



*Like a Carsic River: Gay Independent Cinema from  
Underground Films to New Queer Cinema and Beyond*

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This thesis tries to find common elements that cross the history of gay independent cinema, without disregarding the contexts in which the different movements have developed.

It focuses primarily on three crucial moments for the gay community that marked a rupture with the past, socially, politically and culturally: the 1940s, with the post-war period and the formation of an embryonic gay community; the 1960s, with the sexual liberation movement and the birth of the Gay Liberation Movement; and the 1990s, with the development of queer theories, deeply rooted in the AIDS crisis that gave birth to New Queer Cinema. This work hopes to show how gay cinema has tried to narrate these events, express these contexts and describe its own community.

Precisely in these contexts not only did gay independent cinema acquire visibility but also a group of gay filmmaker constituted themselves in strongly unified, although not homogeneous, movements: first underground cinema and then New Queer Cinema. Since in these moments of uproars the gay community found a common struggle, its artistic expressions also found a common centre. Soon after these three moments, however, the gay community experienced a balkanisation and, as a consequence, gay independent cinema disappeared from the front pages. This kind of alternation can be metaphorically compared to a Carsic River, which apparently disappears underground for awhile, but then comes back into the surface.



In these historic moments, the gay community, the life of its members and the way they themselves and society perceived their sexuality were radically changing. These cinematic movements had to solve the same problem: how to represent on screen the deep and radical changes society was experiencing. Both underground and New Queer Cinema gave similar answers to these questions: to represent radical changes, one needs radical modes of narration. They disrupt what is usually given for granted: a chronological order; a cohesive, coherent story with a beginning, a development and an end. This structure reflects the choice of underground and new queer films not to provide definitive answers, but challenge traditional ideas on storytelling. They want to create new ways of artistic expression, able to represent the fluidity of gender and sexuality. In order to do so, they also choose as protagonists, those subjects marginalised not only by society but also by the official gay community bringing into the surface hierarchy structures and discriminations, in terms of race, gender and social status.

This work could be rightly described, using Gramsci's terminology, as a collection of counter-discourses. In a democratic society, the dominant groups do not seek consensus through coercion but they exert their power through discourses. The more prestigious the social status of the group, the more pervasive and neutral their discourses. Their naturalness is aimed at presenting their discourses as unquestionable, therefore sustaining the status quo that guarantees power to dominant groups. However, in a democratic society, socially subaltern groups can produce their own discourses that run counter to those of the dominant groups and tend to expose their artificiality, partiality, thus the possibility to question them, with the final aim of creating an alternative society run by different values.

All the films described in this work, in a way or another, try to unhinge the status quo, the logic of the society in which they are created. They do so with their content, but more evidently with their formal structure. They want to tell different stories, their stories, and they understand that to do so they also have to find different narrative modes, since the conventional ones have not been invented to describe their experiences, their community, their lives.

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