ALL FEELINGS ARE QUEER FEELINGS: QUEER WORLDING THROUGH AFFECT IN THE FILMS OF XAVIER DOLAN

by

George Evander Cunningham

A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington
in fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Master of Arts
to the Film Studies Programme

Victoria University of Wellington – Te Herenga Waka

October 2020

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Missy Molloy and Miriam Ross. When I was interested in starting a MA but had little idea of what to research, Missy came through and helped develop my passion for queer cinema into a precise and interesting topic. Thank you for the guidance and clarity, and the numerous grammar lessons. Thanks to Miriam for always keeping me on track and supporting this project with humour and nuance. You both pushed me until I had no give left, and for that, I will always be grateful.

To my partner, Chris, thank you for loving and supporting me through this long year. Without you I wouldn't have the confidence to get these ideas onto paper. Your queerness will always be an inspiration to me. I love you.

To Evie, thank you for being there to talk to and watch telly with. You have always inspired my rejection of straight time. Without you I fear I would never have found myself.

To Mum and Dad, thank you for never questioning my desire to study film and for always supporting me through my academic career. Your constant love and patience have got me to where I am today.

Abstract

The highly stylised melodramas of Québécois filmmaker Xavier Dolan use particular affects to represent queerness and express how normative social conventions impact queer lives. This thesis analyses the functions of shame in *I Killed My Mother* (2009), rage in *Laurence Anyways* (2012), disgust in *Tom at the Farm* (2013), and nostalgia in *Mommy* (2014) to convey conflicts between queerness and heteronormativity. Formal analysis of Dolan's films is paired with queer and affect theories to clarify his queer worlding - in other words, the objects and symbols that construct Dolan's queer cartography. Informed by Jack Halberstam's theory of queer temporality, this thesis investigates Dolan's portrait of heterosexual norms' influence on the affective worlding of queer lives. While the focus is on queer temporalities, scholarship on queer childhood, rurality, and utopia also illuminate Dolan's singular style. Kathryn Bond Stockton's work on queer childhood sheds light on the cyclical nature of shame depicted in *I Killed My Mother*, while Susan Stryker's account of trans rage demonstrates the function of colour in *Laurence Anyways.* Furthermore, queer theories of disgust inform *Tom at the Farm*'s subversion of the rural gay cowboy trope. Finally, concepts of nostalgia validate the sonic doubling of music in *Mommy* to promote queer utopian values. Ultimately, this analysis of affect, form, and style highlights how Dolan's cinema spotlights the transformative power of negative affects to displace heteronormativity with queer worldviews.

Table of Contents

Introduction

At the age of 20, Québécois filmmaker Xavier Dolan premiered his first feature, *I Killed My Mother,* at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival. The film was widely praised, particularly in the context of Francophone and queer cinemas, and in light of cinematic art produced, written, and directed by someone so young. Dolan's first film demonstrates extensive queer film knowledge with distinctive texture and depth that engages with queer lives and worldviews. From his debut, Dolan's reputation has grown in art and mainstream cinematic contexts, especially as his films have directly addressed queerness, belonging, and family. Furthermore, his work stands out for its youthfulness, queerness, and formal play with the medium. Drawing on cinematic techniques associated with art cinema, Dolan intentionally queers them, using affective techniques, queer iconography, and formal ingenuity to animate queer worlds as a way of actualising experiences of queerness.

Dolan holds a unique position within contemporary queer cinema, at once revered for his passion, youthfulness, and singular cinematic vision, and vilified for his "style over substance" filmmaking. Yet Dolan's films showcase arresting narratives with a distinctive style that engages with contemporary queer issues and experiences. *Laurence Anyways* explores transgender identities in the late 20th century, while *Tom at the Farm* places queer characters in hyper-masculine environments in rural Canada. Dolan's films position his characters within unorthodox queer narratives, focusing on the relationships between people and queer trauma. His films often photograph actors in close-up in intimate settings to explore the relationship between queer people and normative expectations. Just as much as Dolan's films are about his character's lived experience, they are about *how* they experience, placing focus on the affective qualities of queer life. Dolan's style appropriately reflects his queerness by using accentuated colour, costume, mise-en-scène, and music to convey the pop-culture infused worldviews of millennial queers.

Dolan's filmography extensively explores the queer struggle against heteronormative temporalities, with his characters often fighting against heteronormative desires, unable to positively adapt to traditional expectations. In analysing the effects of heteronormativity, this thesis investigates the affective modes in Dolan's films, identifying how affects express queer desires and worldviews outside of heteronormative ideologies. Broadly, affects define emotions, feelings, or moods altered through outside stimuli (Brennan 5). Affect theory addresses emotional experience as embodied. This thesis identifies four affects integral to

queer worlding and closely reads each in a specific Dolan film. *I Killed My Mother* (2009) illuminates shame, *Laurence Anyways* (2010) rage, *Tom at the Farm* (2013) disgust, and *Mommy* (2014) nostalgia. Each of these affects highlight a particular experience within queer worlding, ranging from childhood and maternity to rurality and masculinity. This thesis demonstrates how heteronormative temporal modes affect queer people's relationships to time. Dolan's expressive cinematic style uses cinematography, mise-en-scène, montage, dialogue, and characterisation to animate the function of affects onscreen. By analysing affect within Dolan's cinema, this thesis will show how queer existence challenges heteronormative expectations while displacing queer people from normative temporalities.

Literature Review

In recent years several notable publications have given Dolan's work the scholarly attention that it deserves. Most notable is the anthology *ReFocus: The Films of Xavier Dolan* edited by Andree Lafontaine. This collection takes a variety of different approaches to Dolan's films, examining them using national, international, and generational lenses. The essays in this book encompass Dolan's entire filmography up until the book's publication (2019) and place his films in conversation with queerness and masculinity through analysis of form and style. Florian Grandena and Pascal Gagné's essay "Xavier Dolan's Backward Cinema" as well as Mercédés Baillargeon's essay "Joy, Melancholy, and the Promise of Happiness in Xavier Dolan's *Mommy*" touch on similar theoretical themes as this thesis, highlighting affect, temporality, and queerness. "Xavier Dolan's Backward Cinema" incorporates Heather Love's theories of "feeling backwards" with readings of *Tom at the Farm* and *It's Only the End of the World* to discuss gay male representation within Dolan's films. Whereas Ballargeon's essay places *Mommy* in a melancholic context to explore queer neoliberal subjectivities within Dolan's film.

Although *ReFocus: The Films of Xavier Dolan* encompasses a wide range of theoretical topics, it is not the only body of work that examines Dolan's cinema. There have been multiple journal articles that approach Dolan from a variety of different angles, some of which this thesis incorporates. Jason D'Aoust's "The Queer Voices of Xavier Dolan's *Mommy*" articulates Chapter Four's reading of nostalgia through music, whereas Sultz's "The Sensation of the Look: The Gazes in *Laurence Anyways"* touches on the affects of cinematography discussed in Chapter Two. While these essays echo ideas within this thesis, an overarching analysis of Dolan's films using queer and affect theory has not yet been done.

This thesis' affective and phenomenological readings of Dolan's work will illuminate the specificity of his cinematic approach to queerness, which I interpret as worldly and attuned to the rich history of queer culture.

Queerness is the most important theoretical framework of this thesis. "Queer" is a complex term with many different meanings and contexts. Broadly, queer is an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ communities. Here, queer refers to non-normative gender and sexual identities including, but not limited to, gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexuality, and gender non-binary identities. This definition is relatively contemporary, however, as the roots of the term queer come from its definition as "strange, odd, peculiar" (Whittington 157). The use of queer within academic discourse is a combination of these two definitions, referring to queer as an identity marker as well as a framework for alternative cultural understandings. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her book *Tendencies,* offers the most commonly referenced definition of the term, defining queer as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonance, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (8). While Sedgwick's definition furthers the complexities of queerness, she works within a scholarly context to redefine how heteronormativity interprets cultural texts. This thesis unifies these definitions to incorporate Dolan's queer (gay) identity with his multifaceted cinema to achieve a nuanced queer analysis of his films.

Queer theories pertaining to specific elements of queer thought, in tandem with temporality inform each chapter. Jack Halberstam's theories on "queer time" from *In a Queer Time and Place,* reveal how spatial and temporal expectations affect queer lives. In this, he defines "queer time" as "those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (6), illustrating the effects of time on queer experiences. This definition reflects a queer relationship with futurity by placing queer lives in conversation with normative ideals of family, reproduction, and wealth. In tandem with "queer time," is Kathryn Bond Stockton's theories on queer childhood, contributing ideas of "sideways growth" and "straight death" to illuminate queer youths' relationships to normative temporalities. Whereas José Muñoz demonstrates queer utopian theories, which criticises homonormative cultures to find the queer possibilities within utopian futures. All these works approach queerness from a gender and sexuality vantage point yet articulate the nuances within queer studies through their association with modes of temporality.

Just as ‘queer’ refers to everything and nothing, ‘affect’, as an academic term, has many contested and contradicting definitions. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth outline a working definition of affect within their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*. In their introduction, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” affect “can be understood […] as a gradient of bodily capacity – supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations – that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounters but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to comportments of matter of virtually any and every sort” (2). This definition reveals affects potential to act upon material and non-material bodies, yet it fails to clearly articulate what affects are. Affects are problematic in their vagueness as different disciplines utilise various definitions to accurately articulate their field. This thesis appropriates affects within their emotive descriptors combined with Gregg and Seigworth’s indiscriminate definition. Theories on specific affects will help to demonstrate how affects work within a queer context. To achieve this, this thesis will draw on Margaret Morrison and Sedgwick’s theories on shame to further my reading of queer childhood. Susan Stryker’s trans theories illuminate rage in tandem with Hil Malatino’s political readings of trans rage, while disgust is taken from Aurel Kolnai’s theories of aversion with Carl Plantinga and Julian Hanich’s cinematic workings of disgust. Finally, nostalgia is informed by Jill Bradbury’s temporally focused affects, and Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley’s evaluation of nostalgia within modernity. These readings of emotional affects pull together numerous understandings on the function of affects within embodied experiences, yet together they inform how affects operate within queer contexts.

Crucial to this analysis of Dolan’s films is Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt’s theory of “queer worlding.” In *Queer Cinema in the World* they suggest that “thinking queerness together with cinema […] has a potential to reconfigure dominant modes of worlding […] a process that is active, incomplete, and contestatory and that does not propose a settled cartography” (5). In this quote they demonstrate the multiplicity of queerness onscreen while demonstrating that a queer analysis of cinema has the potential to rework heteronormative frameworks. Regarding cinema, “worlding” evokes “new worlds, offering alternatives to embedded capitalist, national, hetero- and homonormative maps” (5), working in tandem with Sedgwick’s definition of queerness to build alternative interpretations of cultural texts. More broadly Kathleen Stewart suggests “worlding” as “a sharply impassive attunement […] an assemblage of elements […] that has qualities, sensory aesthetics and

lines of force" (Stewart 2013: 119). Placing this theory in conversation with Dolan's films means looking formally at the way cinema constructs queerness as a lived experience while engaging with alternative understandings of normative "cartograph[ies]."

Methodology

While this thesis takes a theoretical approach to analysing affect within Dolan's cinema, textual analysis will be the main methodological mode which illuminates theory through his films. Textual analysis will be heavily informed by the theory incorporated in each chapter, pairing specific affect and queer theories with film texts to elaborate on how Dolan's cinema presents queer worlding. Dolan's films affect a balance between realism and expressionism, combining moments of realistic family drama with expressionistic non-diegetic cinematography to elicit queer expression through style and form. Throughout his career, Dolan has taken on writing, directing, designing, editing, and acting in his films. Because of his multi-layered involvement within production, textual analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the meaning behind many techniques utilised within his films. This means that reading into Dolan's mise-en-scène, dialogue, narrative form, music, and cinematography will complicate these film's relationship to queer and affective themes, advancing how queerness functions through affect. Using theoretically informed textual analysis, this thesis will unpack how Dolan's cinematic style illuminates queer experiences through affect, in an attempt at understanding the dissociative impact of normative temporalities on queer lives.

Queer theory (Halberstam, Butler), affect theory (Stewart, Sedgwick), queer phenomenology (Ahmed), and queer cinema studies (Schoonover, Galt) are fundamental to my analysis, supported by close formal analysis of Dolan's films. Affect theories of cinema and the concept of "queer worlding" highlight cinema's capacity to evoke worlds of feeling through innovative textual play. Formal analysis of Dolan's work will reveal how Dolan's cinematography, costume, narratives, and mise-en-scène work together to characterise queerness.

Case Studies

This thesis draws on a wide variety of queer, trans, affect, and temporal theories in addition to Dolan's films to establish a queer framework for close textual analysis. Structurally, each of the four chapters pairs one of Dolan's films with related queer and affect theories. While each chapter uniquely interprets Dolan's cinema, they collectively highlight

how Dolan subverts common conceptions of affect by applying them to the nuances of queer lives. All four chapters foreground normative temporalities to explore the films' queer perspectives on time as well as the formal strategies they employ to subvert heterosexual norms.

Chapter One analyses Dolan's first film, *I Killed My Mother* (2009), to examine queer children's familial, or more specifically maternal, relationships and how heterosexual desires produce affects of shame. *I Killed My Mother* is Dolan's semi-autobiographical account of the fractured relationship between queer teenager, Hubert, and his antagonistic but ultimately loving mother, Chantale. Conflict arises when Hubert is outed to his mother, who didn't know of Hubert's queerness. The tension between Hubert's queer desires and Chantale's heterosexual orientation generates shame as a cyclical affect. Kathryn Bond Stockton's theories of queer childhood, specifically of the "ghostly gay child" and "growing sideways," clarifies the film's take on queer shame. Both theories position the queer child as a figure out of time, displaced from normative temporalities because of coming-out's inherent displacement of identity. To Stockton, queer children are birthed backwards, with "coming out" killing the straight child that proceeds the queer (7). *I Killed My Mother* highlights the death of the straight child through Hubert and Chantale, as Chantale must come to terms with that death, while Hubert must learn to "grow sideways" according to queer temporalities.

Chapter Two situates affects of rage as critical to trans experience in *Laurence Anyways*, Dolan's third feature (after 2010's *Heartbeats*). The film deals with the effects of gender transition on a heterosexual relationship by examining how queerness transforms desire. Laurence and Fred are in a happy relationship when Laurence comes out as trans, forcing the couple's relationship into queer temporalities. This chapter draws heavily on Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix," a performative essay in which Stryker parallels her trans worldview with Shelley's *Frankenstein*; by doing so, she interrogates the medicalised paradigms of trans bodies and highlights the monstification of trans people. Trans subversion of the gender binary produces affects of rage. Theories on trans rage, alongside theories on melodrama, reveal *Laurence Anyways*' narrative and stylistic form, which allows Dolan's expressive style to precisely articulate Laurence's transgender struggle.

Chapter Three continues the queer reading of affect in Dolan's cinema targeting disgust in *Tom at the Farm*. Unlike shame or rage, disgust is an entirely physical affect,

theorised as a survival instinct to provide distance between our bodies and objects that may harm. The film is a rural thriller, a departure from Dolan's usual family/relationship drama, that uses the fear of rural homophobia to aesthetically portray disgust. The protagonist of *Tom at the Farm* is Tom who, after the death of his partner Guillaume, goes to rural Québec to attend his funeral. Here he meets Francis and Agathe (Guillaume's brother and mother) and gets trapped in a violent relationship with the mysterious pair. This chapter uses Julian Hanich's 'poetics of cinematic disgust' to unpack how Dolan affects disgust through his style, closely reading several key scenes to highlight how repulsive affects articulate the fear and dread of rural queer life. The social functions of disgust impact this analysis of physical disgust, which highlights the metaphorical link between physical and socio-moral disgust. Dolan subverts the common narrative of the closeted gay cowboy familiar from films such as *Brokeback Mountain* and *God's Own Country*, which portray closeted rural characters as violent and hyper-masculine. I argue that Dolan uses disgust to subvert this narrative trope by representing a violent gay relationship as disgusting rather than romantic and highlighting the inherent homophobia of narratives that represent the closeted queer as self-hating and violent.

Finally, Chapter Four analyses the function of nostalgia in *Mommy*'s sound design. *Mommy* returns to the family melodrama, exploring themes of queer family-making, disability, and grief. The film is about Steve and Die, mother and son, who must learn how to live with each other after Steve gets expelled from a reform school. While narratively *Mommy* is set within a speculative future, aesthetically Dolan uses nostalgic objects in the costume, soundtrack, and mise-en-scène to associate the film with an undetermined past. The contradictions between the film's past-focused production design and future-oriented setting inspire a reading of nostalgia within a utopian framework. Nostalgia orients us towards the past but within the present, bringing historicised objects into conversation with contemporary perceptions. *Mommy* uses music, specifically pop music from the late 1990s/early 2000s, to highlight the potential in a nostalgic queer utopia. Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* aids this chapter's close analysis of music in the film, which produces nostalgia to show that feelings from the past incorporated in the present can expose potential queer futures.

The affect focus of this thesis reveals the temporal relationship between queerness and heteronormativity within Dolan's films, which, in turn, contributes to existing scholarship on Dolan's cinema via the application of a purely queer framework. The goal in demonstrating the relevance of specific affects to individual films is, first, to show that each case study conveys something unique about how temporality shapes and forms queer existence, and

second, to highlight that Dolan's work is exceptionally affective, especially in regards to queer worlding practises. Thus, scholars interested in the formal, stylistic, and affective aspects of Dolan's cinema might use this thesis to further analyse how cinematic form activates affect to represent queer experience.

Chapter One

Forgive me Mother for I'm a Fag: The shamed child in *I Killed My Mother*

Xavier Dolan made an impact in 2009 with his first feature *I Killed My Mother* (*J'ai tué ma mère*). The provocative Freudian violence evoked by the title, the overt queerness of Dolan's cinematic voice, and the emotional nuance of a film created by a person so young drew audiences to his work. *I Killed My Mother* won several awards at Cannes and many others on the festival and award circuits, including the 2010 César award for Best Foreign Film. The film established Dolan as a talent to watch with critics praising his emotional nuance, characters, and expressionistic filmmaking (Saltz; Yue; Brunette). Dolan was 17 at the time of writing *I Killed My Mother*, 19 while directing, and 20 when the film premiered, facts that many reviewers cited to both critique and celebrate the film and its precocious director. This chapter will consider how Dolan represents queer youth through his style and form by examining the familial relationships and negative affects that accompany such a formative age.

Specifically, *I Killed My Mother*'s evocation of queer coming-of-age, gay shame, and confession demonstrates shame's function within queer worldviews, namely through the way parental relationships affect queer children. *I Killed My Mother* evokes phenomenological representations of queerness through Dolan's expressive use of style and narrative by examining what it means to come of age as a young queer and the function of shame within queer bodies. *I Killed My Mother* illuminates theories on queer childhood from Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* that frame experiences of queer coming-of-age as 'growing sideways'. By engaging with Stockton's concepts of the queer child, queer theories on shame, and close textual analysis of *I Killed My Mother*, this chapter argues that the parental expectations of sexual and normative temporalities generate shame through their queer children, in turn representing the proto-affectivity of shame via Dolan's cinematic form and style.

*I Killed My Mother'*s narrative establishes an antagonistic dynamic between mother and son to show the impact of maternal queer shame. The film centres on the relationship between single mother Chantale (Anne Dorval) and her abrasive gay son Hubert (played by Dolan). The plot is sparse but effective in its representation of soured maternal love. Viewers follow Chantale and Hubert through their day-to-day lives with an emphasis on their defamatory conflict, illustrated by their many verbal and physical fights. However, Dolan

presents their conflict through a critical lens, highlighting the faults in both main characters. Chantale is a tacky unstylish person, whose stubbornness and knack for forgetting things put her at odds with her angsty son. Chantale raised Hubert by herself, his father having left after declaring that having a child was not "for him." As a result of this abandonment, Hubert is volatile (a characteristic of many young gay protagonists in Dolan's cinema), self-assured, and highly independent. Chantale and Hubert are two strong personalities sharing the same house, learning how, or if, they can love each other. Because of the contested relations, Chantale and Hubert struggle to understand each other, making Hubert's outing as queer a shameful experience for both mother and son. Dolan has stated that the film is semi-autobiographical, adapted from his "autobiographical novel, *Le Matricide"* which drew on many details from his adolescence (Lafontaine 7). For instance, because of Hubert's volatile behaviour, Chantale and Hubert's father send him to a boarding school, an event borrowed from Dolan's biography. By drawing on autobiographical and experiential formal techniques, Dolan is accurately able to communicate how it feels to grow-up queer, portraying shame as an inherent quality of queer coming of age.

What differs *I Killed My Mother* from other queer coming-of-age stories is the repositioning of the crucial "coming out." Most narratives about queer youth centre around the moment of coming out, the evolution of the queer child from "straight" to queer. Yet, *I Killed My Mother* begins with Hubert already understanding his queer identity which forces the film to focus the necessary "coming out" onto its non-queer characters. Chantale is the character that must work at understanding queer identity, rather than Hubert, because of her lack of understanding towards her son. While "coming out" suggests personal choice and control, 'outing' removes such a choice by placing control outside of the queer. Within the film, Hubert has been dating a man, Antoine, for several months, without the knowledge of his mother. This results in Hubert losing control of his coming out, as Antoine's mother outs Hubert to Chantale while trying to celebrate their relationship. While this drives the conflict between mother and son, it also indicates the origins of queer shame within the film. Dolan removes affects of shame from his queer characters and places it within his heterosexual ones to illuminate how shame works as a cyclical affect that persists through mother and son. By replacing "coming out" with an "outing" Dolan evidences heteronormativity as the cause for queer shame as it places shames origins within his straight characters.

Stockton theorises such an outing as the 'backwards birth' of the 'ghostly gay child'. In *The Queer Child*, Stockton proposes a theory of queer coming-of-age that situates queer becoming within childhood to explore the retroactivity of becoming queer. The ghostly gay child haunts Stockton's book, which looks at the child in retrospect to explore the temporal relationship between hetero- and homosexual identities (14). Stockton is critical of the child as a symbol of innocence, protected by heteronormative ideology from the dangers of the adult world (12). To Stockton dominant conceptualisations of the child have become products of heterosexual desire. Heterosexuality protects the child from being queer simply through the ironic desexualisation of the child as a cultural product (30). Yet this heterosexual origin is integral to understanding Stockton's queering of the child. Stockton presents the 'ghostly gay child' via the retrospective death of the straight child when the queer self is outed – "The phrase "gay child" is a gravestone marker for where or when one's straight life died. Straight person dead, gay child now born" (7). Stockton's evocation of death frames queerness as rebirth, which illuminates the difficulties of queer coming-of-age; in that the queer challenges normative accounts of development from childhood to adulthood (22).

Moreover, the 'ghostly gay child' relinquishes queer identity from personal control by showing the effects of social norms on queer children through her theory of 'growing sideways'. To Stockton, all children are coded straight because implying non-heterosexual identities onto the child breaks the barrier of innocence through perceived queer sexualisation (3). Hence, every child, queer or not, is a straight child until the moment of queer realisation. Outing oneself kills the straight child and retroactively gives birth to the queer. Stockton refers to this as "backwards birth" (6), a concept in line with her overarching idea of queer children not 'growing up', but 'sideways,' "growing up in a haze" or "growing towards a question mark" (3). Growing sideways "suggests that the width of a person's experiences or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing 'adults' and 'children' into lateral contact of surprising sorts" (11). Stockton's sideways growth subverts reproductive futurity – the representation of the child as the future (Edelman 2) - in which growing up means growing towards reproduction. An essential element of Stockton's theories is how sideways growth remaps queer lives, unmooring them from heteronormative guidelines, and illuminating a new way of framing queer time (15). These ideas resonate with *I Killed My Mother*'s depiction of queer becoming. Hubert, though already out to himself, is still struggling with his queer life and his maternal relationship, fearing the effects of his queerness on Chantale. Analysing their relationship according to Stockton's theories of the

ghostly gay child and growing sideways illuminates the relationship between Hubert's outing, backwards birth, and Dolan's vision of Hubert 'growing sideways' as he navigates non-normative temporalities.

Hubert's sideways growth is evident in *I Killed My Mother*'s narrative through Hubert's constant oscillation between adulthood and childhood. Hubert's naive independence motivates many of his actions throughout the film, yet Chantale regularly pushes back against his defiance. The first notion of Hubert's disobedience appears when he kills his mother through metaphor. When asked to organise an interview with his parents for school, Hubert tells his teacher that "he never sees his father. And … my mother is dead." This lie highlights both Hubert's desires for difference and non-conformity as well as his sideways growth away from his mother's heteronormative inclination. Stockton suggests that the gay child lives in metaphor and fiction, "letting one object stand for another, by means of which they reconceive relations to time" (15). Here Hubert refigures his relationship with his mother, and temporal normativity, through verbalising Chantale's death. Hubert's desire to kill his mother, if only metaphorically, allows him to step outside of heterosexual frameworks by reimagining "growing up," highlighting his sideways growth via Chantale's metaphorical death.

In a following scene at his school, Chantale bursts into Hubert's classroom to announce her resurrection. Chantale ruptures Hubert's queer desires by reinstating her existence as his maternal figure. She then chases Hubert through the school, dressed in leopard print which highlights Chantale's predatory desires to keep Hubert from growing sideways. This incident evidences Hubert's need to grow sideways, contrasting Chantale's desire to maintain her straight son's upwards growth. Through Hubert's independence, he kills his mother, only for her spectre to return to keep him grounded.

In another sequence, Hubert pitches the idea of moving into his own apartment to Chantale, an idea she seems taken with. Yet when returning from viewing the apartment Chantale says "At 16, it's nuts to have your own apartment. Wait till you're 18." Again, Chantale's maternal desires crush Hubert's independence, eschewing his sideways momentum in favour of upwards growth. By way of Chantale and Hubert's emotional push and pull and Hubert's queer desire to move away from the idea of up, from normative temporalities and hegemonic identities, Dolan displays the weight that normative modes of being have on the queer experience. These moments highlight Chantale's oblivious rejection

of Hubert's queer growth because of her forceful implementation of maternal desire, in turn producing affects of shame within mother and son. Chantale's shame is evident through her desire to forcefully mother a son who does not want to be mothered. While Hubert's shame originates within his desires to exist apart from his mother. Yet, Chantale's normative desires force Hubert to stay within heteronormative confines, removing the possibility to grow sideways.

Stockton, along with Sedgwick, Downes, Morrison, and many other queer theorists, has identified shame as an inherent quality of being queer. Their theories provide a foundation for analysing the presence of shame in *I Killed My Mother*. Broadly speaking, shame relates to negative affects, defined as a "painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous, or indecorous in one's own conduct of circumstances" (OED). Shame appears consistently in queer theories, with affective shame a focus in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling,* Alan Downes' *The Velvet Rage*, and Stockton's *Beautiful Bottom Beautiful Shame.* Stockton's theories of the 'ghostly gay child' and 'backwards birth' echo affects of shame through the role of the parent. Backwards birth, straight death, and 'coming out', affect shame through the "dishonouring" of heterosexual traditions. These circumstances are understood by the parent as grief and shame because they place the queer child outside of normative temporalities, driving the queer into a perceived world of exclusivity.

By linking shame to queerness through the non-normativity of queer lives, both Sedgwick and Downes suggest that queer shame is a product of exclusion from the wider world. Sedgwick describes shame as a "primary affect we cannot excise from our bodies" (2003: 59). To Sedgwick shame is a politically motivated affect that achieves "a place of identity – the question of identity – at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but [does] so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence" (2003: 60-61). In this context shame is an inexpressible affect, a feeling that is constantly present but never fully acknowledged. In contrast, *The Velvet Rage* reframes shame as having three levels which queer people must overcome to experience an authentic life: the first, "overwhelmed by shame," fearful of one's sexuality or still "in the closet" (3); the second, "compensating for shame," the "gay man attempting to neutralize shame by being more successful, outrageous, fabulous, beautiful, or masculine" (4); and the third, "cultivating authenticity," building "a life that is based upon their own passions and values" (4). To Downes shame is not an affect

that is inexpressible, like in Sedgwick's view, but an affect that, however persistent in queer worldviews, can be overcome to experience life authentically. Both Sedgwick and Downes conceptualise shame as an inherent quality of queer identity.

The maternal relationship between mother and son is at the core of *I Killed My Mother*'s queer shame, as the pair's oppositional desires affect shame as a retrospective and cyclical affect. Where Hubert's desires orientate towards same-sex attraction, Chantale's occur in her heteronormative maternal instincts for her son. *I Killed My Mother* outs Hubert without his knowledge, during Chantale and her friend's spa visit. Hubert's straight self is killed when his boyfriend's mother, Helena, unintentionally outs him to Chantale. At the spa, the meeting between Chantale, her friend, and Helena appears as a wide shot of the women lounging in three wicker chairs in front of a wooden wall. The pair exchange pleasant small talk when Helena exclaims, "Our boys, two months in a week!" Caught off guard by this statement, Chantale asks what two months means, to which Helena replies, "that they've been together." Chantale sits, motionless, expressionless, wordless. Stockton suggests that the death of the straight child inspires a feeling of grief within parents (17). The film maintains this wide shot with the three women sitting uncomfortably within Chantale's grief. To Hubert, no doubt, his straight self is already dead, and to many of the other characters too, but Chantale is still living with that straight child. Chantale has failed to recognise her child for who he is, and as she says, "it's a big deal being a homosexual." The film's colour palette and cinematography throughout this scene are relatively realistic, Dolan muting his usually expressive style to allow the moment to linger within his characters. By enhancing the scene's realism, Dolan highlights the impact of straight death on Chantale, in the process affecting the audience with her grief and shame.

Chantale's reliance on Hubert's straight self is actualised through the sequence prior to his outing; amplifying how, and why, shame affects both Chantale and Hubert. Within this sequence, Hubert cleans the house, cooks his mother breakfast, and is unusually pleasant with her. Here, Hubert performs the good son and the surrogate father. Before Chantale goes to the spa, her friend arrives at their house. The film cuts from a mid-shot of Hubert looking at the two women in the kitchen, to a mid-shot of them standing in a fake beach setting with flower lei and shirtless men standing behind them. By placing Chantale and her friend next to objects of Hubert's erotic desire, this shot represents Hubert's complex feelings towards his mother through erotic juxtaposition. On the one hand, Hubert is showing his desire for his

mother, and by using these images Dolan evaluates the oedipal nature of their relationship. On the other hand, the shot represents Hubert's repulsion at his mother's tackiness. By dressing her in a kitschy costume and placing her in a mise-en-scène designed to distaste, Dolan shows the complexity of Hubert's feelings towards his mother, its erotic and repulsive alternation. This is where the film's queer shame originates. Hubert's role in Chantale's life is greater than simply being her son, he has taken on a symbiotic caregiver role with his mother - at once son, father, and husband. Because of this Chantale needs Hubert's straightness as she relies on him to maintain her normative desires. Yet, when Hubert is outed to his mother her vision of him, and her emotional reliance on him, is shattered, producing shame within herself, while also projecting that shame onto Hubert.

Figure 1 Chantale undressing at the spa

Dolan articulates shame through his visual style by using colour to represent how Chantale is feeling. When her name is called, the film cuts to a mid-shot of Chantale, in her tanning room, she has her back to the camera and is taking off her jewellery. The shot is lit half in blue and half in yellow, with Chantale positioned in the middle. Dolan uses blue's contrast with yellow to show her heterosexual shame at her gay child, by juxtaposing the positivity evoked by yellow and contrasting it with the negative affects associated with blue. Chantale is often in motion but here she is slow, contemplative, and saddened. Slowly Chantale undresses adding a sense of vulnerability to the shot and her character. The film cuts to a close-up of Chantale's face in the tanning bed. Her expression, her eyes looking down but her face showing little else, highlights a primarily physical reaction to shame (Tomkins 385). The blue light from before has found its source in the tanning bed, flooding the frame,

and Chantale, with its depressive mood. Earlier Chantale's friend mentions that her husband keeps showing her "articles on cancer" because of the tanning, therefore the blue in this shot represents death and loss. In this shot the tanning bed is death's representation, reflecting Hubert's straight death in the eyes of his mother. A mid-shot of Chantale sitting on a park bench with her friend proceeds this before a shot-reverse-shot frames them in close-up when Chantale voices her feelings. Echoes of the ghostly gay child become present in Chantale's life when she says "It's as if everything was erased." Hubert's comfort in his identity forces the film to focus his "coming out" onto his mother, as Hubert's straight self is already dead. Dolan puts the cause of shame onto Chantale because of the lack of understanding she has towards her son while showing how shame gets reflected onto Hubert, furthering the cyclical experiences of queer shame.

Hubert does not express shame at his own sexuality, rather, he repurposes it from his mother, becoming elusive and uncontrollable as his mother's shame affects him after his unintentional coming out. While it is obvious that Hubert has been volatile from the beginning of the film, from here his shame manifests in, not just greater violence, but in disconnection from his mother. Yet, Hubert's shame towards his mother and himself, as Margaret Morrison argues, is an inherent quality of being queer (18). Morrison argues that removing shame is indicative of a homonormative growth in the wrong direction and an inherent disregard for how one feels queer. Morrison theorises shame as a creative device, held onto as one of the key phenomenological expressions of queerness; writing that "one achieves "queer dignity" not by repudiating or being ashamed of one's (or one's other's) shame, but by facing politicised shame and reframing or transforming it" (21). Unlike Downes, Morrison's shame is not to be overcome but to be used as a political tool to strengthen bonds between queer people outside of heteronormative frames of mind (18). Shame in this sense should and would be an overarching affect within queer worlding as it is something that is commonly shared and experienced. In Dolan's queer world shame is a fixture, an element of his cinema that allows him to connect with queer audiences in a way that isolates non-queer viewers. Dolan's queer shame, especially in *I Killed My Mother*, is not rooted in queer characters but in the characters around them, showing that shame does not evolve from being queer but extends from those who think queerness is shameful. Hubert's elusiveness after his outing shows his rejection of maternal shame, removing himself from his mother to reject the affects of shame she feels at her son's queerness. Yet he appropriates shame within himself because of the exclusions that her normative shame induces.

Combining Morrison's theories of shame with Stockton's 'ghostly gay child', reveals the interconnected relationship between parent and queer child, specifically in how queer shame feeds off parental shame. Much like the 'ghostly gay child' shame is born retroactively. Sedgwick notes, with the help of Silvan Tomkins, that shame is a 'proto-affect' a "circuit that occurs when a baby and mother/caregiver develops" a circuit of mirroring expressions" (Morrison 19). Hence, parental shame transfers onto queer children through the "circuit of mirroring expressions" implemented by shames retroactivity. In turn, Sedgwick suggests that queer shame is not birthed with the queer child, rather, the queer learns shame through the parental transmission of heteronormative induced affects. *I Killed My Mother* exemplifies this idea through Chantale's initial manifestation of shame at the spa. Shame takes many different forms for the film's two characters. Most notably in anger and frustration from both parties; Hubert at his mother's sedentary lifestyle, and Chantale at her son's obvious rudeness. Yet, *I Killed My Mother* explores shame as a product of guilt. As mentioned previously, before Hubert's outing Dolan shows a scene in which Hubert tries to win Chantale's favour by acting as a caregiver. At this moment Hubert steps away from his role as an angsty child into a more careful almost fatherly figure to prove that he could live by himself but also to redeem his previous actions. Hubert feels guilty because of his selfish actions towards his mother, but also because he cannot fill the gap of his father.

Figure 2 Old dinosaur toy

Robert K. Lightning suggests that *I Killed My Mother* offers a clear example of how the oedipal narrative proposed by Freud works within a queer context. Stating that "the

mother lives on in the son's heterosexual object choice" (78), Lightening positions psychoanalytical thought through the mother-son dynamic, insinuating that mothers rely on their son's heterosexuality to continue their maternal relationship. Through this framework *I Killed My Mother* actualises shame as desire by virtue of its characters, noted through Chantale's heterosexual desires for Hubert and Hubert's rejection of this through his queer orientation. Chantale's shame comes from what she perceives as Hubert's "wholesale rejection of their prior affections" (Lightning 78) whereas Hubert's shame originates within the dissatisfaction that Chantale affects because of her presumed rejection. In turn, Dolan highlights shame's "circuit of mirroring expressions" as an endless cycle between the shamed mother and her ghostly gay child.

I Killed My Mother culminates in a mix of cathartic release and temporal displacement that sees the film's characters embrace and accept each other while mourning the loss of their Oedipal desires. The film represents shame through Dolan's use of montage, costume, and mise-en-scène to place shame, again, within Hubert's queering of childhood and Chantale's loss of a heterosexual son. Dolan uses these cinematic techniques to affectively show how Hubert and Chantale express and feel shame, suggesting that to overcome their shame they must accept the retroactive death of Hubert's straight self. Contextually the final scene comes after a release of tension for many of the film's characters. Chantale has just had an argument with the principle of Hubert's school after he told her that Hubert would "benefit from a male presence at home." Antoine, Hubert's boyfriend, has told Hubert on their way to the lake house to "grow up" after not factoring in his role in Hubert's maternal quarrel. Subsequently, in a dream sequence, Hubert chases his mother, who is dressed in a white wedding dress, through an autumnal forest; an image recollecting Lightning's Oedipal reading of the film. These moments work to justify shame throughout the film, by evidencing shame affects from minor characters to build towards an ending that could either accept Hubert as the ghostly gay child or reject him.

Hubert and Chantale's step towards acceptance is exemplified in the opening montage of *I Killed My Mother's* final scene. Here Dolan combines images of childhood, oppression, family, and time to evaluate the familial roots of their shame. The montage presents motifs that have persisted throughout the film, in four similar, but distinct, images (a toy, religious statue, a baby, and an angel all enclosed within a home). Cut together within the space of 10

seconds, these images collectively act as an affective device that places shame within the queer child via the heterosexual orientations of the mother.

The montage opens with a close-up shot of an old toy - a blue wooden dinosaur, with red wheels. The toy's head is facing towards a window, frozen in its inherent uselessness while looking out to a world blurred from the camera's vision. The toy recollects childhood, the origin of queer shame, birthed with the maternal desire for normalcy. The symbolic nature of the toy, its worn exterior and defeated look, recalls Stockton's 'ghostly gay child' through its evocation of innocence's decay. Our queer child, Hubert, now grown up (sideways), rejects his past straight self – child, toy – and leaves it to eternal disfunction. Blue saturates this montage with its evocation of death, represented previously within the spa sequence. Blue has contradictory meanings in art and culture, symbolising nature, birth, and light while also suggesting nostalgia, melancholy, and loneliness. Maggie Nelson, in her book *Bluets,* examines the many meanings of blue, personifying it through heartbreak. In the book, she expresses blue as melancholy by suggesting that it "can produce bolts of hot pain, a pain which if it stays hot enough for long enough, can begin to simulate, or to provoke…an apparition of the divine" (3). Through this blue becomes a representation of shames painful affects because of its relationship to loneliness, melancholia, and death. Blue's divine affects persists through objects in this montage acting in tandem with theories of shame - shame of childhood, shame of sexuality, shame from a higher power – to centre queer shame within normative heterosexual culture.

The shot of the toy cuts to a close-up of a statue of a woman in religious robes, most likely Mary, as she is holding a small crucified Jesus covered in flowers. Her face is solemn but with eyes that look directly down the camera. The statue, like the toy dinosaur, has a tinted blue headscarf. Here Mary is divine, a literal symbol, queered by Dolan. Resembling Chantale, she is a mother in mourning, one who must hold her son who died a symbolic death. Within the context of this montage, Mary and Jesus' image evokes the loneliness and melancholy that Nelson references by directly relating the painful affects associated with blue to the iconography of divinity in a mother-son context.

Loneliness and shame are closely linked within queer experiences, with many narratives suggesting maternal grief is derived from the idea of their child being lonely because of their queerness (i.e. *Pride* 2014). Here Chantale is Mary, her eternal shame, her fear of loneliness, projected onto Hubert. It may be a stretch to correlate Hubert with Jesus,

however, a queer retrospective death does have symbolic similarities with the story of Jesus' sacrifice. The killing of a straight child is a sacrifice, a sacrifice that leads to rebirth within a cloud of maternal grief and shame. Proceeding this child death, the film cuts to the next image in the montage, that of another porcelain statue, this time of a weathered baby's head, also painted blue. The statue is in a state of frozen motion; with its handheld up over its open mouth, the baby could either be yawning or crying. Is this a reiteration of the death of the straight child? – the blue standing in as a symbol of the heteronormative upbringing of male babies. Or is this a question, much like that of the queer child, of a figure in constant motion but unable to move, balancing on the fine line between comfort (yawning) and shame (crying)? These questions remain unanswered with the montage's final image, that of a statue of a blue angel.

In this shot, the statue of the blue angel is looking down, with the camera situated at a slightly high angle. Yet another religious symbol, the angel here acts as a culmination of the previous four images. The forgotten youth of the dinosaur toy, the divine sacrifice of Mary, and the eternal question of the baby, all linger in this shot – blue persisting. Through linking these images with the colour blue, the sequence suggests that queer shame is derivative of maternity and childhood, connecting the sacrifice and grief of the religious images, with the timeless statues of the child. The mother, a stand-in for all of heteronormativity's controlling devices, needs to be killed, metaphorically, for the queer to accept and move away from shame's controlling affects. Whereas childhood represents the site of heteronormative temporalities because straight time enforces normativity, without control, from birth. Like the gay child, this is not a literal killing, rather, a rejection of the maternal shame produced through the protective agency of the mother figure. If one rejects the mother, then one may accept queer shame.

Dolan rejects the heteronormative mother within *I Killed My Mother* by combining autobiographical narrative with acts of confession to exorcise feelings of shame and guilt. Autobiography is evident throughout the film's narrative, ranging from Chantale's single-parent efforts at raising her son, Hubert's queerness, and the boarding school he goes to. However, Dolan has insisted that the film is only partially autobiographical, taking elements of his lived experience and fictionalising them into a cohesive story. As stated in interviews Dolan wrote the film in a time when his relationship with his mother was fraught, while also saying that he felt little need to "come out" as he was always comfortable with his sexuality.

In turn, *I Killed My Mother* expands upon Stockton's theories of queer childhood as the film places the onus of "coming out" onto the heterosexual figures within queer life. The film, then, is a confession of a troublesome son and a confession of queer youth. Dolan plays with confession through his use of documentary inspired black and white segments of Hubert talking directly to the camera.

Figure 3 Hubert's confession. Eye in close-up

I Killed My Mother opens with one of these confession scenes. An extreme close-up of Hubert's eyes is the first shot of the film, quickly panning from one eye to the other as a voice-over says, "I don't know what happened." A thoughtful gaze crosses his eyes as he talks about the love he and "her" have for each other. Here "her" is unlabelled. One could assume that "her" is a lover, the black and white cinematography romanticising the image, in turn, feeding into the Oedipal themes of the film. Hubert states "I still love her. I can look at her, talk to her, be next to her." This rhetoric implies that of a lover, the conjuring of a stare, a being-with, implying the morning for a lost love. The next shot reveals "her" to be his mother. "I can't be her son" penetrates another extreme close-up of Hubert's eye, giving a revaluation to the stance of the "her." Here Hubert's shame becomes physical with his head and eyes pointing down is a typical bodily expression of shame (Tomkins 385). Through confession Hubert exorcises his shame. Dolan speaks through Hubert to sets up the film as a work to absolve and justify his feelings towards his mother yet fictionalises this relationship to offer distance between creator and character.

These confessional scenes continue to express the complex feelings Hubert has towards his mother, culminating in a sequence that combines confession and shame with physical homophobic violence to represent the full impact that shamed actions have. Towards the end of the film, Chantale finds the camera that Hubert has been filming on. When she opens it, she witnesses a talking head previously played within the film in which Hubert says that if someone hurt his mother, he would kill them but "I could think of a hundred people I love more than my mother." With this Dolan frames Chantale from a low mid-shot, static on her face and shoulders. Chantale's pain at this confession becomes evident as Hubert's confessional shame emotionally affects her. Dolan juxtaposes this against a group of men approaching Hubert at boarding school and physically assaulting him. The scene cuts quickly between these two moments, Chantale finding bags of tapes with recorded confessions and Hubert being beaten, alone and outside, because of his queerness. The film's editing intrinsically links these two scenarios together. By contrasting Chantale's discovery with Hubert's attack, Dolan shows the cyclical violence that shame has within the mother-son relationship. Chantale feels shame because she could not understand her son's queer identity while Hubert's shame is visceral, the physical violence standing in for the emotional violence that is persisted through heteronormative shame.

Dolan ends *I Killed My Mother* with an image of death and rebirth, to evoke ideas of the resurrected queer and the maternal acceptance. A close-up of Hubert holding a small figurine of his mother that Antoine made brings the camera to him. Hubert chips off a blue tear that caricatured his mother. The blue tear ties together the images of the previous montage by reinforcing the underlying sadness of blue within symbolic statues. With the wiping away of the tear Hubert acknowledges his mother's personhood. Here, Hubert kills his perception of his mother, revitalising her as a shame-less figure. Dolan acknowledges shames symbolic presence yet rejects its negative affects, through Chantale and Hubert's acceptance of soured love, as to grow sideways into the queer. The film cuts to a wide angle of Hubert sitting on the rocks in a black hoodie, hood up, conjuring images of the reaper, as a representation of death. Chantale sits next to Hubert with her arm around his back. Hubert killed his mother, only for her to come back and embrace her queer son. Chantale's acceptance resurrects Hubert as queer, normalising his active state through acknowledgement. Mother and son finally learn how to live with each other's desires, fuelled by shame but powered by love.

I Killed My Mother's evocation of queer shame is rooted in the protective normalcy of heterosexual parents. *I Killed My Mother* depicts how queerness affects those around us, and how others' negative reactions – grief, shame – reverse back onto queer children. Dolan produces shame retroactively through parental relationships showing how the queer child appropriates heteronormative shame. Hubert's outing shamed his mother, her straight son killed in an act of verbal terror to birth her new ghostly gay child, one who she seemingly doesn't understand. Hubert must learn to grow sideways as to avoid the temporal pressures of straight time placed upon him by Chantale's heterosexual desires. The metaphorically killing of the mother is the only way for the queer child to accept and move through shame. Chantale "dies" at the beginning of the film, only to be resurrected with Hubert's backwards birth. Dolan mixes violence with shameful revelation to evoke the brutality that shame has on queer bodies, putting the onus onto generational relationships to relieve negative affects. *I Killed My Mother* reinforced shame's influence within queer lives but removes its origins from the queer and places it onto the heterosexual figures within queer lives. Here Dolan implies that being-queer is not something to be ashamed of, but it is still an inherent quality of queer worlding. Yet shame in *I Killed My Mother* remains transformative. Hubert and Chantale are only able to understand each other through their experiences in shame. Shame is intrinsic to queer experience as it allows characters a sense of empathy towards each other, in turn affecting audiences with a similar sense of empathetic shame.

Chapter Two

"Not Made to Be One": Transgender Rage in *Laurence Anyways*

In 2012, following the success of *I Killed My Mother* and *Heartbeats*, Dolan premiered his most daring and mature film to date. Dolan began working on *Laurence Anyways* in 2009 but decided to make a smaller film, *Heartbeats*, before tackling the more ambitious project. Debuting at Cannes Film Festival, *Laurence Anyways* showed that Dolan was a filmmaker of fully realised talent (Hachard, Dalton, Jargernauth). *Laurence Anyways* was by far Dolan's most expensive feature at the time. With a budget of CA$10 million, compared to the CA$800,000 of *I Killed My Mother* and CA$600,000 of *Heartbeats*, Dolan could afford a lengthier shoot and high-profile actors. His frequent collaborator Suzanne Clément (who played a supporting role in *I Killed My Mother*) joined French actors Nathalie Baye and Melvil Poupaud in the main roles. After its premiere *Laurence Anyways* won numerous awards on the festival circuit; most notably Clements won the Un Certain Regard Award for Best Actress, while the film itself won the Queer Palm Award at Cannes. *Laurence Anyways* went on to the win Best Canadian Feature Film award at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2012 and several others at the inaugural Canadian Screen Awards.

Laurence Anyways represents Dolan's move away from personal storytelling, as the film details the love affair between a trans woman and her partner over the span of 10 years, from the late 1980s through to the end of the millennium. The film is, at its heart, a trans narrative, showing Laurence's (Melvil Poupaud) gender transition, while she struggles to maintain her relationship with long-time partner Fred (Suzanne Clements). *Laurence Anyways* was inspired by the life of Luce Baillarge, a trans woman and the partner of *Laurence Anyways*' producer, Lyse Lafontaine (Petrowski). At the start of the film, Fred and Laurence appear content with their lives. Conflict starts, however, when Laurence comes out as a trans woman, telling Fred, "it's not that I like men. I'm just not made to be one." From here the pair go through several relationship phases - being-together, being-apart, being-with - all while dealing with the challenges of Laurence's non-normative gender identity. Dolan situates *Laurence Anyways* firmly within melodramatic conventions. Defined as "narratives…driven by the experience of one crisis after another" (Landy 14), melodramas favour emotionality and expression over narrative logic and action. Like *I Killed My Mother*, *Laurence Anyways* features several scenes of characters loudly yelling at each other and demonstrating Dolan's distinct cinematic blend of heightened drama, realistic relationships,

and formalism through non-diegetic shots, expressive pop music, and a nostalgic tone. Yet unlike *I Killed My Mother*, *Laurence Anyways* tells a deeper love story, putting greater focus on social and cultural issues that affect trans communities.

This chapter focuses on affects of rage apparent in Dolan's trans narrative, linking rage with formal elements of melodrama and Jack Halberstam's theories of 'queer time' to examine how *Laurence Anyways* communicates the displacement of hegemonic/heteronormative temporalities. In 1993 theorist and performance artist Susan Stryker presented "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" at the "Rage across the Disciplines" conference at California State University. This presentation contrasts transgender experiences with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to examine how the constructed embodiment of trans lives results in feelings of rage. Stryker presents rage as a communicative and constructive affect, "confronting the implications of […] constructedness" to "summon up all the violation, loss, and separation inflicted by the gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness" (250). This chapter will pair Stryker's theories with another formative trans theory work, Halberstam's *In A Queer Time and Place,* which outlines 'queer time,' the alternative temporalities that exist for people who live outside of heteronormative modes of being (6). These two theories clarify the depiction of queer time affecting trans/queer bodies and temporal displacement manifesting as rage in *Laurence Anyways*. Alongside trans rage and queer time, melodramatic theories will further illuminate how Dolan articulates rage through form and style. By analysing the expression of transgender rage through melodrama and queer time in *Laurence Anyways*, this chapter reveals how Dolan adapts his cinematic style to tell a transgender story that highlights the dissociative experiences that normative modes of being (temporal and embodied) have on Laurence's life, inspiring trans rage.

Trans theorists emphasise the rhetorical and embodied affects of rage to communicate the contradictory worldview of trans people. Most notably Stryker uses *Frankenstein* metaphorically to depict the medical and social construction of the trans body. Representation of queer and trans people as monsters is common throughout cinematic history (Halberstam 2005: 4). Stryker intervenes in her performance to re-appropriate, dissect, and perform the monster, utilising rage to show where and how she does not belong within hegemonic temporalities. To Stryker monsters and transness work to elevate and subvert the non-belonging of trans people. The monster is a site of (un)wanted disruption, Frankenstein's monster evoking the medically constructed nature of the trans body. She elaborates on trans

rage, which is generated in "the subject […] through a failure to satisfy norms of gendered embodiment" (249). Stryker's rage is what trans rage theorist Hil Malatino would call "defiant anger," but the contradictions that exist in transgender embodiment are the root cause of transgender rage, according to Stryker. "Transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a nature in which it must nevertheless exist" (248). Stryker's assertion highlights the subjective trans experience of existing outside of normative gender binaries. Stryker ultimately identifies transgender rage as the product of trans people's transgression of "the highly gendered regulatory schemata that determine the viability of bodies" (248).

Stryker argues that social acceptance mandates identity based on the gender binary (250); rage humanises trans existence by expressing the violence of compulsory gendering. In other words, trans people must either subscribe to gendered attributions to make "one's personhood cognizable" or accept the "unlivability of its absence," and trans people consequently use rage to voice the dehumanisation they feel at the limited options society presents. By affecting rage Stryker suggests that "the [social] stigma itself becomes the source of transformative power" (249); therefore, the contradictions in transgender rage bring forth the subversive powers of "defiant rage." Stryker's contradictory rage is relevant to *Laurence Anyways*, Laurence's rage stimulated by the conflict between her desire for a normative relationship and an authentic expression of self.

Anger, along with its more volatile affect, rage, frequently appears in queer and trans studies (e.g. see Stryker, Stone), operating as a rhetorical device to communicate the disjunction and oppression of queer and trans lives. Many misconceptions exist about anger and rage, which are characterised in pop-psychology as a "mask for sadness" rather than a unique affective state (Malatino 121). Malatino subverts this understanding in "Tough Breaks: Trans Rage and the Cultivation of Resilience" by proposing the productive function of rage in marginalised people's lives. He stresses that "the few social-scientific analyses that theorize rage as a social phenomenon tend to focus on the way it shapes majoritarian, hegemonic forms of subjectivity" (122), meaning that rage experienced due to gender, race, and/or sexual marginalisation is dismissed as evidence of feeling left out. Instead of portraying rage as negative, Malatino "explore[s] how rage is transformative and world-building, not merely a negative affective force that compromises flourishing and impedes the cultivation of resilience" (122). Malatino's concept of trans resilience posits rage as a defence mechanism against that "which seeks to harm […] a radiating affect that distances" (122).

Thus, in Malatino's view, trans rage is an all-encompassing and productive affect that communicates otherness and distances queer experiences from heteronormativity.

Malatino presents various functions of rage relevant to *Laurence Anyways,* including resilience and transformation. Rage maintains self-preservation; in Malatino's view, "we feel rage and are transformed by rage whenever we sense […] that the networks we rely on for survival are inimical to such survival" (124). In other words, Malatino argues that the contradictory existence of queer lives - that of relying on normative social understandings while also living outside of acceptable identities - conjures rage to communicate the betrayal of queer relationship to those "networks". However, rage is productive in the sense that it humanises, and communicates humanity, to societies that negate trans and queer identities. Rage, as an embodied affect asserting the self, "gives us back our bodies and lives, steals them back and recuperates them from dominant systems where they are illegible, dehumanized, and significantly maltreated" (127). Finally, Malatino defines a rage that communicates, motivates, and moves certain groups of people into political action, which he elaborates as "anger that challenges respectability" or "defiant anger" (128). Defiant anger "provides resources for working through internalized oppression that manifests in self-hatred and self-abuse," which drives political action through anger's "transfer […] from one being to another" (127). Rage as affect strongly influences trans lives; it mobilises, communicates, and asserts trans worldviews by rejecting the dehumanisation enforced by heteronormative paradigms.

Laurence Anyways' use of red and blue mise-en-scène to demonstrate the evolution of Laurence's gender transition aligns with Stryker's interpretation of transgender rage. Katrina Sark's essay, "the Language of Fashion and (Trans)Gender in Dolan's *Laurence Anyways*," links the progression of colour block fashion in Laurence and Fred's costumes to the emotional depths of both characters. For Sark, colour mirrors the inner psychologies of the two leads; however, I would argue that colour beyond costume, both diegetic and non-diegetic colour, and specifically red, highlights how other characters stimulate Laurence's rage. At the beginning of the film, red, both in costume and lighting, expresses Laurence's encroaching emotional turmoil, specifically the rage she feels at not having control over her own gender identity. The film's prologue, which flashes forward ten years into Laurence's gender transition, features blue to convey Laurence's conflict with gender normativity. Cutting back to the film's present, Laurence and Fred next appear in their bedroom surrounded by blue walls, blue sheets, and blue clothes. Blue is the film's base colour,

representing Laurence and Fred's heteronormative equilibrium that Laurence's "coming-out" interrupts. The blue mise-en-scène conveys Laurence and Fred's normative worldviews with the opening scenes' vibrant blue's equating heteronormative thought and normative happiness through blues relationship within their intimate space.

Figure 4 Laurence and Fred's blue bedroom

The opening prologue of *Laurence Anyways* highlights blue, both within costuming and set, as a heteronormative indicator that Laurence opposes through her gender expression. The scene crosscuts between low-angle mid-shots of Laurence walking and close-up shots of people staring at her. The people's expressions show distaste and anger, aimed towards Laurence's visible gender subversion. The first close-up features a young man on a stoop, a pan from left to right tracking his eyes until he eventually stares directly into the camera. The boy wears a blue sweatshirt and glares intimidatingly at viewers. The next shot, also a close-up, shows three old women, but this time the camera tracks in on them rather than panning around them. They are dressed in blue tones paired with distasteful expressions. Additional shots similarly feature onlookers dressed in blue staring at Laurence disapprovingly as she walks down the street. Through these characters' costumes and their intimidating stares, heteronormativity is coded blue, as they channel their normative ideologies onto Laurence.

Blue as a heteronormative indicator continues as the film cuts back 10 years, indicated by a "10 years earlier" subtitle, to Laurence and Fred's bedroom. Their bedroom is painted blue with blue sheets and decorations to match. In these shots, Laurence is on top of Fred as they discuss Laurence's upcoming literary prize, their physical intimacy implying heterosexual romance. Dolan rarely revisits this space, using it at the beginning of the film to situate Laurence and Fred within a heterosexual orientation, yet avoids this room to signal their removal from normative ideologies. By coding blue as heteronormative in the opening sequence of the film, Laurence and Fred's relationship emerges from a heterosexual paradigm, their blue bedroom communicating a normative state of relating. By identifying blue as heteronormative, Dolan lays the foundation for its juxtaposition with red, which the proceeding scenes introduce to indicate a trans alternative to heteronormative being and relating.

Red becomes explicit as a non-normative contradiction to blue to highlight Laurence's encroaching trans identity and rage through dialogue and non-diegetic cinematography within a conversation between Laurence and Fred set in their car. Here they list numerous colours, writing down their associated meanings and emotions. They start with pink and baby blue, colours that indicate "latent childhood trauma," which recalls Laurence's blue bedroom and suggests the trauma, as Stryker described it, of being forcefully gendered at birth. Meanwhile, Fred says that red represents "the colour of rage! And blood! And seduction! And passion!" The film uses this colour game to make the meanings of blue and red explicit for the audience. By starting the film with the colour blue, Dolan establishes the heteronormative assumptions of Fred and Laurence, through its association with their heterosexual happiness. Subsequently, Dolan queers their relationship to blue (heterosexuality) through his transition to red. Because their heterosexuality has been associated with blue from the beginning, the introduction of red, which becomes more and more prominent as the film progresses, indicates the queered state the couple is entering. Much like Stryker's identification of transgender rage within the imposition of normative gender at birth, the blue to red colour palette represents initial normativity enforced through the assumption of Laurence and Fred's gender expressions, whereas red represents the coming interruption of Laurence's queer identity through its contrast with blue.

Dolan combines expressive non-diegetic shots with gendered iconography through costuming to introduce red as a non-normative contradiction to blue. After discussing red in the car, Fred and Laurence share a passionate kiss, as the camera cuts to a silhouette of a

woman through the car window in the rain, who is dressing in red and out of focus. While this foreshadows the film's plot in its articulation of gender transition, the woman in red also indicates that rage has taken root within the non-normative feelings that Laurence has towards her gender identity. By cutting from Laurence and Fred's conversation about the meaning of colour to a seemingly random shot of a woman in red, Dolan communicates the transgender rage that is brewing inside of Laurence. Laurence is stuck in the car, only looking out at what she wants to become, lusting after the "tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable" (Stryker 253). Red here, through costuming and dialogue, is still subtle within the film, showing that Laurence's rage is still latent. She is in the process of confronting her true gender identity yet is stuck within normative gender understandings.

Figure 5 The lady in red

One month after the car scene, the film addresses Laurence's emerging gender identity in a scene that mixes Laurence's POV close-ups from the opening sequence with intense red lighting. As Laurence walks in the rain past shops that glow with red neon light, she looks in at the women inside the shops who are looking out. Laurence takes shelter in a restaurant, where she waits in a crowd of people. The scene mirrors the opening montage of the film, directly communicating with the audience through the fourth-wall-breaking POV

shots, to "create viewer empathy through affect" (Schultz 2). In this sequence, however, the empathy has shifted, from empathy for Laurence into affective empathy, an unconscious coupling of character and audience emotion, which mixes lighting with the image of the gaze to establish an understanding of Laurence's transgender rage. Empathy here does not rely on audiences directly understanding Laurence's trans identity, rather, Dolan positions the audience within the eye-line of the gaze to align audience affect with that of Laurence. By recontextualising the POV shots of the film's opening montage into a more empathetic context, they set up an affective identification between Laurence and the audience, both the audience and Laurence expressing rage at the dehumanising gaze of the film's cisgender characters.

The film uses eye-line matches to cut between Laurence and subjective close-ups of people's faces as they glance at Laurence, this time not with the opening montage's hostility, but with enticement. The subjective positioning of the camera mirrors Laurence's gaze by looking longingly at the women in the shop. The first POV shot is that of a young girl looking directly into the camera, bathed in neon red light from the shop; several similar shots of people sympathetically looking at Laurence follow in a shot/counter shot manner. Finally, the scene cuts to a close-up of Laurence as she turns away from those looking at her then turns back, the shot/counter shot pattern revealing an extreme close-up of a young woman's face, her eyes meeting Laurence's with a smile. Here cinematography and mise-en-scène bring the audience into an empathetic alliance with Laurence's transgender rage. Laurence wants to articulate femininity like these women but is stuck in an in-between position, needing gender conformity to maintain equilibrium within gender normative communities and wanting liberation from the confines of her socially pre-determined gender identity. Stryker posits this in-betweenness as "rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against [her] survival" (Stryker 249). The vivid red lighting paired with the eye-line matches communicates the overwhelming affects of transgender rage that Laurence is experiencing through her desire for acceptance from femme communities.

Following this, Dolan's deployment of colour to distinguish between Laurence and Fred's heteronormative relationship and affects of transgender rage culminates in Laurence's 'coming out' to Fred in a car wash. This sequence involves their celebration of Laurence's birthday after Fred surprises her with a trip to New York City. Confined to the car, this sequence starts in a two-shot of Laurence and Fred above Montreal as the pair celebrates. Fred and Laurence appear in close-up from the back seat of the car, the hand-held camera

moving between their faces and objects within the car, jump-cutting throughout the conversation. From outside the window, the evening blue of the sky saturates the couple. The composition of the close-up framing and the oversaturated blue sky in the background situates the couple within a heterosexual fantasy, orientating them firmly within the already established normative meanings of the colour blue. After Fred tells Laurence that they are not going for dinner but instead to New York, the couple becomes increasingly agitated. Fred is drunk and high, and Laurence is confused and thrown by the surprise, trying desperately to tell Fred of the recent understanding of her gender identity.

After showing them driving, still framed in close-up from the back of the car, the film jump-cuts to Fred and Laurence sitting in a car wash, the camera now framing them in a medium shot from behind. Laurence begins to yell at Fred, and at this precise moment, Dolan collides blue's heteronormativity with red's affects of trans rage. Laurence yells, "will you shut your fuckin' mouth," as the red and blue brush of the carwash spins onto their windshield. "I have to tell you something. It's very important, I have to tell you," Laurence continues as the overwhelming sound of the carwash joins the frantic movement of the blue/red brush to indicate Laurence's transgender rage. By combining the carwash's blue and red brush with Laurence's outburst of rage, Dolan illuminates the couple's contradictory understanding of their relationship and the conflict between normative heterosexuality and trans becoming. The sequence ends on a close-up of Laurence, the blue of the carwash flooding the left of the frame, while a bright red light protrudes from behind Laurence's head as she says, "I'm going to die." Laurence's gender identity has emerged to 'kill' her normative self in a moment of intense rage. Dolan affects transgender rage by coding blue as gender normative while representing red as in conflict with it. The tensions between Laurence and Fred's normative relationship and Laurence's transgender identity collide in the mix of red and blue, which suggests the incompatible understandings of queer gender that fuels trans rage.

Furthermore, melodrama intensifies *Laurence Anyways*' heightened aesthetic, allowing its characters' emotions to penetrate through the screen without the use of explanatory dialogues. Cinematic melodrama is a central genre in the affective communication of queer cinema through its ability to express intense emotionality within logical narrative frameworks (Williams 3). Melodrama has hosted many subversive representations of queerness as the genre allows for camp, emotional, explicit characters to express desire through heightened emotionality, rooting expression within a cinematic

language that many other genres fall short on: granting queer spectators representations of themselves onscreen within the confines of heteronormative cinematic histories (Schoonover and Galt 217). With this, melodrama is a highly affective genre as it utilises "filmic articulation that privileges the marginal, locating meaning in mise-en-scène rather than in narrative, in emotion rather than in reason, and in surface rather than in depth" (Schoonover and Galt 217). Much like horror or porn, melodrama elicits embodied reactions from its audiences, using realism in conjunction with tragic narratives to incite tears in its audiences (Williams 3). Through genre Dolan foregrounds rage, asking the audience not to "weep" but to rage at the social conventions that drive normative identities within *Laurence Anyways*. Narrative conventions of melodrama heighten the textural elements of Dolan's work. By establishing an over-the-top aesthetic in his characters, Dolan can mirror their expression in the film's lighting, costuming, editing, and cinematography, breaking down the barriers between formalism and realism which allows for representational non-diegetic cinematic moments.

Schoonover and Galt theorise melodrama within queer cinema by substituting ideas of genre for a more specific approach through "register." Combining genre specifics with affective film theory, register "offers an ideal term because it references cinema's mediation of experience, mobilizing intimacies, affects, and sensations" granting access to "queerness in and through the cinematic sensorium" (212). To Schoonover and Galt, representations of queerness are "not always easy to capture in film" as queerness "cannot be reduced to a montage of talking heads recounting their sexual deviance, long shots of crowds at kiss-in protests, or closeups of the intermeshed hands of a same-sex couple" because of the inherent embodiment of queer experience (211). Register through melodrama grants a way out of these limitations, bringing forth emotionality, sensory, and phenomenological viewing practises to empathise with, and embody, queerness in cinema.

Dolan employs genre specifics of melodrama and the affective qualities of register to directly state trans rights discourses within the dialogue of *Laurence Anyways*. Schoonover and Galt further examine melodrama through trans cinema by examining the global and political power of melodramatic form as a way of "articulating the political and affective experiences of modernity" (218). Through melodrama's exaggerated temporalities and emotions trans melodramas "deploy rights discourse […] as a mode of visualising and expanding the spaces available for trans living" (Schoonover and Galt 222), allowing audiences to fully experience subjectivities that they may not have encountered before.

In *Laurence Anyways,* Laurence's narrative explores questions of transition, embodiment, and love by directly representing the isolation and freedom that her non-normative gender has allowed her; the freedom of living without the constraints of binary gender and the isolation from normative communities that this freedom brings. Laurence expresses multiple registers throughout the film. Sometimes yelling, sometimes quiet, sometimes violent, Laurence traverses the challenging cartography of queer existence to reveal the complexities of modernity, displaying queerness not just as flamboyance and camp, but as nuanced and infinite. Schoonover and Galt suggest melodrama as "the vehicle for […] human rights discourse, explicitly tethering queer unhappiness to the social hierarchies of gender and sexual oppression that produce it" (225). Fred, perhaps unfairly, plays this part in *Laurence Anyways* by being the spokesperson for much of the films underlying rage, speaking out, and often over, Laurence about the societal treatment of trans people. Using different forms of melodramatic register *Laurence Anyways* communicates trans rage to audiences by placing rage not just within its trans character but also within its cis character, luring oblivious audiences into a state of empathetic rage.

Figure 6 Laurence's bar fight

Using melodramatic register, Dolan employs representational violence through Laurence as an empathising tool to evoke rage's brutality through cinematography, dialogue, and narrative. Though violence has often been a site of transphobic representation in cinema (i.e. *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Boys Don't Cry*), it can also fight hegemonic oppression in ways that non-violence cannot. Jack Halberstam argues for "imagined violence" in art as "the fantasy of unsanctioned eruptions of aggression from the wrong people, of the wrong skin, the wrong sexuality, the wrong gender" (263). Representational violence in media offers a threat to those who threaten through "expression that suggests that retribution in some form is just around the corner" (Halberstam 2010: 263). Laurence encompasses this through her violent attack on a man at a bar, furthering melodrama's emotionality over narrative logic to represent the transgender rage that has embodied her transition.

Dolan uses representational violence in tandem with melodramatic register in *Laurence Anyways* to highlight rage as a communicative affect that humanises trans existence. In this scene, Laurence, shot in a mid-shot from behind, is writing at a bar. Laurence is wearing traditionally feminine clothes and make-up here, but her body is still notably masculine. A man comes up to the bar, orders a drink, and says "Fuck me! That's a look, dude" to Laurence, who smiles but does not look up. This provokes the man to get up and walk towards Laurence, though it is unclear whether the man is inherently threatening or not. Laurence remains seated but as the man approaches, she takes off her earring and quickly head butts the man as he goes to put his arm on her back. The film immediately cuts to a long shot of Laurence on top of the man punching him, filmed in Dolan's typical slow motion, with the sound of heavy breathing playing overtop. Where Laurence's violent outburst could feel unprovoked to many cis-gendered, to non-queer viewers, this moment is speaking to a wider violence, that of casual transphobia and queerphobia. By forgoing narrative logic in favour of representational violence against transphobic people, Dolan is threatening Halberstamian violence as a "political space opened up by the representation of unsanctioned violence committed by subordinate groups" (Halberstam 2010: 247). What adds to this scene's feeling of melodramatic rage is Dolan's use of sensory mise-en-scène and cinematography. Again, the intense neon red light from earlier envelopes the shot which is paired with a handheld camera and intentionally disorientating editing. These elements bring focus onto Laurence's subjective experiences, evoking the subconscious rather than the directly expressed. This allows Dolan to represent elements that feel out of place, the unprovoked fight, without them feeling jarring to the audience. Laurence's sudden change in

register, as shown in this scene "expand the spaces for trans living" by threatening representational violence through melodramatic rage, and by doing so Dolan uses rage to humanise his trans characters.

While Laurence's rage manifests physically in the film, Fred's rage is representational and verbal, bringing forth literal discussions of human rights through melodrama's subversion of narrative logic. Fred is Laurence by proxy, her outbursts of rage fill the film with moments of heightened emotionality via her speeches on the unfairness of trans lives. Fred's rage comes from the contradiction in her life that Laurence's transition has bought. Her emotional turmoil is bound between her intense love for Laurence and her normative, heterosexual desires. Her love for Laurence wins for much of the first half of the film, sticking with Laurence as she faces challenges from her family and colleagues because of Laurence's transition. But the pull of heterosexuality is always present, which in turn forces Fred to discover who she is and confront her internal transphobia. It is this contradiction that permits Fred to outbursts of rage. She has seen how the world has treated Laurence, and though perhaps unfairly, lashes out, on several occasions speaking for Laurence about her oppressive treatment.

In an outburst at a café, Dolan exploits Fred's melodramatic rage to articulate trans social struggles directly to his audience. Unlike Laurence's bar fight which utilises hyper-stylised cinematography, Dolan approaches this scene visually with a heavy sense of realism while still maintaining melodramatic acting and dialogue. Using natural lighting and colour, but maintaining the haptic handheld camera, this scene echoes the film's previous moments of rage, such as the bar fight or Laurence's carwash confession, but pulls them back, allowing for character dialogue and Susan Clément's acting to present the film's message. Here, Dolan revisits one of the film's repeated visual motifs by opening the scene with shots of people staring at the couple. This recalls previous scenes of rage by showing the continued ostracisation of queer characters evident throughout the film. The scene starts just after Laurence's fight. With her face covered in cuts and bruises, she calmly tells Fred that she fell down some stairs. Subsequently, Laurence confesses that she was fired, while the host of the restaurant, an older woman, comments on Laurence's appearance. The old woman misgenders Laurence, though corrects herself, and trivialises Laurence's appearance as "just for fun." From this Fred snaps. Smashing her plate, she stands up to address the "stupid old bag." Fred's speech, however, also misgenders Laurence, placing emphasis on her situation

within Laurence's transition, "have you ever had to buy a wig for your man?", while also giving validity to the public existence of trans people.

The inherent contradictions of Fred's speech mirror the contradictory nature of her relationship with Laurence. It is *Laurence Anyways'* melodramatic form that allows the film to speak directly to and for the audience. By negating narrative logic and employing a "melodramatic visual style" the film can "redouble the affective register of melodrama by speaking its social critiques in the body of the text" (Schoonover and Galt 225). Through pairing this technique with Fred's character Dolan speaks directly through the film, setting up rage as an inherent element of queer worlding by telling audiences about the social struggles of trans experiences, and the rage that forms within their termed acceptance.

Temporal theories of 'queer time' help to illuminate the rage that Laurence and Fred articulate by highlighting how normative understandings of temporality displace trans bodies. Queer theory use time to deconstruct normative temporalities and their affects on queer lives outside of the hegemonic expectations under neoliberal capitalism. Halberstam's book *In a Queer Time and Place* is a key text that discusses the effects of time and place on queer lives, examining how normative temporalities, i.e. the myth of the nuclear family, and urban and rural spatiality change the ways that queer people experience the world. Halberstam defines 'queer time' as "a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (6), suggesting that time is constructed around capitalist logics and that the queer refusal to participate in this is what radicalises queer experiences. Halberstam offers queer time as a critique of homonormative culture, specifically around the construction of family, to radicalise sub-cultural lives that exist outside of the desires of reproduction. Normative time has a large effect on queer lives. The rejection of normative reproduction and the reorientation that many queer people must do displaces their experiences along expected temporalities by setting queer lives on new and different paths.

Sara Ahmed describes temporal displacement through orientation in *Queer Phenomenology*, examining phenomenologically how the objects that we choose to turn to affects how we live. Orientation to Ahmed "involves directions towards objects that affect what we do, and how we inhabit space," thus meaning that queer orientations require the reinterpretation of desire objects to find new paths (28). If normative orientations rely on

heterosexual desire principles, then queer orientations must reinterpret expected temporal maps to explore new paths which lead to re-evaluated ways of being and embodiment. Normative time is an orienting object that has drawn paths that are expected to be followed. Queer time traverses these paths by forging new directions one can take through the reformulation of 'normative' expectations.

However, this is not without problem as the dissociative practice of relearning orientating objects achieves affects of rage through its inherent displacement of learned temporalities. Contradiction, again, is the root of rage through queer time, as the displacement outside of normative temporality contradicts the notion of "happiness" under heteronormative assumptions. Yet happiness only exists within capitalist understandings, going against queer logic to situate being-happy exclusively within normative temporal frameworks. Rage, and trans rage especially, comes from this contradiction, as to relearn gendered practices require trans people to step back in time and become acquainted with queer understandings of gender. *Laurence Anyways* evidences this through both Laurence and Fred, as at the beginning of the film both were on the heterosexual temporal course for a normative life, fulfilling jobs, stable relations, financial independence. But queer desire breaks this normality, disrupting their known temporality for the uneven, unsafe path of the queer. Laurence's need to re-evaluate herself through gender, orientating away from normative modes of identity, means leaving the stable binary form of cisgender behind, which in turn disrupts her progress through normative time. Fred's temporality is set along normative lines which Laurence's transition breaks. When Fred becomes pregnant, a novel situation for a queer couple, she terminates the baby without telling Laurence. Fred's queer time is built around Laurence's. Fred's decision to abort the baby disrupts the temporal logic of heterosexuality because of Laurence's queer time. Laurence's trans rage directly affects Fred, forcing Fred into a state of queer time that inevitably was not her choice.

Queer time's temporal displacement is evident within *Laurence Anyways*' use of non-diegetic shots which combine elements of melodrama with Stryker's trans rage to illuminate the contradiction within Fred's heteronormative framework. At the end of the film's second act, Laurence and Fred reunite and spend time together in the Isle of Black (*Ile aux Noix*). Up until now Laurence and Fred had not seen each other for several years with Fred marrying and having children with her new partner, while Laurence became a well-regarded poet. The two reunite because of Laurence's poems, with Laurence sending a copy to Fred in one of the film's most visually affective sequences. Fred, framed symmetrically in a long shot within

her monochromatic house, sits on the couch reading Laurence's poems. As she reads the sound of waves increases in tandem with the camera's slow track towards her face. As her reading climaxes, the off-screen sound becomes physical within the shot as water floods into the room from above. Here, Laurence's queer time has disrupted Fred's through the literal washing away of heterosexuality. On the one hand, the water can be read as a cleansing, a deep emotion re-orientation onto the path of the queer; while on the other hand, the flood could literally speak of Fred's queer desires for Laurence, crudely implied by the wetness of the non-diegetic interruption. Through this sequence, rage is found in Fred's sadness. Fred follows Laurence's clues and finds a red brink painted on the side of her house. On finding this she breaks down, Dolan pairing Fred and the brick through close-up to affectively show the longing Fred still has for her queer life. Again, Laurence's transness disrupts Fred's normative time, Fred leaving her heterosexual fantasy to explore the boundaries of queer desire with Laurence. Queer time displaces the couple along uncharted temporalities, forcing the two to confront their contradictory desires. Dolan uses melodrama's subversive aesthetic to express unarticulated affect through non-diegetic shots, linking Laurence and Fred's reorientation through visual expression.

Laurence and Fred's queer reorientation evokes affects of rage when they decide to visit a trans man and his wife (Alexandre and Fanny) living on the Isle of Black. This meeting sparks the scene's confronting end, as upon arriving back to their cottage, Fred unleashes on Laurence the shallowness and distance of this couples being; "Baked on cheap opium! … They're buried here because over there, he'd be stoned to death!" Fred's outburst is transphobic as, again, she misgenders Laurence while calling Alexandre a "freak." She continues like this until, driven by rage, she asks Laurence "who's Charlotte?" (Laurence's new partner who, after finding out that Laurence has left with Fred, told Fred's husband about the two). This is where the conflict starts; Fred churns through people in Laurence's life, trying to hurt her. Laurence lashes back as their argument gets heated and physical. Laurence wants to resume their previous relationship, but Fred wants a "normal life," one that she says they could have had but "we lost it. And it's all your fault." The disruption into queer time is the point of rage in this scene; Fred's desire for normality is in contradiction with Laurence's identity and desires. Fred is scared that her normative identity will turn her into "nothing" next to Laurence. Laurence, on the other hand, wants a life with Fred outside of the logic of normativity. Laurence cannot understand the desire to conform and would rather be her authentic self than to live within normative temporalities. It is this point that

sources the film's rage; the pull of queer desire against the push of heteronormativity. Much like Stryker's transgender rage which exists within the contradictory relationship between normativity and authenticity, queer time's rage exists within normative temporal expectations and queer phenomenological orientations.

Through his continued play between formalism and realism in *Laurence Anyways*, Dolan suggests that traditional notions of gender, time, and orientation disrupt trans lives. By forcing normative expectation on trans people, heteronormative culture has fostered affects of rage in trans people by creating a disconnect between societal expectation and trans identities. *Laurence Anyways* shows this through its formal use of lighting, costuming, dialogue, and narrative, as well as through its alignment with theories of trans rage, queer time, melodrama, and phenomenology. By combining these elements Dolan identifies the root of trans rage, situating rage's powerful affects within the contradictory nature of trans lives. Stryker suggests that rage is a negation because "gender attribution is compulsory; it codes and deploys our bodies in ways that materially affect us, yet we choose neither our marks nor the meanings they carry" (254). Melodrama heightens the emotionality of the film's characters, allowing them to act and speak in ways that serve the trans discourse of the film, while furthering Dolan's heightened film aesthetics, matching the emotionality of his characters with his expressive filmmaking. Halberstam's theories of queer time inform the contradictory expression of rage within the film by positioning temporalities as a heteronormative element impacting queer lives, which queer people learn to live outside of this through 'queer time and place.' In *Laurence Anyways* Fred and Laurence fully embody rage. For them, rage communicates their positions outside of normative expectations, while Laurence's transness is transformative and subversive.

Chapter Three

Dead Cows Don't Dance: The aesthetics and politics of disgust in *Tom at the Farm*

Much like the previous two chapters, which focus on negative affects related to queer worlding – shame and rage, respectively – this chapter will examine how disgust functions to subvert common narratives of rural homo-erotic desire. After finishing *Laurence Anyways* Dolan was looking for a "change of direction" in his next project. He considered his first three features an "inadvertent trilogy" all linked by the themes of impossible love (Dolan 7). In contrast, *Tom at the Farm* is a dark psychological thriller based on the play by Michel Marc. *Tom at the Farm* maintains Dolan's expressionistic style but evokes a much darker tone than his previous work. After premiering *Laurence Anyways* at Cannes in May 2012, Dolan produced a script with Michel Marc for a shoot beginning in October 2012. He struggled with the adaptation of the play to the screen, concerned that audiences might "grow tired of seeing the same sets and people," yet he wanted to retain the feelings of claustrophobia that permeate the play (Dolan 11). Horror infects *Tom at the Farm*, which haunts the queer with spectres of violence. While *Tom at the Farm* maintains ideas of impossible love, the central theme derives from a quote from Marc – "before learning how to love, homosexuals learn how to lie" (Dolan 12). This idea informs Dolan's treatment of queerness and being throughout *Tom at the Farm*. The film tones down Dolan's kitsch and colour while embracing aesthetics of isolation and dread, to offer an experience rooted in affects of disgust.

While his first three features are examples of melodrama that explore "impossible love" within urban settings, *Tom at the Farm* examines loss, grief, and violence in rural Québec. The film tells the story of Tom, a young advertising executive played by Dolan, who goes to the home of his deceased partner, Guillaume, for his funeral only to find that Guillaume's family knows nothing of him. Francis (Guillaume's violent and abhorrent brother) and Agathe (Francis' lonely Mother) run the titular farm. Francis is the film's antagonist; he is violent and outwardly homophobic, directing his disgust at Tom through his controlling behaviour. Tom soon becomes a surrogate brother and son to Francis and Agathe, replacing Guillaume as a farmhand, whereas Francis becomes a surrogate partner to Tom, stepping in to fill the lonely void that Guillaume has left. The constant erotic conflict between Tom and Francis animates the film. Both characters play as objects of disgust but to differing degrees. Where Tom elicits disgust within Francis because of his queerness, Francis elicits disgust from the audience due to his moral reprehensibility. The film minimises Dolan's

usual visual style, with the extreme colours and patterns of Dolan's urban films replaced with the monotonous yellows and browns of the country accompanying images of dead cows, blood, and rural neglect. However, much of his cinematic flair – extended close-ups, camp mise-en-scène, stylised music, and aspect ratio changes – remain. Dolan's queer visuality allows *Tom at the Farm*'s disgust-evoking imagery to infect its queer romance, thereby demonstrating that the act of queer desire is contaminated through its relationship with the disgusting in rural queer narratives. By doing so, the film establishes an aesthetic centred on disgust to highlight homophobic violence within queer narratives. Julian Hanich's "poetics of cinematic disgust" will shed light on how *Tom at the Farm* integrates disgust affects into its visual landscape; Hanich's theory provides a framework for the function of disgust within the film's subversion of rural queer romance. By subverting common tropes associated with representations of rural gay masculinity, *Tom at the Farm* illuminates the homophobia present in contemporary depictions of the closeted queer.

Using Carl Plantinga's examination of physical and socio-moral disgust, as well as Hanich's "poetics of cinematic disgust," this chapter will examine how Dolan as a queer filmmaker works through homophobic disgust (disgust towards queer people and disgust from queer people) through the visceral and affective images of physical disgust in *Tom at the Farm*. Disgust as a philosophical topic has been argued as a phenomenological issue of aesthetic taste. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Fredrick Nietzsche appropriate disgust in its (anti)aesthetic forms by linking disgust "to an overindulgence, an excessive sweetness that past a certain point becomes nauseating" (Brinkema 125). Disgust, here, is the opposite of pleasure and beauty and is directly affected by the overconsumption of our desires. Disgust arises from desirable objects which are contaminated through the unknown or foreign. Sara Ahmed cites an example from the diaries of Charles Darwin where he associates disgust with his experiences with the Indigenous people of Tierra del Fuego. When someone touched a piece of meat that he was eating, Darwin "felt utter disgust at my food being touched by a naked savage" (Ahmed 2014: 82). Critical of Darwin, Ahmed highlights how social prejudices appropriate disgust as a political device by establishing hierarchy in relation to repulsive affect. Yet, disgust remains as an ironically pleasurable cinematic affect, contradicting itself in the satisfaction audiences find in disgust. Through metaphoric and literal representations in *Tom at the Farm*, disgust highlights the socio-political hierarchies which dominate cinema's ideological landscape through association with repelling images of rot, violence, and urine.

Disgust works as affect in its pre-cognitive capabilities, establishing itself within the body to distance oneself from objects that may harm. Disgust originates within the gut; the fluids and images that churn and choke the body (food, rot, bodily waste, bacteria) remain as the primary source of repulsion. As an object-oriented affect disgust repulses that which could be dangerous, non-normative, and strange, as "it is inseparable from an intrinsic interest in the object" (Kolnai 587). While Plantinga argues that the "visual, tactile, or olfactory contact with rats, cockroaches, urine, faeces, and vomit has a similar affect on people across cultures" (82), giving disgust universality, in conjunction with Ahmed's critical approach it is evident that these disgust objects affect people differently depending on their cultural orientation. However, disgust is strongly affected by objects which are infused with context, meaning that one culture's disgusting object affects another differently. Aurel Kolnai presents disgust in tandem with fear and hatred as "acts or attitudes or cognitive states of consciousness which on the one hand are clearly governed by an intentional object, and on the other hand, express something like a passion aroused in the self" (582). The disgusting object creates a sense of flight within bodies, "not flight from the object's radius or action" but from "a possible intimate contact and union with it" placing disgust in direct conversation with desire (Kolnai 587). In linking disgust and desire this chapter offers a queer reading of disgust because disgust regulates non-normative tastes on what 'should' repulse. Nearness and social attitudes give context to disgusting objects by influencing how the body interacts and interprets repulsion. Meaning, that while you may find your boggers perfectly edible, ingesting someone else's may infuse that object with disgusting context.

Kolnai, in an overtly heteronormative example, uses the image of a naked man to highlight how nearness and social understandings give context to disgust objects. He suggests that while a naked male body might not inherently repulse, one might find the "experience [of] a male body amorously pressing against his as disgusting" (587). This suggests that it is not the body itself that is disgusting, rather, the close proximity to the object which evokes the negative affects of disgust (Ahmed 2014: 85). Kolnai's anecdote also illuminates the social relations of disgust. Highlighting the social influences that code our understanding of disgust objects, furthers an analysis of the dialectical relationship between disgust and desire. In *Tom at the Farm*, Francis is the focal point of disgust as his homophobic attitudes permeate the film with anticipation and revulsion because of the violence he represents. With Francis, Dolan subverts the heteronormative narrative of the disgusting queer for an exploration of the disgusting straight. Francis appears as the disgusting object in his most

violent scenes as Dolan pairs Francis' abhorrent characterisation with images of saliva, urine, and blood to indicate Francis, not just as an object to fear, but more importantly as a character designed to repulse. In contrast, Tom is not an inherently disgusting character, rather, Francis' homophobic disgust is transferred onto Tom's body, marking Tom physically with cuts, bruises, and sweat. The complexities of presenting two characters as physically disgusting furthers *Tom at the Farm*'s deconstruction of queer disgust as it evidences how homophobic attitudes from violent heterosexuality mark queer bodies through socio-moral disgust beliefs.

Kolnai's theory of disgust as phenomenological affect and its function as a repulsive device is key to understanding how disgust affects audiences via cinema—namely, through audience interactions with disgust objects on screen. Images of disgust (gore, sex, bodily fluids) have been censored throughout the history of Hollywood cinema, for instance through the implementation of the Hays Code in the 1930s. Yet, disgust has persisted as an affective emotion mediated through the screen by giving distance between the disgusting object and its viewer. The popularity of the horror genre is the most obvious indication of disgust's allure, as the genre is rife with images of slimy monsters, gory violence, and sexually explicit repulsion, which drives the genre's popularity (Cherry 155). Other popular genres also employ disgust to varying degrees. Gross-out comedies like *Dumb and Dumber* (2004) and *Jackass* (2002) use disgust for comedic purposes, allowing audiences "expressions of disgust that are pleasurable" (William 20). Yet, many art films use images that incite disgust in tandem with themes such as queerness and race, to make their audiences uncomfortable while questioning the relationship between uncomfortability and socio-moral attitudes. An appropriate queer example is Devine's consumption of dog poo at the end of *Pink Flamingos* (1972), as John Waters brings together the ingestible disgust of eating dog faeces and the social disgust of the queer outsider. Plantinga calls this interaction with disgusting objects "physical disgust," which highlights the biological affects of disgusting objects that remind audiences of their own physicality. Plantinga breaks down physical disgust into two categories – core disgust and animal reminder disgust - to distinguish between the cause of each type. Core disgust relates to taste aversions in the most literal sense: to food and the dangers "about what we touch or put in our mouths" (Plantinga 82). In a cinematic or visual context, this version of disgust relates to images and sounds of mould, rot, decay, and vomit. Animal reminder disgust, according to Plantinga, is incited by phenomena that remind "us of our animal origins" (82). Through "encounters with violations of the body" such as disease,

injury, vermin, and death, animal reminder disgust "can be regarded as a kind of guardian of the temple of the body" (82). While disgust can be understood as more than just a physical interaction, as a phenomenological affect disgust relies on intrusions upon the body, crossing the border between acceptability and repulsion.

Physical disgust infects *Tom at the Farm* through Dolan's manipulation of cinematic form which allows for the disgusting images to permeate the screen, leaving behind the foul taste of disgust. In analysing disgust onscreen, Hanich outlines five "poetics of cinematic disgust" that are useful in identifying how disgust works in *Tom at the Farm*, to "provide a number of brushstrokes for a broader panoramic picture of disgust" (11). Each poetic describes a specific element of cinematic disgust to evaluate how the disgusting is presented to an audience. Dolan's depiction of Francis' disgusting actions and Tom's affected body align with Hanich's outline of cinematic disgust most obviously in a scene in which Francis chases Tom through a dying cornfield after Tom threatens to expose Francis' lies to Agathe.

Figure 7 Tom fleeing through the cornfield

Temporality is Hanich's first poetic of cinematic disgust and is a formal element that *Tom at the Farm* utilises to indicate Francis as a disgust object, observed through his anticipatory reveal within the cornfield sequence. Temporality determines how a disgust object is presented to its audience; either suddenly or anticipatorily. Sudden disgust is an "abrupt confrontation with the revolting object," which "interrupts the […] forward-driven temporal flow of the moving images" and subverts the audience's expectations (14). In contrast, anticipatory disgust "is produced when…the viewer expects to confront a disgusting

object or act anytime soon" (14). The cornfield scene in *Tom at the Farm* leans heavily on anticipatory disgust with the film showing Tom, after running deep into the sharp cornfield, waiting and listening for Francis' inevitable approach. The sequence starts with Tom telling Francis, "I will tell your mother everything and then I'll be gone," a phrase that lingers on an image of Francis' masculine figure before cutting to a tracking shot of Tom running through corn. This tracking shot depicts Tom as a blur, glancing back but pushing forward. The spectre of Francis is heavily implied, but his location is unknown to Tom and the audience. As Tom enters a clearing within the cornfield, Dolan's use of a handheld camera, focusing on a mid-shot of Tom looking frantically to see whether Francis is close, adds to the anticipatory nature of the sequence. The audience is aware that Tom has threatened Francis, but his subsequent actions are uncertain, implying disgust through the uncertainty of the violent retaliation that awaits Tom. The anticipatory nature of Francis' arrival heightens the revulsion to his presence when he finally bursts through the corn onto Tom.

Hanich's second poetic of cinematic disgust, 'presence', examines how audiences are shown disgust objects. Hanich distinguishes between perceived (directly shown) or imagined (implied or indirectly shown) presence (18). After Francis emerges from the cornfield and tackles Tom to the ground, Francis spits into Tom's mouth as an indication of his disgust towards Tom. Dolan focuses attention on this disgusting moment through the shrinking of the film's aspect ratio. While the majority of *Tom at the Farm* is shot in a 1.85:1 aspect ratio, in moments of heightened sexual disgust Dolan vertically narrows the aspect ratio to draw audiences into images that should repel. Dolan repeats this motif at the end of the second act when Tom and Francis share a drunken sexual moment, as well as at the end of the film, when Tom escapes the farm, connecting their relationship through disgust. Within the cornfield scene the aspect ratio narrows on Francis' violent actions towards Tom. Francis chokes Tom and spits into his mouth, while Tom is bleeding and covered with mud from the sharp cornfield. The transmission of bodily fluids evokes 'animal reminder disgust' through Francis' violation of Tom's body. As the frame narrows in on this violation, the physical disgust present in the scene becomes claustrophobic, reflecting the disgust evoked by Francis while mirroring the inescapability of Tom's disgust reactions.

Character engagement demonstrates whether disgust is presented with sympathy or empathy. The distinction between disgust-empathy and disgust-sympathy relies on the audience's engagement with the disgust object. Disgust-empathy occurs when "there is a high degree of congruence between the character and the viewer" (22), while disgust-sympathy

happens when "the viewer […] feels disgusted due to some additional information" that the characters do not have (23). In this sequence, one feels disgust-empathy with Tom, as his and our reactions to Francis' disgusting actions - his violation of Tom's body through his sharing of bodily fluids – are those of disgust. As the sequence nears its end, Tom appears in close-up, narrowed by the shrunken aspect ratio and cowering under Francis' disgusting violence. As Francis exits the frame, the camera lingers on Tom, revealing his dirty, bloody, and eaten up fingernails as he shivers in fear on the ground. This disgust image inspires viewers to empathise with Tom, because of Francis' vile actions, while also depicting Tom himself as a disgusting object. This presentation of Tom as a disgusting victim parallels Francis' views towards him, showing that while Francis' actions are abhorrent and repulsive, as they are inflicted because he sees Tom's homosexuality as repulsive. In turn, disgust mirrors the proto-affective cycle of shame in *I Killed My Mother*, by showing that disgust is transferred from the non-queer body onto the queer through social attitudes. Tom was not disgusting until Francis forced disgust onto him, violating Tom's body to mark it with visual evidence of disgust, metaphorically linking Francis' socio-moral disgust with physically disgusting images.

The final two poetics of cinematic disgust work together to highlight disgust's shared affects with alternative phenomenological modes and cinematic senses. Hanich terms these "synaesthetic audiovision" – senses other than vision and sound that are affected in moments of disgust – and "affective co-occurrence" – other emotional affects that are not disgust but work alongside it (25-27). Within this sequence Dolan evokes disgust not only through vision and sound, but through smell, touch, and taste, using the performativity of his actors. The film relies on Dolan's performance as Tom to deliver this distaste. We can see the fear in his actions as he glances back through the cornfield, just as we can read the putrid taste of unwanted spit and blood on Dolan's face. While sight and sound elicit fear within the sequence, Dolan heightens disgust by inviting viewers to taste the dirt and saliva forced upon Tom while feeling the sharp edges of the razor corn that we followed Tom through. Kolnai suggests that like disgust, "the agent in fear flees the object which he feels threatens his survival, safety, welfare, or any of his vital interests" (584). It is Kolnai's fearful fleeing that we first see within this scene, and it is the fear of Francis' actions that we inevitably find disgusting, as fear reinforces the social hierarchy of queer/straight communities. By combining disgust, other notably negative affects, and furthering cinema's sensory expressions through taste and smell, Dolan complicates our view of Tom and Francis'

disgust. With the addition of these other senses, Dolan offers disorder to disgust, proposing that disgust not only registers in the obvious examples of disgust actions (Francis) but also in the target of disgust reactions (Tom).

Disgust is not limited to the physical, however. Rather, rhetorically disgust can denounce social behaviours that subvert social norms. Plantinga positions social disgust as "socio-moral" disgust, as disgust that breaks the boundaries of what we find moral or just (Plantinga 83), or as Sara Ahmed explains, the nearness to "othered" bodies is "the cause of 'our sickness' precisely insofar as the other is seeable and knowable as stranger-than-me and stranger-to us" (Ahmed 2014: 83). Ahmed highlights socio-moral disgust in her discussion of Darwin's diary, where he finds the body of the "naked savage" to be "utterly disgusting" (82). Here the object of disgust is not only rooted in core and animal reminder disgust principles, but rather in the objectification and "strangeness" of others. Disgust is readily utilised as a way of controlling or regulating social behaviours deemed immoral to maintain "social hierarchies and even to demonize certain people" (Plantinga 83). The physical reactions to socio-moral disgust, however, are much the same as those of physical disgust, producing affects of repulsion at the nearness of foreign objects. More recently socio-moral disgust has morphed into the rhetoric of offensiveness. Offensive language weaponizes disgust through ideological repulsion, as eliciting "disgust involves a sense of offensiveness accompanied by thoughts of contamination" (La Rosa and Mir 225). Offensiveness is evident in the reaction to non-normative sexual behaviours, with queer people receiving much of socio-moral disgust's brute force. In a study done by Caswell and Sackett-Fox on disgust reactions to gay men, they found that "exposure to sexual minorities and depictions of same-sex sexual behaviours elicit disgust" because queer behaviour "deviates from traditional social norms governing the behaviour of men and women" (597). *Tom at the Farm* evidences this disgust reaction to gay men through its metaphorical linking of physical disgust images with politics of socio-moral disgust, as seen in Francis' disgusted actions towards Tom. This highlights how violent attitudes towards queer people are actualised through narratives of the rural queer, as the paring of animal death, urine, and violence with queer representations further denotes the queer as morally disgusting.

While Francis plays as the obvious centre of Dolan's disgust, *Tom at the Farm* still highlights the associations between gay sex and disgust through the implications of gay cruising. Throughout the film, Tom is the recipient of Francis' homophobic disgust, as Francis is disgusted at Tom because of his non-normative sexuality and his inability to

maintain the farm's reproductive inheritance because of the lack of reproduction his queerness allows. Francis' role as masculine protector of his mother and his farm, leads him to project his homophobic disgust, that once landed on his brother, onto Tom as the new brother-surrogate in his life. A scene at the beginning of the film in which Francis traps Tom in a bathroom after Guillaume's funeral highlights Tom as an object of homophobic disgust. The sequence is shot in close-up as Francis looms over Tom after pushing him into a toilet cubical. The confrontation starts after Tom fails to deliver a speech at the funeral which he had promised Francis he would. This upset Agathe and in turn Francis, who channels this onto Tom. Although not inherently violent, this scene combines a disgusting setting (bathroom) and sound design (urinating) to provoke socio-moral disgust towards Francis' controlling actions, while representing Tom as the recipient of Francis' homophobic disgust. Through the bathroom setting, Dolan evokes the disgust associated with public bathrooms with repulsion felt within audiences because of Tom's inability to escape. While using the sound of people urinating combined with the close-up cinematography, this scene sets up socio-moral disgust through core disgust, linking the affective qualities of the latter with the former to push audiences away from Francis' behaviour. Public bathrooms are common places for gay men to meet for anonymous sex. By setting this sequence here, Dolan implies homo-erotic desire between the two men, upholding narratives of gay men as disgusting through the vulgar setting. Moreover, this setting queers the stereotypical character of the closeted rural queer, Francis, by placing his aggression within a setting that elicits images of anonymous gay sex.

Dolan furthers the stereotypical violence of the rural queer by infusing Francis' characterisation with literal depictions of disgust to represent the homophobic attitudes of socio-moral disgust. The prejudice of characters outside of the farm towards Francis illustrates his disgusting reputation. The doctor Tom visits after running through the cornfield appears apprehensive at the notion that Tom knows "the Longcamp family," while the bartender who Tom talks to at the end almost kicks him out for knowing Francis. While fear may seem the operative affect, the bartender's reluctance to divulge what Francis had done hints at the repulsion he feels towards Francis' violence. His disgust becomes evident when he tells Tom of Francis' violent actions against a boy that his brother Guillaume was dancing with, grabbing "his face with both hands and opened it." Francis' violent reputation and the disgust that it elicits within the community highlights the function of socio-moral disgust as an affect that upholds acceptable morality. As the town repels Francis because of his actions,

they distance themselves from the homophobic violence they find disgusting, decontaminating their community in the process. Dolan highlights Francis' encroachment of moral boundaries through the bartender's story. The boy appears briefly at the end of the film, revealing the effects of Francis' violence through the boy's torn face. By linking this physically disgusting image (the boys scarred face) with Francis' violently repulsive actions, Dolan highlights the link between physical disgust and socio-moral disgust. Because of Francis' hyper-masculine persona and the violence associated with it, the town has rejected him, forcing him to remain trapped within the farm.

Figure 8 Francis confronts Tom in a bathroom

While physical and socio-moral disgust highlights the varying ways that disgusting affects repel, the relationship between disgust and desire evokes an irony within disgust. Disgust and desire seem like opposing affective expressions, one repelling while the other draws in. Yet together disgust/desire works at dissecting socio-moral disgust's obsession with queer lives, by appropriating the desire for the queer while juxtaposing this against disgust towards the queer. These ideas are most evident within cinema, as audiences commonly desire to see disgusting images onscreen as the safety that the mediated images offer provides distance between the viewer and the disgust object. Queer cinema relies on disgust/desire to present narratives that are perceived as disgusting (queer romance) through a desirable lens. The narrative of the closeted rural cowboy is an example of disgust/desire that is common in queer cinema, with films like *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *God's Own Country* (2017)

exemplifying this relationship. Within these films the queer performs hyper-masculinity, a toxic mix of denial and acceptance that often ends in violence, rejection, or death.

The mythic film cowboy is one of the oldest characters in Hollywood cinema, represented by "his unique attire; the solitary lifestyle; rodeo culture; farming and working with animals; the homestead and its restrictions on freedom" (Needham 40). Both *Brokeback Mountain* and *God's Own Country* queers this character type to show the tension between desire/disgust while still presenting these relationships romantically, by depicting hyper-masculine characters working in typically straight environments (the rural farm) who express closeted queer desire with violent hostility. Kristen Wright, in the introduction to *Disgust and Desire: The Paradox of the Monster*, suggests that "man has always had a love/hate relationship with the monstrous because the monsters that we create reflect our deepest forbidden desire" (*ix*). If monsters are reflections of what we desire, then the modern image of the gay cowboy - the violent, rural, heteronormative queer - more Ennis Del Mar than Jack Twist, is our contemporary myth. In *Tom at the Farm*, Francis exemplifies the closeted gay cowboy as a man-made monster whose violent disgust is in reaction to his closeted queer desires.

The plot similarities between Francis Lee's 2017 film *God's Own Country* and *Tom at the Farm* highlight Dolan's subversion of the closeted gay cowboy trope as well as the cinematic function of desire/disgust dialectics. *God's Own Country* tells the story of Johnny Saxby who takes over running his family's sheep farm in Yorkshire after his father falls ill. Johnny is a classic representation of the closet gay cowboy evidenced by his binge drinking, fighting, and fucking. When he hires Romanian migrant Gheorghe to work the farm over the lambing season, the two men, after initially being hostile towards each other, start a sexual relationship together. *God's Own Country* acknowledges the desire/disgust relationship through its dirty, rural setting, yet contradicts its romantic narrative by pairing its central queer romance with images of mud, piss, and animal death. Much like in *Tom at the Farm*, Gheorghe and Johnny's first sexual encounter takes place in a field with the two men covered in dirt and urine. However, unlike *Tom at the Farm*, *God's Own Country* maintains the myth of the closeted gay cowboy through its reliance on the romance between the two disgusted men, connecting homo-erotic desire with physical disgust within a romantic context. *Tom at the Farm* appropriates this narrative by showing the charming power of the closeted gay cowboy, as Francis represents the tension between queer desires and queer disgust. By emphasizing the repulsive violence of the hyper-masculine, queer relationship while

associating this trope with physical disgust images, *Tom at the Farm* highlights the violent closeted gay as inherently homophobic, subverting the romanticism identified in these depictions of rural queer love.

Tom is obviously lustful towards Francis, and vice-versa, with their sexual tension evidenced in several violent sequences that deconstruct the desire/disgust relationship to highlight the homophobic narrative within the closeted gay cowboy trope. Tom lusts after Francis because he sees him as a replacement for Guillaume. While Francis desires Tom as a means of escape, not just from the farm but from his boring, normative lifestyle. Yet the pair's co-dependent violence illustrates the toxic homophobia on which their relationship is built by contrasting the violent romanticism of *God's Own Country.* Dolan shows this in a sequence in which Tom and Francis seductively dance together, mixing physically disgusting images with escapist confession and lust. This scene starts with Francis and Tom cleaning blood off their hands after the birth of a calf, which Francis names 'Bitch Ass' after Tom. Dolan's camera lingers on Tom, obviously upset, as he washes the blood off his hands. Francis comes over, offering to help Tom clean off the blood with the camera tightly framed on their touching hands. Here, Tom and Francis share an intimate moment that is tainted by the disgust and horror of the calf's blood as Dolan purposefully aligns their romance with images of death and repulsion. After washing their hands, the two move into the neighbouring barn where Francis, in a move to regain control over Tom, forces him to take drugs. This exemplifies animal reminder disgust through the forced entry of foreign matter into Tom's unwilling body. Here, Dolan mixes physically disgusting images of blood and animal birth with gay desire to highlight the disfunction of Tom and Francis' violent relationship.

Once high, Tom and Francis move into a large open room and dance the tango, furthering the disgust/desire tensions that imbue their relationship. This is one of the film's most tense yet intimate scenes, fusing the proceeding event's inherent disgust with queer aesthetics to produce feelings of desire/disgust within the audience. What is initially most notable is the intense change in colour. Yellow infuses this sequence, spilling through the windows to create a space that feels more fantasy than reality. The sequence starts with Francis and Tom in close-up followed by Dolan's handheld camera, offering an inescapable closeness. Then Francis asks Tom "how did you learn to dance like this?" Tom answers with a glance, implying he learnt from Guillaume. This dialogue brings into the scene the spectre of the dead queer, enhancing the tension between the two while also reminding the audience

of the contradictions between the disgust we feel towards Francis and the erotic desires represented onscreen. The camera then changes from a handheld close-up to a stationary wide-angle, showing the pair dancing within the wide yellow space. Here Francis talks of his desires to leave the farm and his feelings at being trapped there because of his mother, saying "sometimes I wish she'd go quickly. Find her one morning in the kitchen, y'know. Phone in her hand, drooling on the floor, eyes rolled back." Here, the dialogue reminds us of Francis' disgusting desires, reinforced by the camera's return to a close-up view of Francis dipping Tom in slow motion.

The scene ends by revealing Agathe standing in the doorway, having overheard Francis' desires for her death. She is framed within a door, blue lighting contrasting with the yellow of the barn, a blank but knowing look on her face. Agathe exits the scene saying, "I heard every word, and that is no name for a calf," while Tom and Francis stand motionless in the middle of the barn. "It's your fault," Francis sneers at Tom. Francis' antagonism towards Tom at the end of the scene emphasises the controlling power he has over Tom. In turn, Dolan illuminates the ideas of desire/disgust as at once Tom and Francis are represented as homoerotic lovers and abuser and victim with Francis gaslighting Tom into staying on the farm by feeding into Tom queer desires.

Figure 9 Aspect ratio shrinking onto violent lust

Dolan follows this with another scene, this time more violent and erotic, that highlights the desire/disgust parallel while mixing physical disgust sounds and images with socio-moral disgust behaviour. In this scene Francis and Tom are drinking somewhere by a

corrugated metal building, heightening the bored rural energy of the film. The scene opens with a wide shot of Tom and Francis, paired with the sound of urine hitting the metal building and Francis turning to Tom saying, "you're a waste of sperm." In the first few seconds of this scene, Dolan has introduced images of disgust through the sound and dialogue, infusing what is to come with an uncomfortable reminder of bad smells and sexual waste. The scene continues, showing Francis and Tom drunk, as Francis continues his dehumanisation of Tom. The two get closer together as Francis puts his hands around Tom's neck. Harking back to the violence of the cornfield sequence, the aspect ratio vertically shrinks the shot around Tom's face in close-up. Like the cornfield scene, this focuses disgust by forcing us to linger in the stink of homophobic violence as a display of desire. The parallel between these two sequences reminds the audience of Francis' morally disgusting behaviour while shifting this behaviour into a homoerotic context. This furthers *Tom at the Farm*'s dissection of the desire/disgust relationship around the closet gay cowboy trope by recontextualising Francis' violent behaviour and Tom's acceptance of this violence. In this scene Tom is the passive audience, accepting the rural queer stereotype in its intended romantic context. Yet Dolan subverts what could be something pleasurable by infusing this scene with physical disgust images. Juxtaposing physical disgust and socio-moral disgust within a homo-erotic context, Dolan suggests that our representation of gay men as lustfully violent furthers the image of the queer as disgusting. *Tom at the Farm* illuminates this claim through the representation of its gay relationship as abusive, which criticises violence as a core principle within rural queer narratives by highlighting the homophobia at the centre of the closeted gay cowboy trope.

In the end, Tom escapes the farm and Francis' violent lust. As Rufus Wainwright's "Going to a Town" plays over montage shots of a city landscape, the queer safely returns home from his trip to the countryside. *Tom at the Farm*'s ending reinforces the metro-normativity of the queer, but in doing so shows the dangers of being lured into narratives that continue the disgusting qualities that many attribute to queer encounters. The relationship between disgust as a physical and moral affect queers our understanding of disgust by highlighting who and what we find disgusting. Dolan effectively uses images of physical disgust (blood, spit, death, cum) to evoke the socio-moral representation of the rural queer cowboy trope, which mixes romance with toxic hyper-masculine violence. Eugenie Brinkema suggests that "fear is of the fact something is […] while disgust is of the being-so that something is in its likeness," meaning that while we can fear something that we can identify with, we find disgust in objects that too closely remind us of ourselves (161). Queer people,

fearful of the homophobic violence that persists in everyday life, express disgust for ourselves by producing disgusting representations of homo-social relationships and accepting them as the norm. Films like *God's Own Country* and *Brokeback Mountain* persist these disgusting narratives by showing queer love as violent within a hyper-masculine framework. But through tight camera work, familiar narrative structures, odious sound design, and extenuated mise-en-scène Dolan subverts this to show the inherent repulsion of pairing queer love with violence.

Chapter Four

"Liberté": Musical Nostalgia and Utopia in *Mommy*

Dolan's *Mommy* (2014) revives his fixation on the mother-son relationship. With *Mommy,* Dolan sought to redeem the mother figure, saying, "back in the days of *I Killed My Mother,* I felt like I wanted to punish my mum. Only five years have passed…now I seek her revenge" (Dolan 2014: 5). Dolan sought his revenge by evoking nostalgia through *Mommy*'s production design, soundtrack, and cinematography, in a contemporary present to offer his troubled mother a queer future. While *Mommy* is Dolan's first film that does not directly represent queer characters, although Dolan had originally intended on making the son, Steve, "gay" (Buchanan), the film maintains the queer approach to family-making, temporality, and performativity apparent throughout Dolan's cinema. Themes such as otherness, rage, and nostalgia exist throughout *Mommy*, often expressed through music and vocality (D'Aoust), to frame the familial narrative within queer iconography. The film's most striking formal feature is its 1:1 aspect ratio, common in early photography and Instagram, but rare in cinema. Dolan had previously experimented with 1:1 in his music video *College Boy* and expanded this experiment into a feature film, allowing *Mommy* an intensity and claustrophobia that a more traditional aspect ratio would not. As with *Laurence Anyways*, Dolan adopts a melodramatic framework for *Mommy,* which impacts the film's music video aesthetics, flamboyant cinematic style (in both characterisation and visuals), and quotidian dialogue, while focusing attention on nostalgic objects, which imbue the film with temporal complexity.

Affects of nostalgia infuse *Mommy*'s aesthetics, characterisations, and settings, which create a complex temporality, placing past, present, and future in dialectical conversation. From its production design, including the film's costumes and technological props, to its soundtrack, *Mommy* aesthetically situates itself within a visual style familiar from the late 1990s and early 2000 – and exemplified by Die's costuming which *Erin Brockovich* (2000) directly influenced (Kaufman). Yet the film's ostensibly future setting challenges its stylistic orientation in the past. The film begins with intertitles stating, "In a fictional Canada, a new government comes into power during the federal elections of 2015," which sets the film in a near-future, speculative context. Other than the passing of the fictional S-14 Bill, which "stipulates that the parent of a child with behaviour problems has, in a situation of financial distress, physical and/or phycological danger, the moral and legal right to put his children in the care of any public hospital, without due process of law," *Mommy*'s setting is relatively

close to reality - 2015 Québec - yet Dolan utilises music and montage to evokes within his characters nostalgic longing for a bygone time – Steve's childhood when his father was still alive. The temporal dissonance between the contemporary setting and the nostalgic production design embeds a sense of dysfunction within the film, which is simultaneously a future-focused speculative work of fiction and an early 2000's period piece. Interwoven through *Mommy* is a sense of hope, a longing for a better world, and an examination of family-making and state power. Negative affects – shame, rage, disgust - illuminated Dolan's films previously. This chapter will spotlight nostalgia to examine *Mommy*'s animation of nostalgic longing and utopian desire. Scholarly theories on nostalgia in conjunction with José Esteban Muñoz' *Cruising Utopia* will clarify Dolan's setting of *Mommy* in both the future and the past while illuminating the function of nostalgia as an affect that contributes to queer utopia. *Mommy*'s carefully curated soundtrack evokes the past while imagining a future queer utopia; music is therefore critical to *Mommy*'s complex coordination of nostalgic affects.

Mommy follows Die, Steve, and Kyla as they navigate the complexities of queer family-making and past trauma through nostalgic affects that situate their lives outside of normative temporalities. The film begins with Steve's return home after he set fire to his reform school. Steve has ADHD and attachment issues and had been sent away to amend this behaviour. Steve, whose frequent outburst of anger often outweighs his baby-faced charm, is still grieving the loss of his father and relies heavily on mementos from the past, notably photographs and a mixtape, to stay connected to his dad. Steve's mother, Die, is a widow and journalist, who aesthetically resembles Chantale from *I Killed My Mother*, who was also stylised according to a camp, kitschy, early 2000's visual setting (the same actress, Anne Dorval, plays Chantale and Die). Both mother and son struggle to live with each other as they start a new life in Saint-Hubert. The reignition of their relationship is rocky at first, but stabilises, for a time, when Kyla enters their lives. Kyla is their new neighbour who, like Die, is grieving the loss of her son, resulting in a debilitating stutter that has forced her into temporary leave from her job as a teacher. The trio quickly develops a close intimacy after Kyla intervenes after a fight between Die and Steve. The film centres on this relationship, to explore queer family-making, maternal desires, and hope through a nostalgic worldview.

More so than shame, rage, or disgust, nostalgia is an affective mode closely tied to temporality. Swiss physician Johannes Hofner first theorised nostalgia by combining the Greek *nostos*, meaning "return home," and *algia*, meaning "painful condition" (Pickering and Keightley 921). Because of its psychological origins, nostalgia was first a diagnosable

condition relating to "prolonged and usually involuntary absences from home" with symptoms like "melancholia and weeping to anorexia and suicide" (Pickering and Keightley 922). While the concept of nostalgia evolved from a medical problem to a widespread cultural condition, nostalgic longing remains associated with melancholia, grief, and trauma. According to postmodernist theory, nostalgia attempts to recontextualise the past within the present, but not a reality-oriented past, rather, a mediated selection of past desires. Nostalgia works, then, as a worlding practice in the sense that it orients the afflicted towards objects, ideas, and people long gone while constructing an alternative present and future. Focusing nostalgic affect through a queer and temporal lens, *Mommy* zeroes in on how objects from the past can build towards an idealised utopian future, through the conduit of the present.

Queer and postmodern accounts of nostalgia are radically different; while postmodern critics view nostalgia as de-historicised sentimentality, queer theory presents nostalgia as a utopian device. Fredric Jameson criticises nostalgia because of its de-historicisation, fearing that under nostalgia's influence, "history may then have little or nothing to do with its reality, while mediated representations of the past may hamper the development of historical awareness" (Pickering and Keightley 923). According to this view, the past loses all sense of context because nostalgia allows people to selectively choose images and objects from the past while recontextualising them within the present, thereby distorting their original (historical) meanings. If nostalgia is "conceived as seeking to attain the unattainable, to satisfy the unsatisfiable," then the nostalgic longing for a lost past is due to "the irreversibility of time" (Pickering and Keightley 920). Within a queer context, de-historicisation means that the negative connotations that are associated with queer histories disappear within a reimagined present or future. In *Mommy,* Dolan challenges the postmodern view of nostalgia, liberating nostalgic music from its historical roots to carry affects from the past into the present, thereby queering the present via music associated with the past.

Dolan's nostalgic music in *Mommy* confronts time's "irreversibility." Cinema has the power to situate cultural objects within any given moment in the past, present, or future; nostalgic cinema has the capacity to free queer histories from the complexities of the past. Through nostalgia, cinema can incorporate the past into the present, selecting past objects to construct an alternative present/future. *Mommy* puts the past in conversation with the present through its integration of nostalgic music, allowing Dolan's characters to experience desire for the future while queering their relationships with the past.

Moreover, *Mommy*'s soundtrack negates Jameson's de-historicised nostalgia by displacing temporality within the film. Music is the most obvious example of nostalgic form in *Mommy*, functioning as "the stimulation of a form of public nostalgia whereby the collective responses of many millions of audience members can be triggered by recognition of symbolic resources or events from the past" (Inglis 86). Dolan uses popular music from his adolescence to establish *Mommy*'s sonic landscape within the past while bringing private objects of nostalgia into "the dissatisfactions of the present for the attractions of an idealised past" (Inglis 86). Dolan evokes nostalgia's home-sick origins at the beginning of the film, by pairing Dido's "White Flag" (2003) with Steve's return home. At this point, Steve's reform school has expelled him for setting fire to the cafeteria and injuring a student. This event forces Steve back to the Québec suburbs and into Die's care. Here, Dolan uses "White Flag" to set up nostalgia as a primary affect while reflecting his character's apprehension at Steve's return home. The song is about the return to a volatile romance, with the narrator's exclamation "I will go down with this ship/and I won't put my hands up and surrender" paralleling Steve and Die's doomed commitment to their tumultuous relationship. A culturally recognisable object, "White Flag" situates Die and Steve within a nostalgic framework, while reflecting their apprehension at their reunion.

The musical stylings of Dido echo the personal/public dissonance of musical nostalgia through "White Flag's" contrasting lyrics and tonal shifts. The song employs a simple structure, instrumentation, and rhythm throughout the verses. While relying on a 4:4 drum beat and lofty synth chords to portray her personal failings, Dido contrasts the simplicity of the verse with rhythmic guitars and strings to elevate the chorus. The verse/chorus transition gives an initial feeling of grief and regret, reflecting Die and Steve's emotionality at the beginning of *Mommy* as they continue to mourn the loss of their husband and father. The song's contrasting structure brings the personal and the public personas of song's subject into conflict by expressing desire and fear simultaneously. Yet, it is not only the song's textual meaning that adds nostalgic affect to the scene, rather, a knowing connection between audience and filmmaker contextualises *Mommy*'s setting within the past. Dolan assumes the audience will have a connection to "White Flag" as a historic object; therefore, the feelings evoked by the song echo the "dissatisfaction of the present" that permeates nostalgia to reflect Steve and Die's emotional longings and the film's temporal dissonance. This scene is a reunion that narratively and tonally sets up Die and Steve's relationship, and by using

"White Flag" as both a symbolic song and as a nostalgic device, *Mommy* communicates its characters' past-focused worldviews.

Additionally, *Mommy* affects nostalgia to make space for a queered present/future, by subverting the problematic histories that contextualise queer culture. While music sets up a nostalgic relationship between mother and son, the articulation of the past within the present conjures potentiality for the future. Jill Bradbury suggests that "in nostalgia we can […] find the seeds of possibility, the traces of life lived resiliently and agentically […] the longing for home, for the past, can be interpreted as about more than physical place, and pivotally entails a *longing for be-longing*" (343). Bradbury places nostalgia within a future-oriented ontology, hypothesising that "perhaps nostalgia is the desire not to be who we once were, but to be, once again, our potential future selves, selves not yet formed" (342). She theorises the complex temporality of nostalgia, which, she claims, inspires an identity that thrives on fantasies of possible selves. Bradbury suggests that in nostalgia's backward gaze, historicised objects are transferred into an idealised future to mobilise marginalised worldviews (in opposition to an oppressive past). Bradbury's utopian theories align with what Jose Muñoz terms "concrete utopia," "relat[ed] to historically situated struggles, a collectivist that is actualized or potential" (3). This form of utopia is in conversation with the past, its objects and affects, but sees the future potential in removing said objects from their histories and reinterpreting them in a context that allows for greater freedom.

Pickering and Keightley similarly reinterpret nostalgia while stating that "nostalgia may also be seen as seeking a viable alternative to the acceleration of historical time, one that attempts a form of dialogue with the past and recognizes the value of continuities in counterpart to what is fleeting, transitory and contingent" (923). Pickering and Keightley's utopian nostalgia, unlike Bradbury's, positions nostalgia as a desperate grasp for a lost past. This frames nostalgic longing as a process of reconciliation that holds onto objects from the past to "recogniz[e] value" in what-has-been. *Mommy* recognises nostalgia's historical value in its use of music to prompt nostalgia and utopia in a queer setting. Dolan achieves "concrete" utopian by including nostalgic music strongly associated with queer culture, Celine Dion for example, to create a present/future space using nostalgic iconography. Therefore, Dolan's re-appropriation of nostalgic musical objects queers the past while expanding a speculative present and enhancing its queer dimensions.

Furthering a queer reading of nostalgia, *Mommy*'s soundtrack employs sonic doubling to promote utopian ideologies via Steve's subversion of temporal identification by challenging the spatiality of diegetic music. Moreover, the contrast of onscreen diegetics with a non-diegetic soundscape reinterprets Dolan's characters' queer orientation within normative temporalities. After Die is fired because of her commitments to Steve, Dolan presents a montage of Steve longboarding through the suburban streets. The sequence cuts from Steve on his bed, shrouded in low light, to Steve brightly lit outside through as transitional close-up shot of an old tape player. Counting Crows' "Colour Blind" (1999) plays as Steve longboards, in a long shot, over a bridge. The sad tone of the music contrasts with the bright outside lighting but sustains the feelings of helplessness that surround Die and Steve's uncertain future. "Colour Blind" is apparently playing diegetically out of Steve's Walkman, but Steve's movements contradict this as he moves his body to a different beat, suggesting he is listening to a different song. Until now Dolan has utilised music entirely diegetically, offering physical locations for his pop music in the form of a mixtape that Steve's father made him years ago. Yet here Dolan subverts our understanding of the soundtrack's spatiality through the contrast of diegetic sound with the onscreen action.

Sonic doubling makes obvious the temporal dissonance within *Mommy* by directly juxtaposing the past with the film's present. D'Aoust terms this "queer vocal identification", a process of challenging "the prejudiced notion that natural voices are matched to natural bodies;" consequentially, "they challenge vocal prejudice and herald a multiplicity of vocal identifications and expressions" (10). In pairing his ideas on queer vocality with this sequence, D'Aoust suggests that "the viewer is in a soundscape parallel to Steve's" (11). Dolan's contrast of music and action infuses Steve's character and worldview with nostalgic affects by putting him in conversation with past-oriented music while setting him within a contemporary future. Sonic doubling induces nostalgic affect through Steve but removes Steve from directly expressing nostalgic feelings. Nostalgia infuses Steve's worldview by affecting his life through music, technology (e.g. Steve's old flip phone), and costuming to show how his queered state of being has left him longing for an unobtainable past which manifests within the fabric of his present. By contrasting Steve's actions with nostalgic music, Dolan places Steve within a nostalgic utopia as Steve actively observing and selecting elements from the past to feel secure within his present.

Dolan uses historicised queer music to evoke nostalgia as a utopian worldmaking tool, bringing his characters into conversation with queer iconography to recognise the potentiality

of nostalgic practices. This is exemplified in a scene that takes place after the introduction of Kyla, when the trio has their first meal and night together. The dinner sequence follows a typical Dolanian pattern, loud talking, POV shots, and messy dialogue, but what follows, through his use of music, evokes the utopian nature of *Mommy*'s nostalgic affects. After Die and Kyla talk about Steve and their situation, Steve enters the room to the starting notes of Celine Dion's "On ne change pas" (1999). Steve emerges having changed into a camp black costume with slicked-back hair, black nails, eyeliner, and chains, expressing a queered masculinity through his costuming. Dolan reintroduces Steve as a queer character as a mid-shot pulls focus into Steve as he looks directly into the camera, lip-synching and dancing to Celine Dion. Here we can recognise two things; 1) the song is part of Steve's dead father's mixtape, evidenced through a transitional close-up of the mixtape in the CD player, evoking nostalgia through grief, and 2) Steve's act of lip-synching firmly places him within the iconographic confines of queerness. At this moment, Steve expresses queerness through lip-synching's manipulation and swapping of voices. Dolan's use of Celine Dion evokes Bradbury's idea that "nostalgia is the desire not to be who we once were, but to be […] our potential future selves" (342) by infusing nostalgic longing with queer world-making to suggest that the re-appropriation of the past, of objects of the past, can create space for queer utopian ideals.

Figure 10 Steve's queer turn

Illuminating queer utopia is José Esteban Muñoz' seminal book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* which theorises queer utopia within an anti-relational, Marxist lens to understand the impact of normative temporalities on queer futurity. In linking

nostalgia and utopia in Dolan's work, it is important to understand how *Mommy* uses nostalgic affect to further ideas of queer worldmaking. Muñoz suggests that "queerness is not yet here" (1), meaning that the ideal of the queer and the political function of queer identity has evaded common understanding because of homonormativity. Muñoz is inherently critical in the anti-utopian thought that homonormative culture has persisted; arguing that queer politics are too centred on obtaining equal rights under a heterosexual system rather than thinking towards a future that embraces the boundary-less rationale of queerness. One of the main arguments that Muñoz makes is for the negation of "straight time," the idea of temporality influences by "bourgeois reproduction and family' (Halberstam 2001: 6). Muñoz uses "ecstatic time" to highlight how one can subvert the "temporal stranglehold of straight time" (32).

Ecstatic time "is signalled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future" (32). Ecstatic time views "queerness as horizon" by contrasting straight time's "pragmatic politics of the present," to find utopian ideals outside of normative temporality (Muñoz 31). Dolan shows the pleasures of ecstatic time within *Mommy* through his use of nostalgic music that, while drawing our attention to the past, illuminates the inherent pleasures of remembering in the present. This reading is furthered through Muñoz' idea that "the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds" (27), suggesting that we must re-examine hegemonic thought around how we view the present. Meaning that a re-evaluation of nostalgic objects, their functions within the past, and how they can be re-appropriated within the present will further an understanding of a queer utopia by allowing past objects to become unhinged from the existence within "straight time."

Dolan approaches ecstatic time's queering of straight temporalities through his formal distortion of onscreen space in one of *Mommy*'s most iconic sequences. This sequence appears halfway through the film once Steve, Die, and Kyla have successfully navigated their way into a surrogate family, with Kyla agreeing to home school Steve while Die works as a cleaner. Using montage this sequence cross-cuts between Kyla home-schooling Steve, Die working, and the trio together while Steve longboards down the street. Another nostalgic song of Dolan's youth plays over these clips, Oasis' "Wonderwall" (1995), playing in its entirety throughout the sequence. The use of "Wonderwall" adds to the nostalgic feel of the

film by evoking familiar memories, yet places these memories outside of normative temporalities through the process of queer family-making.

However, music is not the most impactful element of this sequence. Until this moment the film's 1:1 aspect ratio has persisted to situate its characters within a restricted frame. *Mommy* rarely frames the trio together as Dolan uses these moments sparingly to offer greater impact when the camera is finally released from its close proximity to its subjects. The result is claustrophobic, enclosing the film within the narrow subjectivity of its suburban setting. However, in this sequence, Steve expands the film's restrictive aspect ratio with a swift movement of his hands. At the mid-point, as Oasis' drums fill the screen, Steve, shot in close-up, widens the 1:1 aspect ratio into a traditional 1.85:1 widescreen. *Mommy* sheds its aesthetic field-of-view to release its characters, associating nostalgic affective with an overwhelming release to further its engagement with utopian ideologies. By mixing nostalgic music with cinematography that queers' understandings of screen space, Dolan exemplifies the utopian workings of ecstatic time. He does this by signalling ecstasy through the cathartic release of the screen. While the pleasures of this aspect ratio change are evident in its emotional release, this change can also be applied affectively to the film's characters. Further in the sequence Steve, in the middle of the road, yells "I am Free" ("*Liberté*"). This signals that the freeing up of screen space, paired with the nostalgic affects of the sequence's soundtrack, provides a space outside of normative pressures for the trio to exist, literally freeing them from the confines of straight time, and allowing them to exist within a queer family framework.

Figure 11 Steve expanding the aspect ratio

Another aspect of *Cruising Utopia* which furthers *Mommy*'s understanding of nostalgia and utopia is Muñoz' insistence on a relational relationship between past and present to overcome the "normalcy-desiring homosexual" (26). Muñoz' is adamant that queerness and queer utopia cannot exist in tandem with homonormative politics. He suggests that "the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds" (27). In *Mommy*, this knowing, a conversation between past, present, and future, is evident within the film's speculative setting. *Mommy* exists outside of known temporalities, its narrative frames the film within an ill-defined future, while the late 1990s aesthetics in its music, costume design, and technologies establishes these characters within the past. This temporally complex setting helps to place the film and its characters within alternative temporal modes. By removing the film from normative maps of time and space, Dolan allows *Mommy* to explore non-normative family making and the construction of queer identity outside of straight time. This illuminates queer utopia as it evokes Muñoz' idea that "it is important to call on the past, to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things" (28). The past is active on the present in *Mommy*, the nostalgic soundtrack actively works to situate the past within the present. In turn, this queers temporal and familial understandings as nostalgia works to displace the film from a heteronormative orientation.

Towards the end of the film, *Mommy* evokes its temporal overlaps in a scene that brings utopian thought directly in conversation with nostalgic ideas and queer world-making. This sequence takes place at the beginning of the film's third act after Steve has attempted to kill himself and Die's failed date with their neighbouring lawyer. After the euphoric happiness that exists within the "Wonderwall" sequence has dissipated, Die is forced to make a difficult decision. This is where the textual intervention of the film's S-14 framing comes in. Die must choose between living with Steve, jeopardising his and her physical and mental safety, or surrender him to the state for medicalised care. Die opts for the latter and persuades Steve to come on a road trip with her and Kyla. This sequence starts as they drive away from home, with the screen expanding from 1:1 to 1.85:1 aspect ratio. This is only the second time this happens in the film, which directly links back to the elated happiness of the "Wonderwall" sequence. Ludovico Einaudi's "Experience" (2013) plays over this sequence. This song, unlike the previously pop-heavy playlist, is a modern classical piece. The contrast between "Experience" and "Wonderwall" is clear, as "Experience" delivers its sonic message

through extravagant yet intimate string motifs rather than “Wonderwall” which relies on repeated guitar riffs and lyrics. This sequence signals falsity and fantasy by removing the nostalgia of the film’s previous soundtrack to accelerate itself into a normative future.

Subsequently, as Die, Steve, and Kyla stop at a beach the scene moves, in montage, from the present into a rapidly evolving future. This happens from Die’s subjectivity, signalled by a close-up transition of Die looking at Steve that begins the fantasy. The sequence propels through Steve’s life, as he graduates high school, gets a girlfriend, is accepted into college, moves away, has a child, and get married. What is unexpected about this fantasy is how dependent on straight time it is with Steve following the necessary plot of a normative life, out of place within the queered narrative of the film. However, because of Die’s subjective point of view, this becomes her utopia for Steve. This is Die’s fantasy of normative time as she gives Steve the life she knows he cannot have. Steve’s fate is queer, as his disabilities force him along queer time, forgoing any idea of a normative life. However, Die allows Steve to live out straight time through her use of ecstatic time, as her contemplation of the future within the present grants Steve an unobtainable life.

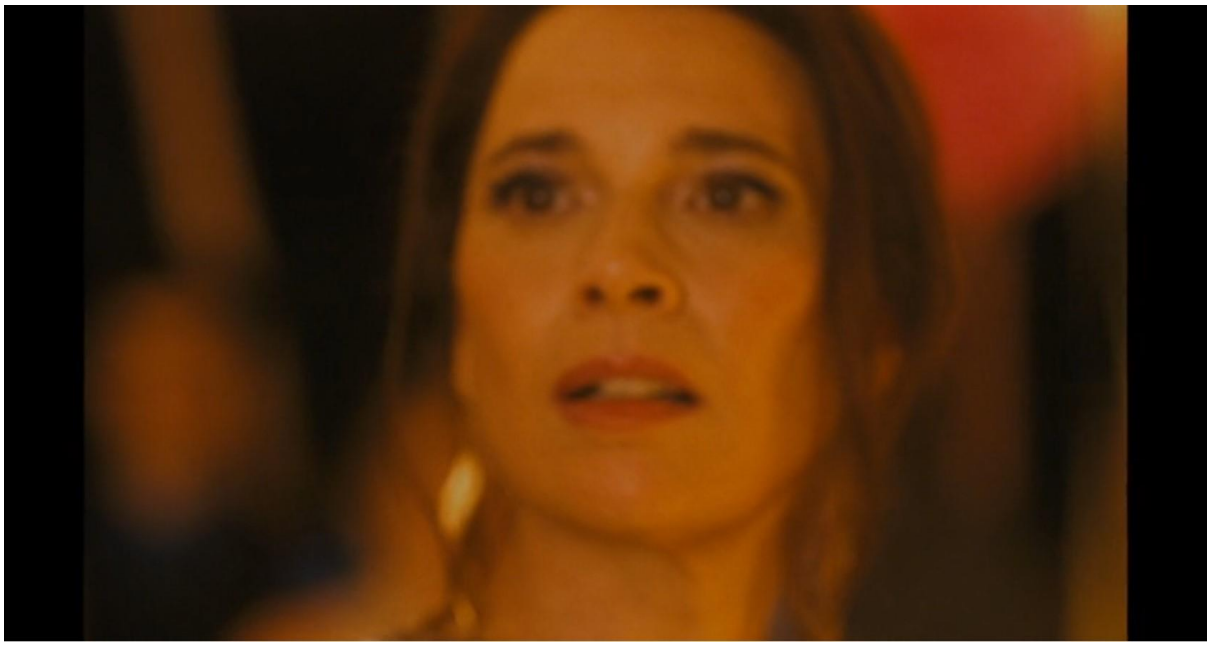

Figure 12 Soft focus in Die’s imagined utopia

Nostalgia and utopia affects this sequence through fantasy as it is at once a longing for what could have been and a, as Bradbury suggested, “longing for be-longing” (343). Die’s fantasy sequence uses nostalgia as a melancholic longing for home within utopian practices as a “viable alternative to the acceleration of historical time” (Pickering, Keightley 923). Textually this is evident in the pairing of “Experience” with Dolan’s soft cinematography.

While “Experience” brings a melancholy to the sequence, evoking affects of nostalgia through the songs uses of non-contemporary instrumentation and continual repetition, it also places the sequence outside of the film’s diegetic soundscape. In contrast, the songs that have proceeded “Experience” have been exclusively pop music from the late 1990s/early 2000s. These songs have been vocal-heavy and have a spatial location within the film. “Experience,” unrooted from spatial recognition, pulls the film out of its expected soundscape to offer a sense of melancholy and utopia as it signals a break from the expect temporality.

Dolan pairs “Experience” with a change in the film's visual texture to signal fantasy while constructing queer temporalities. The cinematograph, up until this point, uses exaggerated colour but has maintained realism, using spatial depth to navigate around the film’s restricting aspect ratio. Here, however, the film exchanges its narrow aspect ratio for shallow depth of field, moving to 1.85:1 but softening the focus as to fixate on its character's expressions. While shallow focus adds to the sequence’s sense of fantasy, through its queering of visuality, it also builds a sense of utopia through its evocation of nostalgic cinematic style. The cinematography recalls Classical Hollywood Cinema, where the soft lighting of mostly female character’s faces bought a sense of innocence and vulnerability to its shots (Keating 38). By using this technique Dolan evokes the normative ideologies of Classical Hollywood in tandem with its nostalgic affects to bring his characters into “straight time.” Dolan’s melancholic music and nostalgic cinematography evoke Die’s subjective utopia while allowing his characters to live out normative time outside of their queer path. In turn, this suggests that straight time is a fantasy, a fantasy that, while difficult to escape, is queered through our selective and often de-historicised relations with the past.

Mommy ends with Steve’s escape from straight time after Steve is forced into state care. His final scene shows him wrapped in a straitjacket and pumped full of drugs. As the film ends, Lana Del Rey’s “Born to Die” (2011) takes us out of nostalgia and into the present, as Steve escapes from the hospital by running full force towards an upper-story window. Nostalgia has gone but its function as a guide towards utopia has been complete. Steve leaves the trappings of normative time through death by challenging the restrictions that have been placed on his life. In a conversation between Kyla and Die at the end of the film, Die says “I did what I did, so that way, there is hope.” Die and Steve are no longer stuck in the past as they have embraced ecstatic time and re-appropriated the past enough to move on. Throughout the film, nostalgia functions to keep its characters thinking backwards, but also moving forwards. Grief and trauma have overwhelmed Die, Steve, and Kyla but their

adoption of queer life, of surrogate families, and non-normative behaviours and expectations have alleviated them from straight time's burden. *Mommy* suggests that through the appropriation of the past, via the nostalgic function of music, a queer future is possible, forgoing normative expectations to express hope for the not-yet-here.

Conclusion

Through exaggerated style, including close-ups, intense colour palettes, flamboyant costumes, and non-diegetic music, Xavier Dolan's films mine queer experiences for their unifying affects. Dolan is not concerned with representing queer life as it is, nor are his films interested in representing universal moments within queer people's lives. Rather, his films are tools that reflect embodied emotional experiences to underscore the effects of normative temporalities on queer bodies. By analysing the affective qualities of Dolan's films in tandem with theories on queerness, performativity, phenomenology, and temporality, this thesis shows how heteronormative expectations displace queer bodies and how affects communicate this displacement. Whether focused on shame, rage, disgust, nostalgia, or other affects, Dolan's queer cinema expresses the multiplicity of feeling that constitute queer experiences.

While *I Killed My Mother* portrays the mother-son relationship infected by affects of shame, many of Dolan's other films also examine this relationship to further elaborate shame's function within familial cycles. In *Laurence Anyways* Laurence continually struggles with her relationship with her mother, Julienne, who focuses much of her attention on her failing marriage rather than her queer child. Julienne's marriage is virtually non-existent, with her husband, Laurence's father, shown sitting and watching television for much of the film. While this continues Dolan's negligence of the father figure, it also positions the queer child, in this case Laurence, as marginalised by her heteronormative family. Julienne initially reacts to Laurence's coming-out with hostile acceptance, warning Laurence that if she is in trouble, "our door will be closed." But when asked whether she still loves Laurence, Julienne replies, "are you becoming a woman or an idiot?" Much like Chantale, Julienne mourns the death of her son but ultimately accepts her daughter, while still expressing affects of shame due to her heteronormative ideologies.

However, the same acceptance cannot be said of Francis and Agathe in *Tom at the Farm.* Agathe has a complex relationship with her queer son, as she never knew he was queer, even after his death. Francis takes on Agathe's maternal shame throughout the film, projecting shame onto Tom, the new gay-brother-child surrogate, through violent means. Francis protects Agathe from shame, through violent repression, attacking those that seek her straight son's death. Francis' shame, however, is further complicated by the implications of his queer desires, in turn protecting both himself and his mother from queer affects. Agathe remains quietly complicit in her production of shame, as her influence over Francis highlights

her reliance on his heterosexuality. Agathe depends on Francis for income and security, while Francis feeds her lies about her gay son and his "relationships" with women. Through *Tom at the Farm*, Agathe's shame remains inarticulate because of her willingness to accept lies. While her gay son is actually dead, her straight son remains. Dolan suggesting that shame is only present with the truth and that to accept shame as a product of queer becoming is to allow the queer child to 'grow sideways'.

Just as shame through the mother-son relationship is evident within many of Dolan's films, music is commonly used to affect nostalgia. *Mommy* uses music to situate its characters within a nostalgic worldview. Dolan's soundtrack for *Mommy* combines music from the 1990s-2000s with a contemporary speculative setting to create contrast between the sonic and visual landscape of the film, in turn expressing utopian desire within his queered characters. Dolan's use of nostalgia through music is also evident in *Laurence Anyways* which, again, infers the not-yet-here of the queer. Unlike *Mommy*, which is set in 2015 but has a soundtrack from the 1990s, *Laurence Anyways* is a period film, set between 1989 and 1999, which incorporates period-specific and contemporary music. *Laurence Anyways*' soundtrack utilises both diegetically and non-diegetically to maintain the period setting of the film while situating Laurence's queerness within a future-focused orientation. Era appropriate music plays throughout the film but usually within diegetic confines. When Laurence and Fred are discussing colours that "minimise their pleasure," Kim Carnes' "Betty Davis Eyes" (1981) plays quietly through the stereo. Dolan uses this song diegetically to situate the soundtrack within the film's present while furthering affects of nostalgia by creating a retro film world.

Yet, contrasting *Laurence Anyways'* diegetic soundtrack is its non-diegetic music which, while often maintaining a period-specific tonality, utilises contemporary songs in key moments of the film to position Laurence within a queer utopian framework. Most prominently is the use of Fever Ray's "If I Had A Heart" (2009) in the film's opening sequence. This prologue is set 10 years after the film's story begins showing Laurence comfortable in her gender identity walking down the street. As the film's title arrives onscreen, and before the title cards which introduce the film's period setting, the opening notes of the song play. Just like *Mommy*, the use of contemporary music within *Laurence Anyways* creates temporal dissonance between the film's setting and its soundtrack, at once evoking nostalgia, while situating its characters within a future-focused orientation. In turn, this creates a queer utopia for its characters to live in. Dolan suggesting, like Muñoz, that the

not-yet-here of queerness exists within our re-evaluation of queer objects in the past and present, to build towards a queered future.

In conjunction with queer temporality is rage's power to communicate the effects of straight time on queer bodies. *Laurence Anyways* exemplifies this through Laurence and Fred's use of rage affects to directly communicate how normative expectations around temporality have affected their lives because of binary gender assumptions. Dolan utilises colour and dialogue through a melodramatic framework to communicate trans rights discourse within the texture of his film. While *Laurence Anyways* examines rage within a feminine framework, *Tom at the Farm* affects rage through masculinity, to illuminate how masculine identities within a queer worldview negatively affect rage. Francis' rage originates within his closeted queer desires, pertaining to his attraction and control over Tom as well as his desire to leave the trappings of straight time which have forced him to stay on the farm. Francis is one of the only characters throughout Dolan's filmography that explicitly displays homophobic attitudes. Francis has continually suppressed the knowledge that his brother, now dead, was queer, while articulating this suppression through rage. This is most evident through the story of Francis' attack on a boy who his brother was dancing with. A bartender tells Tom that one-night Francis attacked a boy after he finds out about his brother's queerness. This attack left the boy with a scar running from his eye to his chin, marking the boy physically with the effects of Francis' rage. Here, it is evident that Francis' rage is a product of his hyper-masculine homophobia as he communicates his fear of straight time through violence.

In contrast, Steve in *Mommy* affects rage because of his disabilities within a hyper-masculine framework. Steve has ADHD, resulting in fluctuating moods ranging from sweet and caring to anger and isolation. While homophobia arises from Steve in heightened moments of rage, disgust and fear do not drive his intentions like Francis'. Rather, rage derives from the love and protection he feels towards his mother. Steve displays his misplaced rage when he and Die go to buy school supplies. In a taxi, Die gets into an argument with the driver which results in him calling her a "bitch." Because of Steve's attachment issues, he berates the taxi driver with racist and homophobic slurs. Unlike Laurence and Fred, whose feminine worldviews allow them to articulate rage calmly and precisely, Steve's masculinity forces him to affect rage through violence. This means that while his projection of rage stems from his desires to protect Die, his outwards

communication of rage results in offensiveness. For Steve, rage protects him from outside interference in an attempt to overcome the grief he feels at the loss of his father. Like Laurence, Steve affects rage to communicate his queer worldviews, yet unlike Laurence, Steve's rage takes aim through insult and injury.

Dolan's later films further explore how shame, rage, disgust, and nostalgia work to articulate the temporal displacement of queer time. After *Mommy* Dolan made three additional feature films: *It's Only the End of the World* (2016), *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan* (2018), and *Matthias and Maxime* (2019). While these works inspired more negative criticism, with further "insufferable characters" (Castillo) and "unfocused" storytelling (Ehrlich) than his previous six films, they effectively maintain his interest in queer affect and heteronormative temporalities. The four affects presented as central to Dolan's previous films are apparent in these recent works, and they clarify Dolan's continual exploration of how normative temporalities manifest within the affective worldviews of queer people.

It's Only the End of the World concerns itself with Louis, a famous playwright who returns to his family after an unspecified terminal diagnosis. Dolan continued his obsession with dysfunctional family dynamics here but furthers these ideas, previously explored in *I Killed My Mother* and *Mommy*, in tandem with ideas on AIDS and futurity. In *It's Only the End of the World* shame, rage, and nostalgia are present through the film's dialogue and characters. Louis' imminent death articulates shame, which is projected onto (and by) his family because of his estrangement. Like *I Killed My Mother* shame occurs within familial cycles, which, in turn, reflects onto the queer in the form of guilt.

In turn, shame is also present through Louis' evident lack of reproductive futurity (his queerness). At the beginning of the film, Louis has a conversation with his brother's wife Catherine, whom Louis has never met, about her children. This conversation reveals that Catherine and Antoine (Louis' brother) named their eldest child after his grandfather (also Louis), in keeping with the tradition of the eldest son taking his father's name. Catherine justifies the appropriation of Louis' name because "you people don't have kids." Shame becomes evident as both characters avert their eyes while Catherine attempts to backtrack on her statement. Just like *I Killed My Mother*'s cyclical maternal shame, Louis and Catherine's shame feeds off one another. Catherine's shame is present through her inadvertent dehumanisation of Louis' queerness, while Louis' shame is evoked through his inability to

maintain the ongoing tradition of the family. Yet shame is not alone in its affective work through *It's Only the End of the World*. Antoine continuously breaks out in moments of rage, which aims for Louis' seamless transition out of "straight time," of which Antoine is jealous and regretful. This resembles Fred's rage in *Laurence Anyways* as she feels resentful towards Laurence because of her displacement from normative temporalities.

These affective links can also be found in Dolan's 2018 film *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan*, again through Dolan's continued exploration of family, regret, and impossible love. *Donovan* explores the relationship between a TV actor and an 11-year-old boy, who have secretly been writing letters to each other for many years. When the media finds out about this relationship, and John's queer secret, it sparks a frenzy that affects both the adult star and the young boy, Rupert. Yet, within the film's change of setting Dolan holds onto the queer affects that define his previous films. Most notable would be the overarching nostalgic tone of the film. The story and its structure are reminiscent of 1990's films like *Magnolia,* with its sweeping multi-storied narrative, while the film is largely set in the mid-2000s, offering the nostalgic aesthetic of *Mommy* but within real-world confines. Meanwhile, nostalgia also affects the film's characters because of their regretful pasts. John F. Donovan, the titular star, longs for an escape from straight time, looking backwards to find a path forward. Whereas Rupert's nostalgia, like that of Steve or Die, has roots in utopia, looking backwards to orient queerness and queer objects of the past into a not-yet-here future. Rupert's utopia is evidenced through the film's framing device, where a now grown-up Rupert is about to release an anthology of the letters he and John sent each other. In this, Rupert's obsession with the past and his willingness to recontextualise the past within the present/future becomes evident. This also recalls Hubert's confessions in *I Killed My Mother*, absolving his queer shame and maternal guilt through art. Dolan's continual use of orienting affects as a way to dissect and nuanced queer experiences is evidenced through *Donovan*'s conversations with nostalgia, offering a traumatic past but hopeful future for its queer characters.

While Dolan's later work evokes shame, rage, and nostalgia it can be difficult to situate disgust within any of these films. Both *It's Only the End of the World* and *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan* offer elements of disgust in their obsession with queer death, but as an aesthetic element disgust has not returned within Dolan's filmography since *Tom at the Farm*. Yet, mining Dolan's visuals and themes on the hyper-masculine queer illuminates

how he continues to subvert established homoerotic narratives. In Dolan's most recent film, *Matthias and Maxime*, disgust rears its head through the character's apparent disgust at their homoerotic desires, evidenced through character design and the hyper-masculine framework that his characters engage with. *Matthias and Maxime* follows a group of close friends, played here by Dolan's long-time collaborators and real-life friends. After a trip to a lake house, Matthias and Maxime get involved with a short film that a friend's younger sister is making. In the short film, the two best friends must kiss, which sparks underlying queer feelings between the pair.

The inability of Matthias and Maxime to initially accept their queer desires illuminates the cause of disgust. Much like Francis' rejection of queerness in *Tom at the Farm*, disgust in *Matthias and Maxime* incites violence, self-destruction, and homophobia. At a party celebrating Maxime's move to Melbourne, Matthias exposes his jealousy when he argues with Max after he observes him whispering to a friend. The argument ends in violence as a fight breaks out between Mathias and another friend, Matthias channelling his homoerotic desire through disgusting actions. This mirrors Francis and Tom's relationship in *Tom at the Farm* by evidencing how repressed queer desire incites homophobic violence, highlighting the function of disgust within hyper-masculinity. Maxime also bears a mark of disgust, a large purple birthmark that covers the right side of his face. While Dolan does not reference this as a sign of disgust through his dialogue, he uses Maxime's birthmark to signal his character as an outsider. This marking turns Maxime from man to monster, using non-normative imagery to evoke disgust to disconnect Maxime from his peers. While disgust does not infect the style of *Matthias and Maxime* as it does *Tom at the Farm*, it still demonstrates an affective function of Dolan's mise-en-scène, which illuminates the otherness that comes with being queer.

In studying affect and queerness in Dolan's cinema, I aimed to understand how film can help audiences emotionally connect to non-normative communities. What Dolan suggests throughout his films, however, is that queer experiences will always be warped by queer people's outsider status and "straight time's" normative pull. In his films, shame derives from the maternal desire for normativity in children, rage is an effect of not being able to meet heteronormative expectations, disgust is evident in experiences of violence caused by masculine homonormativity, while nostalgia functions as a way of experiencing the past within a mediated (and queered) future. Further study of Dolan's cinema will likely expand

on its capacity to represent queerness and affect, and interrogate why queer people rely on affect and emotion to communicate. Without a doubt analysis of Dolan's other films (*Heartbeats, It's Only the End of the World, The Death and Life of John F. Donovan, Matthias and Maxime*) and his music videos (e.g. Adele's *Hello*, and Indochine's *College Boy*) would reveal additional connections between affect and temporality relevant to queer worlding. Spotlighting joy, fear, euphoria, or boredom would contribute to the scholarly understanding of queer worldviews expressed in Dolan's films, clarifying formal methods of animating queer experiences in cinema. More generally, further research on the functions of affects within global queer cinema would illuminate queer representations beyond Dolan's limited worldview to expand critical knowledge on what it means to be queer and the affects that constitute it.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.

---. "The Performativity of Disgust ." *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Edinburgh University Press, 2014, pp. 82-100.

Affron, Charles. "Identification." *Imitations of Life: a reader on film and television melodrama*. Edited by Marcia Landy. Wayne State University Press, 1991, pp. 98-117.

Bradbury, Jill. "Narrative Possibilities of the Past for the Future: Nostalgia and Hope." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* Vol. 18 No. 3 2012, pp. 341-50. *ProQuest,* DOI: search.proquest.com/docview/1500299433?accountid=14782

Bradshaw, Peter. “Mommy review – outrageous and brilliant, a daytime soap from hell”. *The Guardian,* 19 Mar. 2015. theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/19/mommy-xavier-dolan-film-review.

Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Cornell University Press, 2014.

Brinkema, Eugenie. *The Forms of the Affects*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Brunette, Peter. "I Killed My Mother - Film Review". *The Hollywood Reporter*. 5 May, 2009. hollywoodreporter.com/review/i-killed-mother-film-review-93194

Buchanan, Kyle. "Xavier Dolan Has Gone to Cannes for 10 Years. It Hasn’t Gotten Easier". *New York Times,* 24 May. 2019. nytimes.com/2019/05/24/movies/cannes-xavier-dolan.html.

Castillo, Monica. "The Death & Life of John F. Donovan". *Roger Ebert,* 13 Dec. 2019. rogerebert.com/reviews/the-death-and-life-of-john-f-donovan-movie-review-2019.

Caswell, T. Andrew and Kyrsten Sackett-Fox. "Gender-atypical personality or sexual behaviour: what is disgusting about male homosexuality?" *Journal of Social Psychology* Vol. 158 No. 5. pp. 591-602.

Cherry, Brigid. *Horror*. Taylor and Francis, 2002.

D'Aoust, Jason R. "The Queer Voices of Xavier Dolan's Mommy." *European Journal of American studies* Vol. 11 No. 3. 2017, pp. 1-16.

Dalton, Stephen. "Laurence Anyways: Cannes Review". *The Hollywood Reporter.* 19 May, 2012. hollywoodreporter.com/review/laurence-anyways-cannes-review-326821.

Dido. "White Flag". *Life for Rent.* Performed by Dido. Arista. 2003.

Dolan, Xavier. *Mommy Press Kit*. 2014.

Dolan, Xavier. *Tom at the Farm Press Kit*. MK2 Pro, 2013.

Downes, Alan. *The Velvet Rage*. Da Capo Press, 2005.

Dreijer, Karin. "If I Had a Heart." *Fever Ray*. Performed by Fever Ray. Rabid. 2009.

Duritz, Adam and Charlie Gillingham. "Colorblind." *This Desert Life*. Performed by Counting Crows. Geffen. 1999.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Einaudi, Ludovico. "Experience." *In a Time Lapse*. Decca. 2013.

Ehrlich, David. "Matthias & Maxime Review: Xavier Dolan's Romantic but Unfocused Return to Form". *IndieWire.* 22 May, 2019. indiewire.com/2019/05/matthias-and-maxime-review-xavier-dolan-1202143855.

Ford, Elyssa. "Becoming the West: Cowboys as icons of masculine style for gay men." *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* Vol 5 No 1 & 2. 2018. pp. 41-53.

Gallegher, Noel. "Wonderwall." *(What's the Story) Morning Glory*. Performed by Oasis. Creation. 1995.

Goldman, Jean-Jacques. "On ne change pas." *S'il suffisait d'aimer* . Performed by Celine Dion. Columbia. 1999.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Hachard, Tomas. "Into Womanhood, With a Girlfriend Hand in Hand". *NPR*. 27 June, 2016. npr.org/2013/06/21/194333674/into-womanhood-with-a-girlfriend-hand-in-hand.

Halberstam, Jack. *In a Queer Time and Place*. New York University Press, 2005.

---. "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence: Representation of Rage and Resistance ." *Reel Knockouts*. Edited by Martha McCaughey and Neal King. University of Texas Press. 2001, pp. 244-66.

Hanich, Julian. "Toward a Poetics of Cinematic Disgust." *Film Philosophy* 15.2. 2011, pp. 11-35.

Inglis, Ian. *Popular Music and Film*. Wallflower Press, 2003.

Jargernauth, Kevin. "Review: Xavier Dolan's Epic 'Laurence Anyways'". *IndieWire.* 27 June, 2013. indiewire.com/2013/06/review-xavier-dolans-epic-laurence-anyways-96545.

Kaufman, Sophie Monks. "Xavier Dolan: 'I've never experienced love as something calm and tender'". *Little White Lies*. 12 March, 2015. lwlies.com/interviews/xavier-dolan-mommy.

Keating, Patrick. *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir*. Columbia University Press, 2009.

Kolnai, Aurel. "The Standard Modes of Aversion: Fear, Disgust and Hatred". *Mind*, Vol. 107 1998, pp. 581-96.

Kotte, Claudia. "Fast and Furious: The Sound and the Fury in Xavier Dolan's Mommy." *French Forum* Vol. 44 No. 2. 2019, pp. 321-32.

La Rosa, Antonio Olivera and Jaume Rossello Mir. "On the Relationships Between Disgust and Morality: a Critical Review." *Psicothema* Vol. 25 No. 2. 2013, pp. 222-26.

Lafontain, Andree. *ReFocus: The Films of Xavier Dolan*. Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

Lightning, Robert K. "Conflicting Interests: mother and Son Relationships in the Films of Xavier Dolan." *Film International* Vol 46, No 4. 2016, pp. 71-82.

Malatino, Hilary. "Tough Breaks: Trans Rage and the Cultivation of Resilience." *Hypatia* Vol. 34, No. 1. 2019, pp. 122-40.

Morrison, Margaret. "Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid": The "Dignity of Queer Shame". *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature,* Vol 48, No 1. 2015, pp. 17-32.

Muñoz, Jose Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press, 2009.

Needham, Gary. "Queering the Western." *Brokeback Mountain*. Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 31-78.

Nelson, Maggie. *Bluets.* Wave Books. 2009.

Pickering, Michael and Emily Keightley. "The Modalities of Nostalgia." *Current Sociology* Vol 54 (6), 2006, pp. 919-41.

Plantinga, Carl. "Disgusted at the Movies." *Film Studies* 8, 2006, pp. 81-92.

Saltz, Rachel. "A Mother-Son Dance With Many Awkward Steps." *The New York Times.* 13 March, 2013. nytimes.com/2013/03/13/movies/i-killed-my-mother-a-xavier-dolan-film.html.

Sark, Katrina. "The Language of Fashion and (Trans)Gender in Dolan's Laurence Anyways." *Synoptique* vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 127-34.

Schoonover, Karl and Rosalind Galt. *Queer Cinema in the World*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Schultz, Corey Kai Nelson. "The Sensation of the Look: The Gazes in Laurence Anyways." *Film-Philosophy* 22.1, 2018, pp. 1-20.

Scott, A. O. "Parent and Child as Two Volcanoes Under One Roof." *The New York Times.* 23 Jan 2015. nytimes.com/2015/01/23/movies/xavier-dolans-mommy-depicts-a-clashing-mother-and-son.html.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Tendencies*. Routledge, 1994.

---. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Shahani, Nishant. "Between Light and Nowhere": The Queer Politics of Nostalgia." *The Journal of Popular Culture* Vol. 46 No. 6, 2013, pp. 1217-29.

Stewart, Kathleen. "Nostalgia -- A Polemic." *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 3 No. 3. 1988, pp. 227-41.

---. "Tactile compositions." *Affective Landscapes Conference*. University of Derby, 2013. 119-27.

Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*. Duke University Press, 2006.

---. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Duke University Press, 2009.

Stone, Sandy. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." *Camera Obscura* Vol. 10 No. 2. 1992, pp. 150-76.

Stryker, Susan. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. Routledge, 2006. pp. 244- 56.

Tomkins, Silvan. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition: Two Volumes*. Springer Publishing Company, 2008.

Travers, Peter. *Mommy. Rolling Stone,* 21 Jan, 2015. rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/mommy-255524.

Whittington, Karl. "Queer." *Studies in Iconography* Vol. 33. 2012, pp. 157-68.

Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly* Vol 44 No 4. 1991, pp. 2-13.

William, Paul. *Laughing, Screaming: modern Hollywood horror and comedy*. Columbia University Press, 1994.

Wright, Kristen. "Introduction." *Disgust/Desire: The Paradox of the Monster*. Brill Rodopi, 2018. pp. vii-xii.

Yue, Genevieve. "Review: I Killed My Mother." *Film Comment.* July-August 2010. filmcomment.com/article/i-killed-my-mother-review.

Filmography

Boys Don't Cry. Dir. Kimberly Peirce. IFC Films. 1999.

Brokeback Mountain. Dir. Ang Lee. River Road Entertainment. 2005.

God's Own Country. Dir. Francis Lee. British Film Institute. 2017

Heartbeats. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Alliance Atlantis Vivafilm. 2010.

I Killed My Mother. Dir. Xavier Dolan. 2009.

It's Only the End of the World. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Sons of Manual. 2016.

Laurence Anyways. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Lyla Films. 2012.

Mattias and Maxime. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Sons of Manual. 2019.

Mommy. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Sons of Manual. 2014.

Pink Flamingos. Dir. John Waters. Dreamland. 1972.

Pride. Dir. Matthew Warchus. British Film Institute. 2014.

The Death and Life of John F. Donovan. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Sons of Manual. 2018.

The Silence of the Lambs. Dir. Jonathan Demme. Orion Pictures. 1991.

Tom at the Farm. Dir. Xavier Dolan. Sons of Manual. 2013.