods. Franck quickly leaves Henri and follows Michel. The camera and the audience are positioned with Franck, cruising Michel. Michel's connection to sex and desire are made clear in these shots. He is not interested in the conversations had on the beach; rather, his only interest is in the actions taking place in the lake and the woods. When Franck finds Michel in the woods, he is with another man. Michel and Franck make eye contact before Michel continues having sex with the other man. On the second day, Franck follows Michel to the beach after they cross paths while swimming in the lake. Both naked, they discuss their connections to the lake; Franck is a regular and Michel is new to the cruising spot. They are interrupted by another man, presumably the other man Michel was with from the first day, and Michel leaves with him to go to the woods.

Several important occurrences happen on the second day. The first is one of the film's most explicit sex scenes, which includes a cum-shot, and the second is the murder of Michel's first lover at the lake. As noted, Guiraudie suggests a connection between desire and death by positioning these two scenes immediately after one another. The entire murder takes place in an extreme-long shot from Franck's point of view. During the first moments of the murder, it is unclear whether Michel and this man are playing innocently together or if the man is indeed in danger. However, this uncertainty is

clarified when the man yells “stop”. Michel succeeds in drowning this man, swims to the shore, and walks back to his towel to get dressed. The entire time the camera remains fixated on Michel, transitioning from an extreme-long shot to a long-shot when Michel is getting dressed. In perhaps the most Hitchcockian scene in the film, the camera is paralyzed along with Franck, unable to do anything, just as we are unable to stop watching the action taking place. The camera’s position resembles the moment when Michel walked out of the lake the first time Franck cruised him. Franck is significantly still attracted to Michel even after discovering he is a murderer; he still desires him. Because Franck and Michel actively cruise each other before the murder, and the fact that these moments are visually similar, this perhaps suggests that Franck desires Michel despite his actions and not because he is a murderer. However, it may also suggest that the danger Michel represents actually intensifies Franck’s desire for him. Michel significantly does not return to the lake on the third day of the film.

On the fourth day, Michel returns to the lake. We do not see him arrive at the beach or undress before swimming; rather, he simply emerges from the water after the other men have left. We again see Michel through the point of view of Franck. This positioning of the camera again suggests that the camera also “cruises” Michel. The camera follows his naked body as he emerges from the water and walks towards the camera, moving from a long shot to a close-up of his face and shoulders. Michel breaks the fourth wall, looking directly at the camera, and says hello. We/the camera participate in the cruising (and vice versa). Michel asks to share Franck’s towel and sits down beside him. Michel asks about Franck’s “boyfriend”, referring to Henri. Franck explains that he is not Henri’s boyfriend and that the two hardly know each other. Michel’s inquiry demonstrates his misperception of the non-normalized relationship between Henri and Franck, and perhaps Franck’s as well. Michel and Franck soon begin kissing and Michel then fellates him.

The film’s explicit, non-simulated sex functions within the specific location to formally and narratively destabilize normalized depictions of sexuality. The fifth day includes another explicit sex scene between Michel and Franck. The scene shows non-simulated sex between the actors’ body doubles. Guiraudie has noted that he did not want

to leave sex to pornography alone, but rather to incorporate it into narrative cinema. He explains, “Love and passion are everywhere in mainstream cinema. But sex, which after all takes up an important part of our lives—even in love, sex is important—we hide in pornography” (Pendleton & Grundmann, 17).

As Williams explains, it would be a mistake to confuse this decision, the decision to use pornographic doubles, with actual pornography. Rather, Guiraudie’s decision to include these scenes comes from a desire to not leave sex to pornography but to show it as both a part of life and cinematic narrative. The scene lasts approximately four minutes and includes oral sex, using the body doubles, and Michel and Franck having unprotected anal sex. Rees-Roberts explains that Guiraudie gives more attention to sexual health here than in his earlier films, and that *Stranger* “toys with references to contemporary practices of barebacking, realistically enough given the fraught negotiations around the topic in early twenty-first-century gay culture” (455-456). For Williams, *Stranger* is not quite an allegory of AIDS, but not quite *not* an allegory either (17). It is in fact tempting to read *Stranger by the Lake* as an AIDS allegory, characterizing Michel as the killer; AIDS is present without being literally tangible and evident. The fear of AIDS did not play a role in the film, as Guiraudie himself explains, rather, it is present in all cinema in a post-AIDS society (Osenlund, *Slant*).

The sex scene contains moments of playful laughter—Franck asks Michel to kiss him and he jokingly resists—which speaks to Franck’s happiness with Michel. These moments are complicated however by the discussion following the sex. Franck inquires why Michel will not spend a night with him away from the lake. Michel answers by saying that he has his separate life and that: “We can have great sex without eating or sleeping together”. Michel’s desire to have non-committed sex, limited to the lake setting, runs contrary to Franck’s desires to have a more traditional relationship with Michel. Their interactions function to create a new relationship, much closer to Michel’s ideal vision. Michel is positioned as a masculine ideal and as the center of Franck’s desires. Yet, he is also positioned as the killer, mysterious and dangerous. For the audience, the connection between death and desire is established in this new relationship; Franck desires Michel and fears death. Closely related to the creation and regulation of

these new relationships is the introduction into the film of the police officer, inspector Damroder.

Much like the inspector from *The King of Escape*, inspector Damroder represents the state, the police, and thus, is “officially” heterosexual and heteronormative. Guiraudie explains the role of the inspector in an interview with *Cineaste*, suggesting that the inspector is a spokesperson for the audience, an audience that may be unfamiliar with a cruising spot (Pendleton & Grundmann, 19). Here, Guiraudie acknowledges the broader non-queer audience of this film. He continues, “I really liked the idea, which is in *The King of Escape* as well, that maybe this inspector really wanted to see for himself how things worked among these men” (Pendleton & Grundmann, 19). Just as the inspector is attempting to understand the relationships among the men at the lake, he functions as a stand-in for an audience potentially trying to understand these relationships as well. The inspector thus represents an interested curiosity, perhaps shared by an audience, as well as the potentially normalizing force of police work. The inspector represents the state and appears to be heteronormativity personified. He’s an archetypal authority figure; he is ‘God in the Garden of Eden’ (Pendleton & Grundmann, 19). Rees-Roberts contends that the inspector’s investigation resembles an ethnographic inquiry into gay sexual practice (456). He argues that it is the inspector “who articulates the more searching questions concerning the communal value and affective difficulties of casual sex – problematically so given his role as a *porteur* between the characters and the audience and his official function as the voice-box for hetero-normative law and order” (456). By the end of the film the inspector is brutally murdered by Michel. This ending, as Rees-Roberts usefully explains, neutralizes the judgmental concerns about promiscuity, anonymity, and responsibility by following the thriller-horror genre prescription of killing the potential savior (456). With this ending, Guiraudie suggests that the normalization of queer relationality by the state is inherently futile.

Inspector Damroder is first introduced on the seventh day. He appears suddenly while Michel and Franck are kissing in the woods. He first appears in the shadows of the bushes, as if he had been there the entire film, hiding in the shadows, completely unseen. Although the camera does not directly share his gaze in this moment, it is positioned

beside him and resembles his point of view from the bushes. He reappears again each day for the remainder of the film, each time surprising Franck with his arrival. These surprise visits are less surprising for viewers who have seen *The King of Escape*, where the inspector's visits are humorously timed to be awkward for Armand. The inspector's job, as in *King*, is the understanding and regulation of these relationships. However, the relationship between the viewer and the inspector is different in *Stranger* because there is an actual crime to be policed/solved. The inspector advises Franck to "show some concern, if only for yourself. What if there's a homophobic serial killer on the loose? Then do something, or you may be next."

By the end of the film, the tenth day, Henri confronts Michel about the murder of his previous lover. Henri here leaves his beachside location and ventures into the woods, knowing Michel will follow him. Henri is then murdered by Michel in the woods. The sequence visually resembles the first murder in the lake. Both sequences are from Franck's perspective and filmed using a long shot. Michel and Henri are partially obscured by bushes, just as Michel and his lover were obscured by water. Lastly, both sequences end with Michel calmly walking away. Henri's final words to Franck are: "I got what I wanted". Henri sacrifices himself for Franck and embraces death. Moments after the murder the inspector arrives. He looks directly at the camera, breaking the fourth wall, as he walks through the path to the woods. The following shot reveals that the inspector was looking at Franck. In the final moments of the film we are identifying with Franck, suggesting perhaps, our final alignment with the cruiser. The inspector's arrival at the end of the film represents a potential salvation; he is capable of saving Franck from Michel. However, this salvation is denied by the film. The final sequence of the film, shot in near-total darkness, involves Michel hunting for Franck, and perhaps, vice versa. In the final shot of the film, Franck calls out for Michel, who is now gone. As Rees-Roberts suggests, this surrender, is a submissive embrace of self-annihilation (453).

By situating his queer place in the rural idyll of the lake, Guiraudie is using landscape to position questions of sex and sexuality outside of the normalized and accepted urban space. The exploration of relationality works in conjunction with the explicit sex, situating Guiraudie within the political moment in France with regard to the

legalization of same-sex marriage. By continually narrowing the focus to sexual orientation and identity politics, the movement arguably desexualizes homosexuality (Warner, 25). In contrast, Guiraudie chooses in *Stranger* to directly challenge the desexualization of homosexuality while also grappling with typically homophobic associations of gay sex with danger and death. In an act of deliberate de-stabilization, *Stranger* has several scenes of explicit gay sex. Not only does this re-assert the importance of the act of sex, it also positions Guiraudie in dialogue with the contemporary debates in France regarding same-sex marriage and the normalization of queer, sex and relationships.

Whereas *Blue is the Warmest Color* can be seen as mirroring the ongoing political normalization of same-sex desires occurring in France, *Stranger by the Lake* complicates the moment by examining alternative forms of relationality. Henri, Franck, Michel and the inspector are the four characters whose lives intersect within *Stranger*. Their interactions all are framed by the location, a specific place where new relationships can develop, occur and be observed. These alternative forms of relationality challenge the republicanism of French politics which posits a dominant form of sanctioned and state approved normalization much different than the fluidity of the relationships the characters of *Stranger by the Lake* develop. The darker tone of the film would perhaps function to suggest that the alternative relationality, that was conceivable at the beginning of the film, is lost by the end of the film. With the death of Michel's lover, Henri, and the inspector (with his attempts to understand new relationality), the film suggests that the popular appeal of more normative visions of homosexuality live on. Franck, and the audience, are left looking for answers for the future of alternative forms of relationality.

Conclusion

5 Beyond Normal

This thesis began by questioning how recent French queer films may mirror, interrogate, and trouble sexual politics in France. The key political changes included the PACS legislation from 1999 and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013. A consideration of the relevant literature provided an introductory context for the thesis, following which the first chapter considered the filmography of François Ozon. The chapter discussed Ozon's position as a mainstream queer auteur, suggesting that his contemporary films offer a "mainstreaming" or normalizing version of non-normative approaches to sex, pleasure, and identity. These representations seem to complement the political moment in contemporary France.

The next chapter discussed *Blue is the Warmest Color*. The chapter began by presenting an overview of the controversy surrounding *Blue* and then moved to a textual analysis of the film. Ultimately, it emphasized the primary role that class played in the film for Kechiche. This focus on class division and social division necessarily changes our consideration of the film's explicit sex scenes; the scenes are, from this perspective, used to propose that despite explicit passion between two individuals, love that crosses class lines cannot last. By using lesbianism to explore persistent class hierarchies in France, Kechiche presents these questions in a contemporary context, piggybacking on the debates for the legalization of same-sex marriage in France, and, as such, normalizing queer desires in the process.

The final chapter focused on the most recent film by director Alain Guiraudie, *Stranger by the Lake*. The chapter began by discussing his earlier filmography. The objective was to trace characteristic thematic concerns and cinematic style through his filmography. By exploring gay male cruising in a prototypical French space, the lakeside location, the chapter explained how Guiraudie queered this place in order to explore queer relationality. Moreover, it was suggested that the relationality at the lake is best understood by considering Foucault's conceptions of homosexuality and friendship. The explicit sex within *Stranger* functioned to further examine alternative forms of

relationality, moving the sex from pornography into narrative cinema. The chapter concluded by asserting that the exploration of alternative forms of relationality serves to question the universalist republicanism of contemporary French politics. So what conclusions can be derived from this discussion? In addition, how may research on this topic be furthered and expanded?

5.1 Explicit Sex and the Politics of Normalization

The thesis examined films and filmmakers operating at the intersection between French sexual politics and a larger, ongoing global dialogue about gay rights. The introduction prefaced the thesis consideration by referencing 20th century gay political theory, in particular, Warner's *The Trouble with Normal* and Foucault's concepts regarding the history of sexuality, homosexuality, and gay male relationships. Taken in conjunction, the existing scholarship underscores that the experiences in France are emblematic of a larger global movement. Thus, while the films and filmmakers discussed in the thesis focused on the changing politics of normalization within France, their films have resonance that extend much further. What is common to the works of Ozon, Kechiche and Guiraudie examined here is that their use of explicit sex serves as an effective means to engage with normalcy and the questions that arise as a consequence. Moreover, their work illustrates the importance of questioning normalcy as key in the contemporary politics of normalization within a particular context.

Normalcy, with its constructed ties to the "good and natural", qualifies certain individuals while simultaneously marginalizing those who are not "normal". The current rhetoric of the gay rights movement has for many critics involved moving the borders of normalcy, legalizing gay marriage, to include queer individuals within the institution. Yet, moving these borders to include gay and lesbian individuals who chose to marry and be in monogamous relationships does not address those who do not adhere to traditional relationship standards. Those queers who willingly choose not to participate in marriage become potentially even more deviant in the eyes of dominant society. With this in mind, a careful consideration of cinema's involvement in this process is important. According to *SOS Homophobie*, a French national association against homophobic discrimination and violence, 2013 marked a sharp rise in abuse of 54% from the previous year, and

violent attacks on the whole increased by 78%. The group's spokesperson, Gregory Premon explained: "There's no doubt the rise in homophobic acts was linked to the context of the opposition against gay marriage" (Duffy, *PinkNews*). While the decision to legalize gay marriage in France may appear to have been a step towards homosexual and queer acceptance, the ramifications of such decisions may suggest the opposite. The films discussed in this thesis similarly recognize that the normalization process of PACS and gay marriage might not immediately manifest the imagined French utopia of universality. The potentially ambiguous endings of *The New Girlfriend*, *Blue is the Warmest Color*, and *Stranger by the Lake*, draw our attention to the impossibility of the republican fantasy of the nation.

As the global gay marriage boom continues to grow, queer text/images are continually being found in the mainstream, reaching more and more audiences globally. Furthermore, in the likelihood that this transition is only increasing, the complex engagement of queer cinema with the processes of normalization will continue to demand our attention. Following this global influx of queer visibility, Julianne Pidduck has suggested the term hypervisibility. The term "registers a sea of change in the epistemological, cultural, political and economic regimes governing the re/production and dissemination of images of same-sex desire and identity" (Pidduck, 10). The move from visible to hypervisible, as Pidduck argues, "...suggests an excess or even frenzy of visibility (or 'positive images') as strategy for social, political and cultural integration" (10). With the visibility of same-sex desires only increasing in cinema (internationally, art cinema, and the mainstream) we must consider the implications of this transition, and question how queer cinema can maintain its critical and political edge. Returning to the words of Warner, we must remember the trouble with normal. Importantly, the exploration of alternative relationality, which is not bound to the confines of normal, can frequently be found in the exploration of explicit sex on screen.

Moving sex from the margins (pornography) to art cinema (or narrative cinema) in order to interrogate what may be deemed normal, could be one way to destabilize the relationship between politics and sex, and to question the relationship between normal and good, correct, and natural. In this regard, questioning *how* we screen sex matters.

Altering our relationship with normalcy seems more important now than it ever has. No longer is visibility the singular concern for queer representation (not that it ever was). Rather, considering the relationship between these representations and contemporary sexual politics is key. As this thesis has shown, there is more than one way for filmmakers to address these issues. Ozon, Kechiche and Guiraudie all use different approaches and raise different questions, but their engagement with normalizing structures and strategies is what binds their work.

5.2 Going Global: Beyond French Queer Cinema

First and foremost, the further development of key issues addressed in the thesis would surely involve the inclusion of scholarship both written and only accessible in French. Importantly, while writing this thesis I referenced scholarship accessible only in English. While the conclusions may not drastically alter, it would, nevertheless, provide a more informed overview on the issues addressed in the thesis.

As queer becomes more global, exploring the centers of global interactions should also be addressed. Julian Stringer, in “Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy”, situates the film festival circuit as part of a global space comprised of global cities. He uses the term “international film festival circuit” to suggest the “existence of a socially produced space unto itself, a unique cultural arena that acts as a contact zone for the working-through of unevenly differentiated power relationships... it is cities which now act as the nodal points on this circuit, not national film industries” (Stringer, 138). Global cities as cultural sites replaced nations as nodal points in the international film festival circuit. Stringer concludes that “more and more these days the festival crowd does not appear to be there primarily to enjoy the show so much as to provide evidence of its existence for worldwide observers” (Stringer, 141). Even though Stringer is not specifically discussing queer cinema here, his conceptions of the film festival circuit can be translated into LGBT film festivals as well as international festivals that show queer cinema.

The work of Ozon, Kechiche and Guiraudie has benefited greatly from the Film Festival circuit. A full exploration of the how and why of the relationship of each of the

three directors with Film Festivals was beyond the parameters of this thesis but does warrant a further examination. In addition, future research may wish to examine how these festivals act as global cities for the observation of national issues. Similarly, what is the role of LGBT festivals in particular, and what is their relationship with mainstream cinema? Moreover, as several of the films discussed here illustrated, understanding the transitioning of films from being “LGBT films” to the mainstream may also be a highly revealing line of enquiry.

5.3 Authorship and *Auteurs*

Within the context of this thesis, the exploration of alternative relationality has focused on male homosexual *auteurs* and their texts. There exists, as Pidduck explains, a longstanding and polyvalent male homosexual *auteur* tradition in France, encompassing not only filmmakers, but also writers and intellectuals (Pidduck, 23). Consider, for example, Jean Genet, Jean Cocteau, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Cyril Collard, André Techiné, Patrice Chéreau, François Ozon and Christophe Honoré. Male homosexual auteurism, and the many related questions, represent an area that requires further analysis. However, the largest area which deserves further academic attention would be Francophone lesbian authors and female same-sex desire in cinema. With little academic work available on these topics, the representation of lesbians in Francophone cinema remains under-examined. For example, the work of Céline Sciamma would offer an interesting avenue for an extension of the analysis in this thesis. Her most recent films include, *Naissance des Pieuvres/Water Lilies* (2007), *Tomboy* (2011), and *Bande de filles/Girlhood* (2014). Sciamma is an excellent illustration for examination of a female auteur in comparison with the three male directors referenced here: her works are contemporary (*Water Lilies* in 2007 was her first film) and her filmography is centrally concerned with female same-sex desire and the blurred lines of identity and intimacies. How does she, as a female auteur, address the politics of normalization in contemporary France?

The questions that linger in relation to the work of Ozon, Kechiche, and Guiraudie reflect the wider meanings that can be derived from the discussions within this thesis. Primarily, this thesis brings examines the relationship of screening explicit sex,

with its disruptive and unpredictable quality of desire and sexual pleasure, in relation to the tendency of the gay marriage debates to present a desexualized version of homosexuality. If the movement aims to normalize and make gays and lesbians invisible through republican universalism, then how can we explain the recent surge of imagery which makes queer desire and sexual pleasure so explicit? The sexual and relational variations which we see in these films reflect the presumed relational norms of contemporary France. Ozon questions the implications of republicanism as it seeks to make normal previously considered queer desires and pleasures. Kechiche's *Blue* suggests that the lesbian couple, now fully normalized, is still unable to bridge the social divisions that remain embedded within France. The alternative relationality which deviated the most from the normalized relations in contemporary France was found in *Stranger by the Lake*. Yet, the ending of *Stranger* is enigmatic. Instead, Guiraudie ends the film without answers for the potentiality of new relations. Perhaps, the ending of *Stranger* best captures the contemporary moment in France. At the same time, it underscores the potential for French queer cinema to raise such questions.

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