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“How I became what I am”: an aesthetics of twist cinema in films from the 1960s and 1970s

Abstract: *The article analyzes the political and theoretical potential of cinematographic language to express and rebuild the relationship between sexual and gender differences. As cultural products, the three films analyzed – A Casa Assassinada (1972), Sunday, Bloody Sunday (1971) and Les Amities Particulières (1964) – allude to feminist issues of the time, as well as instigating a reading of gender beyond the narratives, by historicizing the visibility of the female body, heteronormativity, and the subversiveness of forbidden loves as represented through the films’ structure. The text argues, from a queer perspective, that the aesthetic nature of twist cinema, within the limits of each style and period, was precisely the boldness to run risks in its visual grammar, not making political concessions in challenging the moral canons of current society.*

Keywords: *feminism; queer cinema; films studies; twist cinema*



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The Focus

This article analyzes the political and theoretical potential of film language as a mechanism of production/dissemination of images and imagination. It considers film as an integral part of the great media device of making (in)visible¹ existing and/or idealized ways of life. One of the political potentials that stands out from the very start is precisely to bring to the big screen the visibility of what seemed intimate and restricted to the interiors (of houses, bodies, institutions), disclosing this intimacy to the gaze of a heterogeneous audience, and thus exposing it in a political way. There is a resonant atunement in the camera turns that provides a critical perspective in relation to modern subjectivities (and oppressions and hierarchies) and to the feminist claim of the end of the 1960s (*the private is political*) against the domestic violence intrinsic to the patriarchal structure and values of the nuclear family

² There are classic names associated to the formation of this more radical branch of feminism, among them Carol Hanisch and Shulamith Firestone; however, I would recommend the book by bell hooks, *Feminism is for everybody*, which recovers this history of feminism, especially the fight for the autonomy of our own bodies, referring to the access to reproductive rights and free love. The book also includes a critical reading of how women's studies were consolidated in the American academy between the 1970s and 1980s. Hooks' first book, written when she was 19 years old (*Ain't I a Woman: Black women and Feminism*), is another important reading. It was, at the same time, a self discovery of her potential as a black writer and a political libel aiming to unite feminism to the debate on racism.

(institutionalized sexism). Extensive to black feminism,² and to the increasing presence of gay and lesbian issues within identity politics, this slogan has expanded the understanding that what seemed individual conflicts were, in fact, overt forms of oppression and institutionalized violence. This awareness entailed the need for a collective management of (dis)affections in the public sphere, in terms of family relationships as well as of the self.

Still within this scenario, in the depth of the field, it is possible to envision the relationship between some of these issues and the formulation of a radical criticism of the play of masks, characteristic of the political life before modern times. Such criticism constituted one of the landmark notions of power and citizenship in modernity. Clothing, wigs, the performative and theatrical aspect of aristocratic life were taken as pretexts to emphasize appearances at the expense of essence and thus, in the French Revolution, the "clean face" motto – without makeup or wigs – was one of the ethical principles for rising into public life (Jean Jacques COURTINE; Claudine Haroche, 1988). The game of truth/reality vs. lie/fiction is chronologically considered modern. However, it returned in a different format over the last century, within the sphere of the arts and the media.

In a given historical moment, which culminates in the formulation of the *Private is Political*, the State and other civil institutions were demanded to act as mediators in disputes within the personal/sexual sphere to restrain abuses, violence and arbitrariness. There is a public dimension of sexuality and of the constitution of subjectivity (what individualizes us in terms of perceived gender, race, social class, education, age, marital status) which allows for regulation and standardization.

This introduction serves to reaffirm that it is precisely within this tense and disputed sphere of the production of subjectivities (normative or not) that lies the consumption of images in press, television, web (network) as well as in cinema.

After all, films actively participate in the questioning – philosophical, psychoanalytical, historical, religious, and scientific – of who we are, who are the others, and how we can (de)construct the play of appearances in and from the production of images. Recently there has been a growing desire to access and visualize *the truth* about ourselves in the reflections (cultural mirrors) that are all around us in multi-screens and other representational arts. In the theater, even if the theme is *Life as it is* (Nelson Rodrigues), the staging pact and the stage itself act as mediators. In cinema, the enjoyment and the effect of continuity of images create a degree of credibility and authenticity that erases the limit between the screen and the viewer. The illusion of reality reaches a high degree of perfection with an effect of enchantment. This

³ The Popular Center for Culture (CPC), created in 1961 in Rio de Janeiro, and closed in 1964 (due to the coup d'état), was linked to the National Students Union (UNE). It was an organization of a group of leftist intellectuals aiming to create and disclose a "popular revolutionary art". Their initiatives included: theaters and music exhibited at factories' entrances and theaters at periphery regions. They also traveled to the countryside – artists of various areas, such as theater, music, cinema, literature and plastic arts. A debate on this project can be found in Heloísa Buarque HOLLANDA (1981). More information on CPC can be found at the oficial website: <http://forumeja.org.br/book/export/html/1720>.

⁴ He analyzes movies such as *Girls in Uniform* (1958, G. Radvanyi, Germany), *Un Chant d'Amour* (Jean Genet, France, 1950) and *Word is Out* (USA, 1970).

aesthetics mimics the "natural" form, forging a sense of reality through customary gestures, feasible clothing and narratives, producing the effect of naturalness. There is a vast critical literature on classic cinema that shows its tendency to hide its own representational nature. In the postwar period, approximately at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, there is a widespread (Marxist) politicization of cinema, evidenced by the French poetic realism, the Italian neorealism and, later, by Latin American cinema (that influenced part of African film production) and part of what we understand in Brazil as "new cinema" and the politicized³ cinema of the early 1960s. The 1990s, which inherited this tense debate between art and politics, are considered a decade of resignification of classical aesthetics, proposing a fusion between classic cinema (with its epic naturalistic tone) and neorealist political cinema, which *documents* reality without strategies of "masquerading" it.

In terms of the relationship between cinema, sex and sexuality (homosexuality, and a queer perspective), for at least 25 years critics have been pointing out a tendency towards a greater visibility and eloquence of the theme in the movies in general (apart from porn industry), be it aesthetically or politically (as seen in the films of Oshima, Bergman, Pasolini, Sganzerla) or as part of the aesthetics that became known as *sexploitation* (exploration of sex as a scenic and narrative feature as in the Brazilian *pornoanchada*).

In the international sphere, the politicized gay/lesbian cinema of the 1970s and 1980s argued that filmic language needed to move from apathy, especially in relation to the affective/sexual practices among people of the same sex, to bodily/sexual liberation. This type of aesthetic proposal became known as affirmation cinema (Richard DYER, 1990),⁴ which had the intention of screening lesbians and gays as they "are", claiming for identification by the gay and lesbian audience and acceptance by part of the straight audience. According to Richard Dyer, this cinema dealt with three things, not necessarily together: "*thereness* – the fact of the gay existence; *goodness* – the feasibility and worth of gay lifestyle (Happy endings! No narratives in which characters experience internalized homophobia); and *realness* – more realistic movies (movies that address the past, hypocrisies, dissimulations, etc.).

In this perspective, affirmation cinema was and is based on essentialism. The narrative structure and their imagery require a script in which the discovery of the sense of self, viewed as something that was hidden within, is based on unity over the diversity that marked/marks "gay and lesbian people." The narratives and the *mise-en-scène* aim to focus on what they have in common, minimizing the impact of

internal differences in the community itself. It is this imaginative vision of an ideal community that may have led Richard Dyer to conclude that films participate in a “*promotion of homosexuality*”.

Following affirmation cinema, another kind of filmography developed under a social-constructionist viewpoint – which, unlike the essentialist approach, situated the *gay style* within a historical perspective of social struggles. The five most popular films are: *Maidens* (Australia, 1978), *Royal Opera* (France, 1979), *In Black and White*⁵ (Canada, 1979), *Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts* (USA, 1975) and *Madame X* (Germany, 1977). It is relevant to note that in this list, elaborated by English scholars, none of the films that will be analyzed here are included, and that, therefore, an interesting dialogue with this filmography may be established.

Post-affirmative cinema was produced during a period of great retaliation against lesbian and gay sexuality, when the debate on the law of sodomy was resumed by the U.S. Supreme Court (Regan Bush (1989-1993) and George Bush (2000-2009) era) and the dispute around Clause 28 in Britain⁶, created during the AIDS epidemics, gained momentum. Still connected to Dyer’s interpretation, we see this other lesbian/gay culture linked to an ironic vision of the self and of others (those who are straight), with full consciousness of the superficiality and the play of appearances as a survival strategy. This attitude (of post-affirmative cinema) was doubly rooted in political realities and cultural traditions. “It is a kind of art for which what is important still matters” (DYER, 1990, p. 263). The new queer cinema that emerged in the 1990s somehow goes against these filmic experiences of the 1970s, criticizing political strategies/aesthetics of gay and lesbian affirmation cinema, proposing a more self-ironic approach, an aesthetics that celebrates the abject, gender trouble, uncertain sexualities (which cannot be framed as the gay/hetero/homo triangle) and the unassumed desires (even those that are wicked) of the queer subcultures (DYER, 1990, p. 279).

This text is not about the new queer cinema of the 1990s, but a reading of films from the 1960s and 1970s, highlighting a cinema that approached queer issues without naming them as such. It is a genealogy that is neither rational nor conventional. The films that will be analyzed have in common what I call the aesthetics of *twist or twist cinema*. The films chosen deal with the moral pillars of heteronormative and phallogocentric sexuality, the foundations that guide the family institution and the respective performance of gender in a way that threatens the stability of notions such as men as providers and women as responsible for the

⁵ In the movie *In Black and White*, sex scenes between two men in a bathroom are shown in what we later recognize as a security camera placed in a public bathroom. One of the debates that arise from the film is the issue of how the “impersonal” can be sensitive, how a sex scene can be eroticized without relying on metaphors or narratives, i.e., visually, sex is presented solely as sex, not as pornography, understood as a fetishization of the body or a transformation of sexual intercourse into mere merchandise.

⁶ The Local Government Act 1988 was an amendment to the Act of 1986. The amendment stated that the local authorities could not promote activities or publish any material with the intention of disseminating homosexuality. It was forbidden to teach that homosexuality was accepted as a form of constituting a family or affective relationship. The local councils were forbidden to give away educational material, flyers, books etc. Counseling and groups for LGBT students were closed in schools and universities. This amendment was definitively revoked in England only in 2003. <http://gbthistorymonth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/1384014531S28Background.pdf> The amendment cites the book by David Reels, *Milkman’s on His Way* (1982), as an example of books that promote homosexuality.

harmony and order of the family. These aesthetic twists are expressed in narratives that rub salt on the wounds of the social structures, especially social hierarchies and inequalities concerning race, class, gender, and in the case of gender hierarchies, the issues of age (with the overestimation of youth and beauty for women) and education (especially for men). The term twist is suitable because it implies something turning on its own axis, be it an object or, in this case, an entire imaginary.

In these last few years of studying Film Festivals and analyzing films in the field of feminist studies, I have attempted to address the materiality of filmic images from a transdisciplinary stance that understands the film as a cultural object. Films have a singular form of production that dialogues with several other languages (literature, painting, photography, media (newspaper, TV)), and have historical-spatial modes of consumption (commercial film projection rooms, film societies, video rentals, access via internet – or even cell phones nowadays). All this technical-artistic materiality turns movie making into a complex objectification of various and different practices.

Despite the important transformations that occurred throughout the 20th century, it is still important to stress what Walter Benjamin pointed out in the first half of the century: the need to think the experience of film/cinema as inserted simultaneously in the aesthetic and political dimensions. Rather than a mere industrial production of signs, the film is also a testimony/memory of a moment, of a lived experience. In this sense, it also allows questionings typical of Cultural History⁷ because it contains the traces of how some topics like love, sex, family, social life, rules, morality and religion become visible, referring to the fertile field of mentalities, fantasies, desires and visual references in displaying them.

The uniqueness of the analysis proposed here is that this view of cultural history needs to be combined with queer studies, which bring their own range of issues and ways of understanding cultural dynamics from the inflection of gender and sexuality. It is interesting to note that it is precisely in the historical period that I study (1970-2000) that the early researches on women and movies emerge. Along with Donna Polan, Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, to name three of the most renowned authors in the field, other feminist researchers, lesser-known to the Brazilian public, such as Molly Haskells (1987) and others, position themselves in opposition to the oppression and the ideology of film industry towards women. These authors voiced a radical critique both of the objectification of women subjected to an image of inferiority, frailty and ignorance (dumb and futile blonde), and of the worship of the feminine (women as mothers, mothers of the

⁷ Some authors are important to mark this territory, such as: Roger Chartier, Michel De Certeau, Peter Gay, Alain Corbain, Joan Scott, Stuart Hall and Warren Susman.

⁸ *Notes on Women's Cinema*, that included Johnston's essay resulted from the Edinburgh Film Festival's Women's Cinema Event, which she co-organized with Laura Mulvey and Lynda Myles.

earth, a symbol of peace, innocence, the idealization of the feminine). They criticized narratives in which women (co-stars in men's adventures) would fill their needs and desires, their *raison d'être*, in institutions such as marriage and motherhood. Haskells problematized the very feminist analytical logic of the time, questioning if films would be only a machine to produce stereotypes about women. The author studied films from the 1930s and 1940s and noticed in them a dominant theme for each cinematographic genre, concluding that *(female) sacrifice* is the most prominent theme. Haskells (1987) was one of the first to develop a more complex theoretical perspective to analyze the relationship between femininity, representation, and gender and film industry. In England, also in the 1970s, Claire Johnston (1973) edited the seminal book *Notes on Women's Cinema*⁸, and a few years later, another important book by American feminist Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film, both sides of the camera* (1983), would improve our knowledge on film and feminism. Johnston argues in her article, that important new tools within the domain of film theory were being developed – as analyses of film narrative strategies such as the role of editing, framing, script, and casting in the shaping of the production of meanings and allegories – that would aid feminists to move forward in their critical analyses of films. In other words, it is not enough to criticize the content of the film, it is also necessary to analyze its structure. That was how structuralism and semiotics, as well as psychoanalysis, started being part of the feminist criticism of films. B. Ruby Rich (1978) wrote an important article in 1978, *The Crisis of naming in Feminist Film Criticism*, in which she emphasized the importance of thinking about film as a form of language, alluding to the precarious ways feminists worked with film criticism and with their own practice as directors. According to the author, it was necessary to think about how films produce meanings, analyzing their structures, codes, subtexts and intertexts. Other authors, concerned with a queer perspective, such as J. Halberstam, Ellis Hanson, Richard Dyer and Judith Butler, urged the expansion of questioning, allowing for displacement of the woma(e)n axis towards the cultural constitution of male and female bodies as desired and/or object bodies, thus contrasting various types of femininity. More than the contents of these approaches, they inquired about the parody games, the mimetic practices and how this performatic play reveals the very dimension of gender as an act, action, performance in relation to established standards and norms.

With this plethora of feminist criticism in mind, I intend to make an immersion in three films, inserted in a particular temporality: the 1960s and 1970s. The three are part of the speculation about sexualities and transgressive desires, each

one in its own ways. The singularity of each film (yes, they were shot on film) allows us to infer, at the same time, aspects that are local and global. The goal is to analyze the tensions, twists and gender issues, as they historically became visible in the films of that time, and the representational debates that they were and still are responsible for (in film societies, in digital circuits), as testimonials/memory of a unique experience with images. My argument is that thematic, political and aesthetic boldness enabled them to forge, both in marginal cinema as in the more consolidated European cinema – however distinct from Hollywood practice –, a cinema of twists. In other words, there is a door that opens, in the sphere of the intervention of cultural objects, film in this case, in the large political debates that, although with a limited range, have a high transformative intensity.

The impact of a work should not be measured by the amount of people who have witnessed it, that is, the infamous box office success. That is why it is important to reiterate here the political importance of analyzing this production within the sphere of its subjective/social transformations and its power to create new worlds (in and out of the screen). I could have chosen films by Pasolini, by the irreverent and pioneering Fassbinder, could also talk about Kenneth Anger, Nagisa Oshima or Antônio Carlos Fontoura (*Rainha Diaba*), João Silvério Trevisan, Rita Moreira and so many others who, somehow, are considered *original, marginal, or daring* in the history of local and/or world cinema. However, I have chosen to dedicate this reflection not to directors, but to films (though the direction obviously matters) that, although having already been cited in studies on gay or feminist cinema, were not analyzed in their contributions to the consolidation of a *twist* cinema.

° Movie synopsis: Nina, born in Rio de Janeiro, arrives at the Menezes manor, in the countryside of the state of Minas Gerais, to marry Valdo, the youngest member of the family. Her beauty and personality charm the family. The manor has an oppressive feeling and Nina feels isolated and bored. Her brothers in law are puritan and frustrated. Instinctively, she gets closer to Timóteo, the homosexual brother, kept apart in his room. Nina feels attracted to the gardener Alberto and is accused of adultery by her brother in law Demétrio. The husband attempts suicide. Nina, pregnant, leaves. Seventeen years later, Nina comes back, sick, to meet her son, who was taken away from her by her sister in law Ana, when he was born (<http://filmow.com/a-casa-assassinada-t20974>).

The films, the countries, the struggles...

The Brazilian film, directed by Paulo Cesar Saraceni (1933-2012), *A Casa Assassinada* (1971)[°] came from a screenplay based on the book by Lúcio Cardoso (1912-1968) *Crônica de uma casa assassinada* (1959). Lúcio Cardoso was one of the first Brazilian writers to assume being gay. Although he died young, still in the 1960s, he made important contributions with scripts for cinema. One of them is the script of the film *Porto das Caixas* (1962), considered the first of the *new cinema*, also directed by Paulo Cesar Saraceni.

I must admit my reluctance to venture in the field of films classified under the umbrella of *new cinema*, especially to deal with *A Casa Assassinada*. However, I was convinced by the evidence that it deconstructs a common sense view of new cinema – as moralistic in terms of sexuality, like our left-

wing politics of the 1970s – and represents twist cinema well, in enhancing a different way of seeing and producing a narrative. *A Casa Assassinada* generates uneasiness and the deconstruction of meanings connected to right/wrong, good/evil, i.e., it displaces a particular type of sexist moralism and exposes secrets and intimacies of each of the characters that make up the axis of the plot. As a matter of fact, one of the key points of the film is the way it builds/develops the female characters in contrast to the male ones. The personal dramas, lived side by side with the social ones (family problems, collapse of the farm), are dense.

In the very first frames a big commotion announces itself: few words, intense stares, crying and a slap in the face show the existence of an erotic relationship between mother and son. The scenic strategies hint that they have engaged in sexual intercourse. As viewers, we still do not know anything about the lives of either mother or son, but the dying state of the mother and the mixed tone of remorse and affection wraps up this first shot, not disclosing whether the plot will be one of guilt or forgiveness. Moving back in time, the next scene is a still picture with a lot of information being distilled simultaneously. With mastery, the scene exposes the decay of the patriarchal family structure of the *casa grande*¹⁰, and presents, in detail, the deconstruction of a network of subjectivities based on the power of the father, of the eldest son and on the impotence of the youngest brother.

In collapsing, the ruins show traces of what had been and of what, in the conflict to come, explodes into view. The main critical readings of the film have privileged (in a very shallow manner, I would say) the fact that it brings female protagonists to the Brazilian cinema of the 1970s, in a perspective understood as feminist, based on two central characters: Nina (Norma Bengell) and Ana (Tete Medina). Nina perfigures the transgressor and Ana, the conniving, with a plot twist to somewhat mess up the roles of each character. The analyses emphasize the pursuit of autonomy, the conquest of freedom and the struggle between modernity and tradition, represented by these two female that are so different from one another.

It would be hard to disagree that Nina and Ana represent a prototype of the feminist transformations and demands of the 1970s, focusing on autonomy and pleasure in contrast with motherhood, seen as a form of repression and oppression. However, going further, in a queer analysis, it is necessary to open the channels of perception and see how gender relations – not just the construction of the feminine centered on women – are presented as “troubled” (Butler, 1990). Firstly, the film urges the viewer to separate the notion of

¹⁰ In the database of *Cinemateca Nacional*, the movie's logline is: “The ruin of a traditional family from the south of Minas Gerais reveals their hypocrisy with the arrival of a woman who confronts everyone to preserve her own dignity”.

femininity from female characters. This denaturalization does not occur in the same visual way as in queer movies of the 1990s; however, the deconstruction of gender as naturally predictable is clearly present.

Where and in whom can we find the constitutions/perceptions of the feminine and how do they emerge? Firstly, I would highlight the house, a representation of the feminine that contains all evils – a true Pandora's box. It was not a mere advertising strategy titling the movie *A casa assassinada*, since the house is a (female) living entity that provides the atmosphere of archetypal decadence and crumbling of the many structures supported by it (working relationships, family relationships, a true *casa grande* without a *senzala*). The house is the target of multiple ironies and attacks, since its presence is seen as status (by the Menezes), as suffocation (by Nina), as a private prison (by Timóteo), as beauty and pleasure (by the Gardener), as a den of sin (by the priest), as doom (by Ana).

Secondly, there is Nina (Norma Bengell), the pseudo-incestuous mother and adulterous wife, who came from Rio de Janeiro to the rural countryside of Minas Gerais, bringing with her the manners and oddities of urban life (theatres, music, cultural life) to a place where nature reigns (the garden - a place of dispute). Nina is expected, at the same time that she is feared. Rumors about her life soon spread around the house. Her liveliness contrasts with the dark atmosphere of the place. She sees the house with uneasiness and fear ("I'm carioca, everything here annoys me: the silence, the habits, the scenery ..."). Although her life is carefully controlled, and despite all the watchful eyes, Nina acts in a challenging, libertine manner, and cunningly satisfies her desires. Her character appears as the external action that triggers the internal conflict, to the point of shattering the historic and solid bonds of affection and respect among the Menezes brothers.

Another character that reveals herself throughout the film is Ana. She observes, interacts very little, is a voyeur - we follow her sneaky scopophilia from a privileged standpoint - exercises what Laura Mulvey (1973) describes in the pleasure of seeing and being seen and her narcissistic propensity. Ana is a divided character: on one hand she is someone who was raised in this decaying world, as a working part of it; on the other hand, she is maybe the one who most suffers the impact of the new world brought to the house by Nina. She envies, covets, disdains, reinvents, acts and takes the place of the other. She reveals herself, near the last scenes of the film, to be a deeply subversive person: in her desperate attempt to be like Nina, she also falls in love with the Gardener, gets pregnant, steals Nina's son (knowing it is hers, since Nina's son dies.) In the scene in which Nina and André (the

son) are seen together naked, she reproaches them and soon afterwards looks for André in order to have sex with him. She satisfies all her desires in the shadows, enjoying total immunity, since she is above suspicion. Of all the female characters, Ana is the one that appeals to me the most as an image of insubalternity. Her dissimulated way of being, in line with a certain trait of the culture of Minas Gerais (the “*come-quieto*”) is a measure of how much the new (Nina) seduces and disrupts her ideals of family, love, pleasure, sex, sensuality. In one scene, walking through the gardens of the house, with her back to the viewer, Ana thinks to herself about the internal conflict that she is going through and how confused she feels:

I followed her like a shadow, stalked her through the cracks, through the doors, always wondering what she was doing, what her thoughts were, an unhealthy curiosity would come to me to know what she was wearing, how she learned to discern and choose those things that attracted men so much, it was this curiosity that revealed to me the presence of the devil, which led me to this fire where today I burn.¹¹

¹¹ The scene takes place around minutes 32 and 37 of the movie.

A whole way of being a woman is put at stake in the confrontation between how she behaved and how she nullified herself in search of the performance of the ideal wife – hair held back, grey clothes and no cleavage, sparing in her words and in interventions with the family – and the sensual, erotic and decided lightness of Nina. Ana, apathetic and apparently desexualized in her initial performance, is converted into a sheer explosion of colors, verbs and “sinful” desires.

Bete, the maid, although a supporting character, is also a key element in the narrative structure. She is the one who welcomes the newcomer Nina. Her characterization is very close to Ana’s, except for the status and class differences between the two. Her clothes are dark and do not expose cleavage, her hair is always tied back and her gestures and speech are restrained and discreet. She works in the plot as a mediator between two worlds: Nina’s and that of the Menezes. In fact, between three worlds, since it is she who introduces us to the isolated room of the character Timóteo, the last character to express femininity in the plot. Timóteo invites Bete to go into his room, an opera is heard on the jukebox, and his first appearance in middle shot is haunting.

The actor Carlos Kroeber builds the character in a very mixed way. His hairy chest is exposed, framed by long pearl necklaces, with feminine and masculine icons floating together. On his fingers, beautiful rings, earrings in the ears, and a revealing low-necked golden dress cover his body. The haircut a la garçon, very short, the exposed chest hair and his voice

are some of the male bodily references. Timóteo does not make a point of having a female pseudonym; he does not control his voice to sound female. However, in describing himself, he first tells Bete that he was not the only one in the family with these (transgender) "tendencies". He describes a great aunt who would dress and ride horses as if she were a man, who was strong and brave, but was dominated and imprisoned by her family, almost like him in his own home. By owning the jewelry and the clothes of his dead mother, he embodies a threatening and destabilizing femininity. In front of the mirror, he is shown to the viewer (framed in mid-shot so as to give prominence to the feminized decor of his room) while narrating his own transformation. How did I come to be what I am now? he asks, implying that this is everyone's question, including the spectators'. In response, an assertive lesson: "What do they accuse me of? (...) After all, it does not matter whether we wear this or that. (...) Why follow the common laws if I am not common?". Bete listens intently, although she seems not to understand very well what this intimate confession really means. Timóteo insists, walks across the room, sits in a rocking chair and looks at the camera (as if he was looking at Bete) to say in a challenging and lamenting tone:

My clothes are an allegory, I want to show others the image of the courage I did not have and this is the only complete freedom we have, of being monsters to ourselves.

He continues in a monologue that lasts nearly ten minutes. He speaks of a truth, a truth that may be grotesque, but that one day will come out. It is a slow scene, with only a few shots, which focuses on the effort of the one who listens to him (who represents the "humble", those who can understand, although they may not know how yet) and of the audience, so that everybody can move closer to the image and to the self-narrative that the character builds for himself.

Throughout the film, Timóteo expresses himself with ease, although he spends his days isolated from interacting with the other two Menezes brothers. There is a mix between selfpity, due to the condition of marginality in which he lives his experience of cross-dressing and his desire to live as a woman, and reassurance, since he knows (or think he knows) how to deal with the hollow manly vanities of his two brothers. His plan for revenge against the Menezes gives his life a meaning. Timóteo sees in his revenge a form of freedom.

Although he is considered by most critics as a minor character in the consolidation of the plot, one needs to remember that the most relevant issue of the film is the oppression of womanhood and that he, Ana, Nina and Beth, as well as the house, constitute the different facets and

nuances through which a picture of feminine insurgency and revenge is being drawn in the foreshadowed tragedy of the film. Interested in how the critics of the time understood the character, I was surprised by the relative absence of a more elaborate analysis of Timóteo. The performances, both of Norma Bengell and of Carlos Kroeber, are widely praised; however, the transgender issues proposed are attenuated in the kind of descriptions like the one that appeared in *Folha de São Paulo*, in August 1972, “Carlos Kroeber is Timóteo, in a brilliant performance. The character acquires in the movie the dimension of a Felliniesque figure that lives off the praise of beauty”. No mention is made of his homoerotic sexual fantasies, much less of his ever present transgender characteristics. The emphasis is only on the hedonism of the character (surely a reference to his clinging to the jewels inherited from his mother). The fact that the film disrupts a conservative notion of femininity, tied to maternity, to docility (all the female characters are extremely clever and know how to get around in the small domestic universe that was designated to them) and to a contained eroticism, is completely ignored. The emphasis of the article is placed on the incredibly small number of people who attended the premiere of the film in São Paulo (7 people, including the journalist Orlando Fassoni, who signed the review).

As a representative of the new cinema, the film was featured in various film studies – including analyses of the passion trilogy, a name given to the adaptations made by Paulo César Saraceni throughout his career, of novels by Lúcio Cardoso.¹² However, it was Antonio Moreno (2002) who highlighted the character Timóteo in his analysis of homosexual representation in Brazilian cinema.¹⁵ His analysis, which is quite dated, considers the way the character is made to be cartoonish and stereotyped, and argues that only two factors did not make the character a laughing stock: 1) the lines, because they are dense and serious; 2) the performance of Carlos Kroeber. I think Moreno, in confusing sexuality and gender, missed the opportunity of seeing there a real deconstruction of the stereotypes and a tense complexification of the relationship between transgressing gender norms and, at the same time, living sexuality outside heteronormativity. Although the vocabulary of the 1960s/1970s and the vocabulary used by Moreno himself focus on the “homosexuality” of the character, the narrative itself goes far beyond in an attempt to characterize a kind of subjectivity still barely visible in cinema in general and, in particular, in Brazilian cinema, which is the blurring of gender borders, or transgendering.

The alliance between the intimist and, at the same time, acid writing in Lúcio Cardoso’s social critique (which, as

¹² The trilogy is composed of: *Porto das Caixas* (1964); *A Casa Assasinada* (1970); and *O Viajante* (1998), according to an interview Saraceni gave to José Geraldo Couto to *Folha de São Paulo*, 10/16/1998.

¹³ Dzi Croquettes are contemporary and also employ this camp aesthetics, aiming to confuse (more than simply crossing the line) the female and male genders. They usually impersonated Carmen Miranda in their shows. See: Fernando Balieiro, 2014.

¹⁴ Actor Carlos Kroeber won three awards for better actor in national Cinema Festivals.

¹⁵ I refer to the literary meaning given to it by Chico Buarque (1991): an individual who is *neither here, nor there*.

¹⁶ The Kafkian scene to which I refer is the one in which Gregor Samsa, after his transformation, leaving his seclusion in the bedroom to listen, in a corner of the living room, to his sister playing the violin. The audience is surprised by that monstrosity, without a name or a reference. The scene of Franz Kafka (2000), as the one by Saraceni, join the tragic, the grotesque and the cruel in human relations, from the most intimate ones (family relations) to the social.

¹⁷ There are two important texts to deepen this theme: the pioneer research by Mary Russo – *The female grotesque*, which analyzes the relation among risk, excess, and modernity; and the study by Jorge Leite Jr. *Das maravilhas e prodígios sexuais*, which develops an excellent history of the monster and of the category of monstrosity, and how it is appropriated in the aesthetics of bizarre pornography.

critics have already pointed out, went far beyond the regionalist literature of his time) and the boldness that was simple, straightforward, yet sensitive to the poetic gesture of the image and to the importance of the literary in the construction of the dialogues of the film, as conducted by Saraceni, made this film one of the most beautiful specimens of what I call twist cinema. I agree with Moreno in his analysis that there are excesses in the depiction of the character, especially in the clothing and in the gestures; however, instead of seeing this as a stereotype, I see it as a camp aesthetics,¹³ which was beginning to circulate in the *carioca* culture of the time, with its exaggeration of colors, of flowery prints, of the quantity of rings and bracelets, of the size of the earrings, in short, with the over exaggerated performance, an aesthetics that transforms Timóteo's performance not into an *allegory* (according to Moreno), but into a *re-creation* of a feminine/masculine subjectivity.

In this vast universe of femininities and their appropriations of the masculine (Nina, Ana and Timóteo retain and re-signify masculinity all the time), the final scene deserves a comment, since it literally pulls Timóteo out of his sheltered closet. Timóteo's transvestism¹⁴ operates to destabilize the binary division of gender in the plot as a whole. The character is perceived (by himself and by others) as a major nuisance.¹⁵ The scene that mostly enhances the strangeness caused by his image without referentiality is one of the last, when during Nina's funeral, Timóteo takes on the protagonism. His entry into the room where all (neighbors, relatives and the dreaded/loved Baron) are looking at Nina's dead body, is for me a real Kafkaesque tribute to the insensitivity of the "civilized" in relation to common humanity, close to a revolting/monstrous animalism¹⁶. The theatricality of the scene, the drama and the effusion of his "entry", with the camera passing through the crowd of men in suits and women bearing fake smiles, simulate the return of the repressed. In a scene in which death is at the center, It/Timóteo challenges and exposes the Eros which they both carry, a life drive that has transcended the audience, who see the scene in the dimension of the grotesque/baroque of Minas Gerais. We could relate the character of Timóteo to the aesthetics of the monster (Freak), when at the end of the 19th century this term acquires a sexual connotation, meaning a deformation (of the psyche, of bodily functions?) causing an anomaly¹⁷. Timóteo is the pinnacle of confusion, of displacement, of discord. His forbidden love (for the gardener Alberto), as well as Ana's and Nina's, leads him to death – as in the middle of the living room, he suffers a fatal heart attack. Ana seems to come out unharmed, but the bizarre way in which she holds and touches the Priest who listens to her confessions and the way

she lets her hair down for the first time in the whole film and dances when carrying Nina's dirty clothes suggest that she is completely out of control, that she has gone crazy.

And manhood, how is it treated? Erased, decadent, falling in ruins. The two brothers who see themselves as the men of the house, therefore the owners, are facing a critical economic situation, which makes them unstable. They are vulnerable, and one of the symptoms of this vulnerability is the – almost imaginary – presence of the young gardener, who looks after the superfluous, the beautiful, who offers violets and pleasure to the women of the house. The eldest brother, Demétrio, tries to be the pillars that support the ruins; the youngest, Valdo, transits between his desire for the unknown (his passion for Nina, a woman from Rio de Janeiro) and the family values of which he feels part. The jealousy that they (both brothers) feel towards Alberto, the Gardener, is also envy; his naive tenderness makes him desirable, an unmanned masculinity, erotically potentialized by his devotion to beauty. The very notion of masculinity and its relationship with activity/passivity seems to be in open transformation, for he who begets the child (André), who is considered the sole heir of the family, is not a descendant of the patriarch, but a *subaltern*. Such marginality does not find space to flourish in such a claustrophobic environment as the *casa grande* of the Menezes. After Nina's return to Rio de Janeiro, in an act of despair – after all, he was an intense character – Álvaro kills himself. The impotence of the Menezes is also revealed in the use and handling of firearms, a form of virility that fires back at them, because they cannot succeed even at a suicide attempt.

Part of modern masculinity, more sensitive and delicate, could be thought up from what Ana's son (who thinks his mother is Nina) represents in the plot. The erotic scenes between the (supposed) mother, Nina, and son, André, are stunning, and cause discomfort for their unconditional freedom and for the eroticism that they exude. Through lighting and art design (location), everything displays liberal bodies enjoying the touch, the senses. They both desire that pleasure which is imbued with the risk of being caught red-handed; after all, they mean to affront the father figure. This out-of-place eroticism is one of the many twists in the film. It might seem distasteful, as a representation of what happens when women assume leaderships, submitting the son to the commands and incestuous desires of his mother, in a pathological version of the triangular relationship among mother, father and son. However, this would be a psychologizing way of *seeing* the film, and there are other less pathological views. There is a political-cultural aspect that delimits this condition, without intending to explain it, which is Nina's disposition and the way she seduces André,

to affront that family with which both were involved. It could be read as an insurgency of values, in the form of acts considered repulsive. Luxury as subversion.

The implosion of the patriarchal family leaves no stone unturned and displaces at the same time gender and sexuality through characters that cause discomfort, dissatisfied as they are with the reality that surrounds them. Transgressions are painful but a "necessary evil". In other words, no one in the film celebrates a conquered, or to be conquered, identity. The plot does not organize itself around issues of identity. What the film shows is the pain of radically struggling against standards and the various explicit and implicit modes of punishment with which they are obliged to deal. The choice of a queer way of life is not something to celebrate; the struggle for pleasure, for autonomy, has a high cost, especially if we consider the historical moment of production and screening of the film, a time riddled with isolation, loneliness, moralism and political authoritarianism. *A Casa Assassinada* suggests, *avant la lettre*, a movement beyond simplistic dichotomies, as for example the false opposition between the gay struggle (serious) and the queer one (silly), or the fight of men (Menezes, the gardener, household servants) against women, gays and transgender. Every character is stricken by an overwhelming subjective loss of structure, by a discomfort with the seemingly solid places. Demétrio, the character who could be considered the closest to (patriarchal) truth and power, is affected by fury and pain when wildly kissing the red dress that belonged to Nina, who was already dead. His performance is a key to displaying the layers and to blurring the limits between normalcy and insanity. *A Casa Assassinada* is a (visual) simulation of the death of a whole set of values and cultural practices.

The second movie of this historical reflection on twist cinema is *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, directed by John Schlesinger, released in the same year of 1971. Schlesinger was already relatively known internationally, because his Oscar-winning *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) gave him great media visibility, money, and perhaps confidence to be more daring. In addition to publicly declaring his homosexuality, he decided to take advantage of the auspicious moment to screen his most autobiographical film. The film tells the story, apparently cliché, of a love triangle. The narrative gets bizarre when the one being disputed is not the woman but the young artist Bob Elkin (Murray Head). The critical target of this movie is not so much the family itself, not even love (in spite of the romantic feeling in the background) but heteronormativity.

The character Bob appears to be bisexual (and was thus considered in some reviews at the time), but his bisexuality

is not easily classifiable, as the film makes a point of not addressing his subjectivity very much. Even in reminiscences of the former lives of the characters, there is nothing in the visible field of the screen regarding his life, that is, the narrative avoids providing psychoanalyzing or categorizing elements. What we do know is that he is an artist, a sculptor, in tune with postmodern aesthetics and with a desire to see his life sensuously expanded in all directions. Bob passes through the lives of two other central characters in a way that is respectful, affectionate, noticeably without predilections and without a nostalgic posture when making the decision to move to another country and leave them. His posture was understood at the time as narcissistic and selfish, typical of the hedonistic heirs of the sexual revolution. The same could not be said of Alex and Daniel, who are emotionally in ruins, even if characterized by indignation, rather than defeat or pure resignation. What we realize is that the fact that they are going through a period of life of greater maturity, in spite of a desire to establish a lasting bond, is the reason why both seem to comply with the short but intense loving gesture that Bob has to offer them.

¹⁸ *Screen*, 05/22/1970. Archive of the British Film Institute (Reuben Library). Research conducted in July, 2014.

In an interview at the time the film was released, Schlesinger¹⁸ suggests that for him this was an important point, to talk of a kind of loving bond that does not offer warranties and safety, but that provides a kind of comfort that lies exactly in the intensity of the exchanges. Sharing Bob was a hard task, but both were doing it as part of the agreement, that is, a highly "civilized" and rational type of arrangement and administration of passions. This was seen by American critics as too "cold and calculating", that is, characteristic of *British cultural modernity*.

What is special about *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, besides the title's explicit reference to the political struggles of the 19th century, suggesting it deals with a social tragedy? The characters are white, visibly well educated: Alex (Glenda Jackson) has a good job, though she does not enjoy her administrative and bureaucratic functions, has a family of good standing in the British society of the time, is newly divorced and, although she helps her friend (sister?) to take care of three kids, plays no maternal role; Daniel Hirsh (Jon Finch) is a doctor, lives alone and his character is a stereotype of the homosexual in the closet, because in one of the few scenes in which he is with his Jewish family, at a party, it becomes clear that no one has the slightest idea that he is gay. The use of wide shots keeps a cool distance from scenic objects, avoiding intimate close-ups.

In the course of the narrative there is a brief episode of his former life, in which he paid young people to have sporadic sex. However, even when he is with Bob, his family has no idea

that they are in a romantic relationship. Because Bob is younger than his two lovers, part of Alex's and Daniel's fascination with him is not necessarily physical, but due to his liveliness, which brings color to the boring lives of both lovers. The movie oscillates between these three very different universes, elapsing in the relatively short time of two weekends. The climax is the farewell, which creates a struggle for the love/affective bonds to be consolidated. Although Alex and Daniel, each in his own way, try to seduce Bob into changing his mind, he insists on remaining free, with no institutionalized ties.

What could be queer in this film? It is not just the way it exposes the debate on sexual freedom, or the fact that there are relationships between same-sex partners (Daniel and Bob), or that Bob also maintains relations with a person of the opposite sex, i.e. not necessarily tying himself to a sexuality demarcated within the limits of binary boundaries. There is a whole shock aesthetics, of the "twist" or bending of the bourgeois values of British society, in the very bosom of this same social group, for the film is restricted to showing an internal conflict between generations within well established social groups. The generational difference becomes clear in scenes in which there are meetings between Alex and her parents, and Daniel and his Jewish parents, disclosing the emergence of new cultural practices and the blurring of a whole set of values relating to sexuality and the use of pleasure. However, the film does not engage in multicultural issues, already on the screen in the English urban society of the 1970s¹⁹. In the whole film there is no presence of immigrants, of the lower classes, of the media, of junkies or of counterculture. Maybe the aesthetic proposal of the film was exactly to run away from the clichés of counterculture, to project new values in the preserved universe of liberal society. Possibly, the problematization of sexual freedom and some other feminist issues was still very much restricted to an elite group.

In the more than seven reviews I was able to read in New York and London newspapers of the time, what most attracted critics (unanimous in saying that it was a great movie, a new triumph of the Oscar-winning director) was the fact that it treated with naturalness both the threesome relationship and the minimalist attitude of Alex and Daniel regarding Bob's bisexuality. However, some critics such as British writer Thomas Wiseman (1971) highlighted the fact that actor Peter Finch had acted, ten years before, as a homosexual in the film about Oscar Wilde, and that on the occasion, the debate on homosexuality and film was practically non-existent. In the 1970s, when playing the character of the doctor in love with the artist, the resourcefulness of the character was exactly in the silence regarding the relationship between two men (neither camp,

¹⁹ As it is possible to follow through the studies produced in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, at the Birmingham University, coordinated by Stuart Hall, 1968-1979.

²⁰ The other researched papers were: *Screen* (22/05/1970); *Observer* (04/07/1971); *Daily Express* (30/06/1971); *Times* (19/07/1971); *The Listener* (08/0/1971); *Daily Mirror* (07/07/1971); *Financial Times* (02/07/1971).

nor coy), but it was not a cynical kind of silence, there was simply no need to talk about homosexuality, only to live it.²⁰ ("What was previously unmentioned is now not considered worth mentioning")

Although a drama and not a comedy, the film contains several scenes about everyday activities that reveal an admirable sense of humor. Some marvels also take up space on Schlesinger's screen, such as the scene in which one of the boys puts a cigarette in his mouth. What is shocking is not the image of a child smoking, but the disregard of the mother for the act, that is, there was no gesture of censure (even minimal) regarding the implication of the son smoking. Although smoking in the 1970s was sometimes worshipped and naturalized in domestic and public environments, the scene was nevertheless a scandal, for it focused not on the child's curiosity, but on the mother's denial of her role in defining for her son what is right or wrong.

In this sense, boldness runs rampant in every scene, exploring the unusualness of the love triangle, in which all involved are aware of what is at stake and, although with some caution, attempt to live what is possible without demands that would undermine the relationship. In an analysis of homosexuality in the cinema and the possibility of a radical critique of the way gay men, lesbians and transgenders are represented, Richard Dyer (1978), a few years after the film's release, in 1978, comments on *Sunday Bloody Sunday* as an example of a film that did not propagate the stereotypical vision of the homosexual (doctor Daniel), or of Bob as bisexual. The major problem with the film would be the fact it uses a "rounded" aesthetics of characterization²¹, i.e. characters apparently complex and "perfect"²². About this, he argues that the female character Alex, as did (the disputed) Bob, as did doctor Daniel, performed in such a naturalized way what life would be like outside hegemonic conventions, that the movie emphasized only individual standards of breaking rules, as if it were the libertine act of a single person (in this case a trio), not belonging to the sphere of more collective cultural transformations.

Beyond the question of sexuality, the movie the deliberately confronts the centrality of motherhood, the quest for pleasure as something legitimate and socially sustainable, practiced by almost all the characters. Bob represents the new appeal – the modernity that his youth incorporates – and the break, with no fuss, of the codes that used to govern sexual/loving relationships, like fidelity (monogamy) and the very notion of commitment – what is it like to be lovingly involved with someone, what are the commitments that need to be made, how sexual freedom and freedom of movement relate to this possibility of sexual bonds with no contracts and no

²¹In literature there is the distinction between flat (simple) and rounded (complex) characters. Although rounded characters are much more interesting, sometimes literature explores this sinuosity by highlighting the individualism of centuries XIX and XX. Idiosyncrasies, instead of subversive collective subjectivities.

²²"Inscribed in the concept of the well-rounded character is the ideology of individualism, the belief that an individual is above all important in and for himself, rather than a belief in the importance of the individual for her or his class, community, or sisters and brothers. This cardinal precept of bourgeois ideology as against feudal or socialist ideology is built right into the notion of the 'rounded character,' who may well feel some pulls of allegiance to groups with whom she or he identifies, but who is ultimately seen as distinct and separate from the group, and in many cases, antagonistic to it" (DYER, R. 1978, p. 16).

prospect of longevity. Despite all these qualities, the havoc generated by the film was undoubtedly the famous kiss between Daniel and Bob. This is considered the first loving gay kiss of British cinema screened in the mainstream venue and regarded as a big event due to the natural way it was filmed. In the scene, Bob arrives at David's house, they hug, talk a little and Bob gives him a kiss that is tender and sweet, but at the same time highly erotic. As the kiss is something totally integrated into the plot and is filmed with some distance from the camera, it loses the sensationalist effect and gains an aesthetic tone that earned much applause and many comments, especially in the USA, where the film was very well received, mainly by the print media²³.

²³ The *New York Times* described the characters of the film as follows: "It's a movie of unusual tensions and reserves, qualities reflected in the performances of both Finch, whose homosexual doctor has, at least, the stability of his large Jewish family, and Miss Jackson, who has come to be the movies' foremost actress of on-edge roles. As the bisexual boy, who is a sort of embodiment of the so-called new morality, which, in this case, amounts to enlightened selfishness, Murray Head is remarkably appealing, largely, I suspect, because the screenplay accepts him without tears or analysis". (N.Y.T. 09/22/1972 – online archive of N.Y.T.)

Another important detail is the protagonism of the feminine, due both to the director's perspective (with a strong interaction with and sympathy for a thorough reformulation of masculinity/femininity), and to Penelope Gilliatt's script, which allowed for the characterization of Alex, including sex scenes between her and Bob, too erotic for the mainstream cinema of the time. In short, the movie is not about heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals, but about people in love, willing to fight for their "objects of pleasure/affection", so that there is some familiarity in this search (an entire history of cinema inserted in the context of heterosexual relations), that is, the extraordinary (relations between people of the same sex) is displayed in a very ordinary manner. The film would never fit in affirmation aesthetics, since it does not present optimal ways of how to be a happy homosexual. Instead of encouraging the search for identity categories, the film avoids simplistic classifications.

²⁴ "Les Amitiés particulières est très marqué 'qualité française' en plein essor de la Nouvelle Vague". La Critique TV de *Telesrama* DU 02/17/2007 – Bernard Génin – According to the French cinema archive, the film received, in France alone, over 26 reviews, including an analysis by Jean-Louis Comolli in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (n. 159/Octobre/1964).

The third and final film of this brief historical analysis is *Les Amitiés Particulières* (This Special Friendship), directed by Jean Delannoy²⁴ in 1964. Jean Delannoy was a filmmaker already known in France, with several films, including some considered by the critics of the French Nouvelle Vague as traditional cinema, that is, fitting within a classic aesthetics, focused on the *mise-en-scène* of studio films, with large budgets, large production teams, in short, movies that carry the label of "the best of French cinema". In other words, Jean Delannoy must have surprised in bringing such a sensitive topic to the screens, though he did so within an aesthetics considered outdated and conservative.

As for the film itself, I would highlight the deliberately bold way, although timid in the eyes of today's viewers, in which it framed the moments of closeness, flirtation, intimacy and sensuality between a teenager (15 years old) and a child (12 years old), without turning to voyeurism or to the spectacularization (exploration) of juvenile eroticism. The film narrates a tragedy based on a theme as sensitive for the time

as it is for the present day: a friendship fated to an unhappy ending, with a melancholic scenario and poignant plot that puts love and homoerotic friendship in a threshold beyond the reinforcement or not of this practice as identity.

The film, considered “uncomfortable and embarrassing”, triggered many moralist weapons, since it uses melodrama to express a major complaint about the arbitrariness of Catholic boarding schools in which young people were confined for a whole school term, isolated from family affections and from the contact with the opposite sex, becoming the target of erotic assaults by teachers and members of higher echelons of the clergy. The film plays with the contrast between the purity of an erotic friendship between two people of the same sex at the height of their sexual awakening and the hypocrisy and erotic aggressiveness of adults confined within their religious doctrines. Religion and homosexuality form the axis of the film, but the protagonism of the two boys brings to light loyalty pacts, the establishment of lasting bonds, elements that go much beyond the purely erotic or sexual universe of relationships between persons of the same sex.

The film problematizes the role of the friendship between the boys and between adults and young people regarding the way they make use of reciprocal pleasures, distinguishing between legitimate encounters and the practice of (coercively) molesting and abusing between persons of the same sex. It challenges the gaze to perceive delight, an action that is mutual and not based on power, and ends with the prevalence of the institutions and their power of coercion, though delegitimized by the premature action of putting an end to one’s own life. Suicide, subject of one of the first gay-themed films (*Different from the others*, 1919) is disconcerting because it is precisely a demonstration of extreme freedom, of an acute ripening before the challenges of life and, in the film, committed by the 12-year-old boy, Lucien Rouvière (François Leccia), supposedly the youngest and most immature of the relationship. The 15-year-old boy George de Sarre (Francis Lacombrade), supposedly “doing what is right” to protect his friend, after being blackmailed by the school’s Cardinal, writes a letter severing the relationship between them, which is seen by the young child as a terminal gesture, an end to life, to existence itself.

Les Amitiés Particulières addresses the disciplining and controlling of bodies, the dissection of the environment in details, ages, actions, that is, the establishment of a constant surveillance. It visually exposes the strictness of schedules, of routes, of hierarchy in the relations between teachers, staff and students, as well as the architecture, the entire structure of containment of desires built to safeguard

the principles of morality, the taming of excesses. It also displays confession as an exercise of self-restraint and self-knowledge, the attempt to atone for sins. The refined treatment of the relationship between two young people makes the boldness of the innocent images a reason to think about the intensity and multiple dynamics of desire. The film makes explicit its moral appeal against the connivance of the Catholic Church with the oppression and sexual abuse between the clergy and young Catholics.

Although considered to employ a more conservative cinematography, from the point of view of the debates about the twisting of representation practices and of ways of displaying certain objects, plots and characters, the film deserves a second chance at analysis. Despite maintaining intact certain scenic conventions and the narrative structure itself, it helps dislocate an expectation in relation to sexuality in adolescence, addressing its awakening and the consciousness of it being a legitimate and genuine desire/affection in its intentions and conditions of existence. The theme of homosexuality in adolescence will come back in such less moralistic approach, off the axis of perversion, in the film festivals of sexual diversity in the 1990s. In this sense, it is important to highlight the place this film occupies in the history of cinema and in the constitution of a visual sensitivity in film producers and viewers²⁵.

²⁵ After over a decade, another film on the passion of two boys stands out: the Danish *Du er ikk ene alene* (1978), directed by Ernst Johansen and Lasse Nielsen. Due to the length limitations, I could not include it in this article.

Brief Conclusions

My argument in this reflection on gender, queer criticism and cinema as political media and art is that the boldness and what I call twist cinema do not follow the same aesthetics, nor do they constitute a single political position. The three films, of different geographical origins and with distinct aesthetic affiliations, were chosen because they have been underestimated in terms of their potential for displacing and subverting the conventions of visual culture, as they screen plots and characters with sexualities and gender performances outside hegemonic norms. Also, they all appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, a historical moment of proliferation of youth movements and debates on sexuality and on the limits and potentialities of cinematic language, and the industry itself, as a means of cultural intervention. In other words, I purposely avoided categorizing the movies so as to explore other forms of analysis, since I believe that often the aesthetic standardization in filmic analyses undermines other dramatic and scenic potentialities, especially in what concerns the sexual politics of the various cinematic styles and aesthetics. For me, the formal and visual treatment of twist configures a singular aesthetics, a twist cinema.

²⁶ Full divorce means that neither partner needs proof of grievance, such as, violence, alcoholism, cruelty, incest etc.

Sunday Bloody Sunday, by Schlesinger, and *A casa Assassinada*, by Saraceni, are tangent to the basic agenda of 1970s feminism, which includes the issues of sexual freedom, legalization of abortion (or reproduction as an unavoidable fate), double working days (full insertion in the labor market), new love/sexual arrangements made possible by the contraceptive pill and the full possibility of divorce²⁶, a law which was adopted in England in 1969. They expose, using different cinematic strategies, the confrontation between the institutional structures of the bourgeois society of their time, with their family and sexual transgressions (incest, pedophilia, and infidelity), and the demands of a sexual and feminist revolution.

Feminism, in questioning the patriarchal context of the production of knowledge and the little access of women to culture (a female perspective, independently of being expressed by women), invaded cultural studies and art criticism, demanding the deconstruction of hegemonic gender relations (and, in some cases, the deconstruction of gender itself). In 1997, Maggie Humm (1997) drew attention to the fact that early cultural-studies feminists, in their filmic analysis, had full awareness of the influence of images in contemporary culture. Surely their aggressive criticism contributed to an understanding of how gender deeply molds cinema and how a feminist perspective has helped change certain paradigms of gender in a cinematographic production that intended to be revolutionary, contrary to the Hollywood film industry.

The fact that Jean Dellanoy's film chronologically precedes the first two may be the reason why it is less pointed in its deconstruction of sexuality and gender in the hetero/homo or man/woman dichotomies. However, what could be a moralistic reading of homosexuality, represented as a perversion developed in claustrophobic and repressive environments (as the way it is exposed in the relations between the adult priests and the youngsters), the narrative, especially the direction of scenes of games and jokes among teenagers and the intensity of the bond between them, points to an experience of (homo)sexuality and (homo)affection outside of the perversion axis and its criticism, as being an effect of the repressive sexual policies and practices. Rather than repression or perversion, the film suggests – despite the limits of the cultural film review repertoire of the time and of the narrative style chosen – a deconstruction of the hegemonic homosexual imagery of the time: monstrosity, sin, disease²⁷ or immorality.

²⁷ It is worth remembering that homosexuality ceased to be considered a mental disease by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association in 1973.

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