

The Environmental Politics of Grief in the Queer Anti-Pastoral

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In Fabrice Du Welz's *Calvaire*, the travelling musician Marc Stevens (Laurent Lucas), is held captive by the deceptively affable, yet deluded, innkeeper Bartel (Jackie Berroyer). Bartel "transforms" Marc into Gloria, his promiscuous ex-wife who has abandoned him and the rural community, by clothing him in her sundress and forcibly shaving his hair into a militaristic buzz-cut. In the striking final sequence, a group of male villagers, perceiving in Marc's presence a figural substitute for Gloria's absence, proceed to gang rape him in revenge for her desertion. The camera slowly swirls overhead as the villagers traverse the frame and scuffle over their positions in this ordeal. Amidst the confusion, gunshots are fired and Marc escapes, running into the adjacent forest and nearby wetlands. Then, a startling cut (1:20:43) alters the environment from dry woodlands to a snow-covered marsh. All of the men have given up on finding "Gloria" at this point, except for their leader Robert (Philippe Nahon). Slopping through the muck, he sluggishly trudges behind Marc and slips into a quagmire. While his body slowly descends into the earth—erasing him from the film—Robert implores, "Dites-moi que tu m'aimais" ("Tell me you loved me") (1:22:19-21). Nearing his release from unremitting abuse and humiliation, Marc turns back to Robert, provides empathetic solace in the face of death, and capitulates without coercion to "being" Gloria. Kneeling down and hunched over in a rounded bend, s/he replies, "Je t'ai aimé" ("I loved you") (1:22:32). The camera remains still on this unlikely couple, eschewing the dynamic movements of preceding violence. This final act of tenderness, regardless of its probable insincerity, initiates an aporetic rift that radically alters the narrative action, affect, and aesthetic structure of the film. Suspended by the fleeting connectedness of death, riven by forces of indeterminate bodies and desires, and subjected to volatile environmental disruptions, this surprising queer expression of intimate togetherness ultimately presents us with the form of grief.

In *The Forms of the Affects*, Eugenie Brinkema upends the notion that affects are arepresentational forces, proposing instead that they are formal operators untethered to the subject or the spectator's body.¹ She formalizes grief by tracing St. Augustine's unbearable misery (*dolore*) of light, through Freud's "Trauer und Melancholie," to Laplanche's reconfiguration of Freudian mourning as *Daueraffekt* ("an affect with duration" that "occupies a lapse of time" [qtd. in Brinkema 57]). She then explicates grief from these concepts of illumination and temporality by further developing Roland Barthes's photographic theories in *Camera Lucida*. Regarding Barthes's suffering meditation over a photograph of his recently deceased mother, Brinkema proposes, "[...] we are offered the fullest picture of grief as something radically different from mourning, as non-relational, as a non-labor that does not profit, and as fundamentally undialectical" (76). Independent of spectatorial experience or embodiment in her radical formalist account, grief is an affect solely bound up in the frozen temporality of the material photograph. The isometric tension of grief as a dwelling in-between lightness and darkness, presence and absence, is played out in her reading of the ten-minute, mostly static sequence following a child's death in Michel Haneke's *Funny Games*: "The name for the structure that *is* the affect of grief in this film is the tableau" (99, original emphasis).

Although shorter in duration but nonetheless legible as a tableau given how this sharp emergence occurs, the conclusion of *Calvaire* applies a similar framing device that correlates

¹ In her self-proclaimed polemic for contemporary film theory, Brinkema proposes to "dethrone the subject and the spectator" (36) by "reading affects as having forms" (37). Paying close attention to the double-bind etymological origin of affect, "derived from the Latin *affectus* (a completed action) and the verb *afficere* (to act upon)," she defines affect as a "force more than a transmission, a force that does not have to move from subject to object but may fold back, rebound, recursively amplify" (24). Her conceptualization of affect as a fold or a folding process draws from Deleuze by way of Foucault, allowing Brinkema to track the simultaneity of interiority and exteriority as a marker of subject formation within a discursive field. Yet, she discards the bodies that, for Deleuze, instantiate the locus for sensorial engagement, thereby making affect, first and foremost, an aesthetic problem of specific textual workings, writing: "My argument is that *it is only because one must read for it that affect has any force at all*" (38, emphasis in original).

with Brinkema's reading of *Funny Games*. In Haneke's film, a brief cut to the outside darkness of the countryside contrasts the skewed lightness of a knocked-over lamp inside the home, signaling a "visual inversion" that stages the durational drama for grief (105). This aesthetic switch also takes place in *Calvaire* when the foggy imperceptibility of the forest is made starkly bright after the cut moves its characters into the snowy wetlands. The downward bend of the grieving mother in Haneke's film likewise mirrors Marc's slumped posture during, and after, Robert's incidental burial. And, the mise-en-scène in each film balances the frame with a rigid composition, approximating visual stillness that seemingly levels out violent intensities. The room in Haneke's film is demarcated by three windows and three seating areas that create a conversational harmony, and the wilderness in Du Welz's film is similarly proportioned by equivalent sprouts of plants on each side of the two men. The lack of shot-reverse shot editing also appears to compound the heaviness of gravity into each image (109); the quagmire in *Calvaire* even literalizes the force of gravity's weight. What the tableau of grief portrays, then, is a disrupted aesthetic mode that suddenly blocks narrative momentum and forecloses temporal futurity as it pulls the image down into a barely mobile present.

My intention in recounting, and perhaps belaboring, these complimentary formal attributes is to demonstrate the utility and portability of Brinkema's close reading practices for affect; however, contrary to Brinkema's aims, I seek to return the political to her methodology. On the one hand, then, I am compelled by her anti-humanist turn to "dethrone the subject and the spectator" (36) as a means of severing the spectator's body from sensorial experiences and moving beyond a navel-gazing theoretical impasse on affect that presumes a cinematic image does something to *me*, for *me*. Furthermore, I agree with Brinkema's insistence that affect is an exterior force that is "non-intentional, indifferent, and resists the given-over attributes of a

teleological spectatorship with acquirable gains” (33), a position that contends that the impersonal and unruly flows of affect, in and of itself, fundamentally cannot be directed toward a political goal. Yet, I part ways with her approach on the basis that form itself is always within the purview of the political. Thus, while Brinkema instructs us on how affect is formalized, New Formalist critics such as Caroline Levine teach us how forms are always already politicized.

Building off from Jacques Rancière and Bruno Latour to unify formalist and sociopolitical criticism, Levine argues, “[...] if the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience, then there is no politics without form” (3). To bring Brinkema’s thesis on affective formalism into this theoretical vein does pose an initial discrepancy. That is, while affect may be neutral and desubjectivized within form, politics rely on biased, subjective constructions to create and make sense of form. However, even though Brinkema purports that putting affects to ethical, teleological, or political work fundamentally denies the intensity of an affective experience, I argue, by contrast, that the politics of form actually highlight the very power and potency of a given affective force that takes shape and to what degree it endures across cinematic representations, despite that its appearance may not speak to a desired political outcome. If we consider, for example, how the severity of the irresolution and non-catharsis of grief becomes a form in *Funny Games*, then we must also evaluate the formal bodies embedded into this image that are impeded by this force. Grief emerges here in a domestic space at the loss of a white bourgeois family’s continuation when Georg, the child named after his father, is murdered. There is an undeniable hierarchized privilege to what compels grief’s properties in this case, and this propensity is likewise legible in the series of films on grief that Brinkema references at the side of narrative, only to rebuff them for their aesthetic inaptitude in staging this formal affect (96-97). Whiteness, heteronormativity,

ableism, and elevated class status persistently necessitate filmic representations of grief, leaving behind what Judith Butler calls the “ungrievable lives” of non-white, queer, disabled, or economically disenfranchised people within representative regimes. This is not to say that the formal affect of grief cannot emerge alongside portrayals of these subject positions—in fact, this essay brings more focus to how grief takes shape for these more precarious populations—but that the incapacity for much of cinema to grieve for them compels us to consider more closely where the acute affective force of grief materializes and persists in ways that correspond with the political domain.

This consideration further relates to Caroline Levine’s New Formalist addition of “affordances,” a term from design theory that underlines “the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs” (6), which thereby allows us to view “the capacity [for forms] to endure across time and space” (12). Affordances demonstrate both the generality and specificity for a form, providing us the means to see how forms may potentially adjoin with, break off from, or circulate among other forms throughout cinematic representations or genres.² In this regard, grief may be a general form, but its specific iterations that are constituted by the formal bodies of subjects and spaces surrounding it direct us to the very political power of its intensity and where it travels. I thus take this cue from Levine alongside Brinkema to explore the affective-aesthetic

² Affordances provide more complexity to what a form may do or convey. To provide but one example of how this operates, Levine proposes that the spatial forms of whole containers “[...] do not afford only imprisonment, exclusion, and the quelling of difference; they also afford centrality and inclusiveness” (39).

arrangements of grief, how they interlock with political perspectives across a variety of recent queer world cinema,³ and what affordances for queerness⁴ are on display in these sites of sorrow.

Bringing more attention to the staged natural environments within queer world cinema, I additionally seek to understand why grief permeates in the exterior spaces of what I call the queer anti-pastoral, a model exemplified by *Calvaire*. First, let's walk through a few aesthetic, affective, thematic, and political concerns of the recurrent historical form of the pastoral, then examine its more specific queer variations before turning to what more succinctly defines a queer anti-pastoral. Following this explication, we'll pursue how a formal grief, free from embodied spectatorial activity, is relevant to expressing a queer environmental politics. According to Brinkema, "[...] *Funny Games* is not about grief or grieving. Rather, it brings to light the force of the affect *as* its visual and temporal form. [...] it is the form of Haneke's film above all that grieves" (100). In other words, the form emits grief, not for a spectator, but for the cinematic structure itself; the film grieves over its own aesthetic transformation. What does it mean, then, for a queer anti-pastoral to grieve over its own dramatic change? How do these formal

³ My understanding of queer world cinema is chiefly informed by Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt. Although they underline a fundamental instability in what counts as a queer film due to how these expressions travel across global distribution networks—from LGBTQ-focused film festivals, to art-house echelons, to popular regionally-oriented cinemas—with such an expansive range that films may be “queer in certain contexts and not in others” (8), they chart four distinct traits for queer world cinema. Subcultural appropriations by LGBTQ audiences or diegetic narrative depictions of queer characters are two ways in which a film may count as “queer.” These tendencies here rely on identitarian categories to make legible the affordances of queerness. Additional ways in which cinema may be queer, however, correlate closer to aesthetic style, whereby a propensity for “warping normative regimes of visibility” via “formal excess” or “temporal drift” and the “staging of sexuality, gendered embodiment, and nonheteronormative sex” (10-11). These latter traits follow feminist film theory's contributions on cinema as a desiring apparatus, and they direct us to the minoritarian political value of formalist innovation and its continued resonances across media.

⁴ By “affordances of queerness,” I am suggesting that queerness constitutes a general umbrella of sexually marginalized expressions, while also holding more specific and localized iterations for what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, genderqueer, etc. Given that these terms are defined by historically and culturally contingent practices, experiences, and desires, their variabilities bely the ability to overlay any transhistorical or transcultural rubrics to them. However, if we consider the fact that sexually marginalized expressions have been integral to art practices across the globe and pursue what formal or generic properties recur, shift, or emerge, then we can begin to better address what the affordances of queerness are in a given moment and where they also lie within a historical trajectory.

expressions of disrupted aesthetics, blocked narrative momentum, and foreclosed futurity posit a political concern? And, ultimately, what could lodging the image into a sad, stagnant present purport for a queer environmental politics?

Traditionally speaking, the pastoral as a literary and art-historical mode⁵ depicts the lives of rural dwellers—typically shepherds or other folks that tend to livestock or agriculture—amidst idyllic, harmonious landscapes. Following William Empson’s claim that the pastoral situates “the complex into the simple” (25), literary scholars have since tracked how the evolution of pastoral thinking from Theocritus and Virgil to their Renaissance imitators and onward has consistently staged inventive and self-reflexive political critiques based on the boundaries between rural and urban life.⁶ The latter more often appears as a corrupting influence to human relations, while the former is typically situated as the affective antidote. Yet, in classical contexts, the pastoral may also be a space of conflict, and in modern novels, it may be edged with a Burkean sublime that troubles the presumed peaceful happiness of the countryside. What nevertheless binds together this flexible mode across periods and cultures as David James and Philip Tew discern is the pastoral’s “foregrounding of archetypal patterns of behavior so as to insist upon the importance of pattern and repetition in the order of things” and its “overriding trajectory of nature as fecund, generative, and transformative” (13-14). These qualities correlate with the generally regular and predictable patterns of the seasons, which install expectations for what nature may provide for humans within a given space and time, as well as the emotional

⁵ By referring to the pastoral as a “mode,” rather than a genre, I am following Paul Alpers’s definition of this literary tradition for how it chiefly portrays a humble or content affective attitude toward nature. To suggest the pastoral is a “mode” also abides by Terry Gifford’s explanation of how this “historical form” moves across, poetry, drama, novels, and visual art without generic integrity (1).

⁶ In addition to Alpers, for cultural and political critiques of the pastoral and its contradistinctions to the urban or the court, see Annabel Patterson and Raymond Williams. For the self-reflexive qualities of the pastoral, see Segal and Ettin.

dispositions of each climatological period. For Ken Hiltner, these features of assumed stability further connect to how the pastoral often utilizes such orderly perceptions to obliquely forward an “environmental consciousness” (8). This primarily occurs through gestures of cultural proximity, motifs of exile, and a dramatic sense of nostalgia for either the landscape itself or the perception of a communion with nature that has been lost. By shifting focus from a receding natural backdrop—sometimes a literal one—to an emergent memorialization of that very space, the pastoral emphasizes the spatiotemporal breaks of environmental change and how human subjects make sense of these developments. As such, the pastoral not only provides either an implicit or explicit sociopolitical contrast to the urban, even while it may be authored by or for urban audiences, but it also significantly conveys ecological concerns for the interdependency of humans, nonhumans, and the land.

In *Queer Cinema in the World*, Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt chart two distinct sub-categories of the pastoral that portray interrelations for queers and the natural world: “the homoerotic pastoral and the queer eco-critical” (246). The former, as developed by early gay studies scholars, emerges in Western classical traditions of primarily white male same-sex eroticism and imagines “a place where it is safe to be gay: where gay men can be free from the outlaw status society confers upon us, where homosexuality can be revealed and spoken of without reprisal, and where homosexual love can be consummated without concern for the punishment or scorn of the world” (Fone 13).⁷ The turn away from the urban in this version of the pastoral is also a rejection of the cultural cliché that “queer life is urban, with the country a place to be escaped from, toward the cosmopolitan city” (Schoonover and Galt 246). And, although the homoerotic pastoral may depict some instances of animal husbandry or land-based

⁷ For early gay studies scholarship on the pastoral, see Norton, Fone, and Halperin. For scholarship on the more marginal lesbian pastoral literary tradition, see Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson.

labor, its primary focus is on creating positive affective spaces of reprieve, pleasure, and romance amidst “nature as a site of innocent, corporeal plentitude” (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 23). In so doing, this pastoral naturalizes and valorizes same-sex desire, while at the same time, following its traditional forbearers in upholding elevating imaginings of restorative practices for humans within a landscape. The continuation of this trope within contemporary contexts is legible in such films as *Beautiful Thing* (Hettie Macdonald, 1996), *Big Eden* (Thomas Bezucha, 2000), *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016), *God’s Own Country* (Francis Lee, 2017), and *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino, 2018), to name a few. Yet, while these natural spaces do forge valuable and affirmative sociable-sexual linkages for some subjects, they nevertheless pose significant problems for queer coalitional politics, as David Shuttleton argues, precisely because the affordances for queerness generally abide by representational hierarchies of gender entitlement, monochromatic raciality, and jingoistic xenophobia (91).⁸

The queer eco-critical pastoral, by contrast, is less inclined toward a myopic utopianism for queers within nature and also more attentive to collapsing racial, gendered, and sexual hierarchies as well as fostering more direct connections between the human and the nonhuman. In Schoonover and Galt’s cinematic models for this pastoral, *She Male Snails* (Ester Martin Bergsmark, 2012) and *Papilio Buddha* (Jayan Cherian, 2013), they locate examples of queers as “environmental stewards” that “upturn rhetorics of human dominance over nonhuman nature, often by refusing to take part in the nature-culture binary that has proved so destructive for both

⁸ The contemporary examples cited above have obviously begun to challenge this tendency by depicting more cross-ethnic relations (*Big Eden* and *God’s Own Country*) or even evacuating whiteness from the frame (*Moonlight*); however, all of these films still abide by socially acceptable forms of maleness, thereby putting them in line with this romanticized pastoral tradition and much mainstream-approved LGBTQ cinema that displaces femme, trans, or genderqueer subjects. The queer eco-critical pastoral, by contrast, attends to these more marginal subject positions.

queer people and the world's ecology" (247). This deconstructive project relies on visual juxtapositions that position queers in more caring affiliations within nature than their oppressive, "civilized" heteronormative counterparts. The queer eco-critical pastoral also does not supplant labor, precarity, or violence for more romantic concerns. Instead, it presents occasions in which queers nurture and sustain the earth through labor, get evacuated by state-sanctioned dispossession, or where the violence subjected to their bodies correlates with, and effectually critiques, environmental exploitation (254). Regardless of the differences between these two pastoral modes, however, ecological ethics emerge in both for Schoonover and Galt through sensory and tactile aesthetic practices that convey a queer politics of empathetic, embodied, and communal engagements within nature that resist normativity and dovetail into more positive affective strides for vital import.⁹ Where traditional pastorals are more often configured around a nostalgic loss for a landscape or rural life, a loss that is negotiated by upholding patterns and environmental order, the formal qualities of these queer counterparts generally memorialize these spaces for how they manifest intimacy, sensual discovery, and sociable belonging. In so doing, they direct more attention to the significance of queer sex and desire for the interdependent relations of biodiversity and environmentalism.¹⁰

Given its name, the anti-pastoral tradition clearly runs counter to all of these pastoral modes, but I want to suggest that it is actually more mutually informative to its interlocutors than it is starkly antagonistic to them. According to Terry Gifford, a traditional anti-pastoral literary mode first emerges in Stephen Duck's poem "The Thresher's Labour" (1736), which critiques

⁹ Empathetic engagement and materialist embodiment recur throughout the theoretical circuit for how the emergent field of queer eco-criticism has generally approached the interrelations for the queer and the environment. See, for example, Alaimo, Anderson et. al, Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, and Seymour.

¹⁰ In highlighting biodiversity here, I am gesturing to recent feminist and queer scholarship on biology and neurology that upholds an inherent contingency and open-endedness for sex, gender, and sexuality. See, for example, Alaimo, Fausto-Sterling, and Lane.

the idealization of the reaper from the vantage point of an industrial worker, and this artistic practice has continued since as one of “outrage and compassion” (69) that protests urban tendencies of romanticizing exploitative human and agricultural relations within spaces of so-called simplicity or redemption.¹¹ As a rhetorical and aesthetic style, the anti-pastoral is “caught between notions of realism and poetic conventions” and situated “between attack and analysis” in its delivery (67). Its politics more directly carve out the dire links between capital accumulation, labor alienation, and environmental degradation or destruction. For Jonathan Allison, the anti-pastoral’s political concerns are further made legible by how “it invokes the farming landscape only to depict it as infertile and barely productive; it portrays the life of the peasant as utterly boring, if not utterly degraded, and as unheroic and life-denying, whereas conventionally it had been depicted as noble and heroic” (45). To be against the pastoral yet still operating within its purview thus means that the anti-pastoral does not posit the rural landscape as a space of freedom, contentment, or harmony but rather as one of captivity, despair, and alienation. And, as Gifford underlines in his reading of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (1867) as an exemplar of the anti-pastoral mode, the speaker’s “loss of faith in nature as the source of cultural value” near the roiling sea is what leads to a failure in “buttress[ing] him against grief”: “[...] what begins as calming, even ‘tranquil,’ turns into a ‘grating roar’ that brings to the speaker a sadness at, presumably, the ‘eternal’ repetition of natural violence” (62). As the anti-pastoral disrupts the assumed harmonious patterns and repetitions of nature alongside their entanglements with human relations, grief effectively emerges as a woeful recognition of the

¹¹ In addition to Duck, Gifford cites Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770), George Crabbe’s *The Village* (1783), certain poems by John Clare and Wendy Cope, Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (1851), and twentieth-century works by Patrick Kavanagh, Edward Abbey, and Cormac McCarthy as anti-pastorals (63).

impersonal effects of nature and how humans have dangerously presumed their hierarchical placement within the order of things.

To claim a queer anti-pastoral is adumbrated within these interwoven traditions is to say that it yields a generative negativity that is nevertheless tempered by grief so as not to romanticize the forces of negation. The queer anti-pastoral brings into the frame not only the violence deployed against queers within nature, like the queer eco-critical mode, but also the queers that instigate violence therein, whom straddle the line between homophobic figurations of antisocial criminals (those hyper-sexual, homicidal, and suicidal menaces) and prickly representations of queer negativity (those subjects of rage, shame, withdrawal, self-hatred, loneliness, and failure).¹² For brief consideration, a few anti-pastoral models with non-sentimental, or even anti-sentimental, queers within nature can be seen New Queer Cinema films such as *Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991), *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992), *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, 1994), and *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992), while more recent examples from queer world cinema include *Criminal Minds* (François Ozon, 1999), *High Tension* (Alexandre Aja, 2003), *Tropical Malady* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2004), *Twentynine Palms* (Bruno Dumont, 2004), *Stranger by the Lake* (Alain Guiraudie, 2013), *The Ornithologist* (João Pedro Rodrigues, 2016), and *The Untamed* (Amat Escalante, 2016), among others. The queer anti-pastoral resists hetero- and homonormativity through its de-idealization of the homoerotic pastoral, while at the same time, it struggles to find communal and coalitional support like the queer eco-critical pastoral. Its caustic features follow the traditional anti-pastoral insofar as it critiques the valorization of patterns of repetition for their exploitative monotony and their

¹² For a brief sampling of film criticism on homophobic antisocial figurations, see Harry M. Benshoff, Sue Ellen Case, Ellis Hanson, and Robin Wood. For archives of queer negativity, see Heather Love, J. Halberstam, and Kadji Amin. In these latter accounts, problematic anti-normative queers do not follow the rhetorics of pride or assimilation, but they nevertheless hold commitments to queer world-building through different measures.

projection of a violent future of the same, yet unlike its traditionalist forbearers, the queer anti-pastoral is already suspicious of the nature/culture binary and thus not grievous over that specific loss of knowledge. We know this because the films listed above stage the culturally imagined perverse, inhumane, or “unnatural” queer within nature, and although these figurations are unlike the representations of their queer pastoral counterparts, they nevertheless follow the musings of their fellow traditions in forging a representational contrast against that which is deemed “natural,” a move that radically destabilizes and calls into question these very discursive categories, rather than mourns their disappearance. Where grief typically emerges in this pastoral model, however, is in moments of loss following expressions of betrayal, malice, and cruelty that disconnect humans from each other, nonhumans, and the landscape. In this sense, the queer anti-pastoral abides by its traditional model but brings more focus to the destructive sexual relations that obstruct the ability to observe an ecological interconnectivity.

This critical position challenges how queer eco-criticism has typically approached the interlocking discourses of sexuality and nature for political import.¹³ Similar to Schoonover and Galt, as well as Stacy Alaimo and Nicole Seymour, Catriona Sandilands frames sensorial and tactile experiences of pleasure within nature as the primary contribution of queer environmentalism:

If we take seriously the argument that the ecological crisis is, even in small part a problem of desire—specifically, of its narrowing, regulation, erasure, ordering, atomization and homogenization—then, I think, queer theory has a great deal to offer

¹³ Considering these mutually informative discourses, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson argue that a queer ecological politics “reveal[s] the powerful ways in which understandings of nature inform discourses of sexuality, and also the ways in which understandings of sex inform discourses of nature; they are linked, in fact, through a strongly evolutionary narrative that pits the perverse, the polluted, and the degenerate against the fit, the healthy, and the natural” (2-3).

environmental ethics, and vice versa. [...] Desire for, and pleasure in, the tactile presences of the Other has the potential to reorient sexuality away from both ecologically and sexually destructive relations. (“Desiring Nature” 188).

Though I agree with these sentiments, my goal in staking out a queer anti-pastoral is to bring more considerations to what queer negativity may yield for an environmental politics. Indeed, negativity is the ontological, affective, aesthetic, and political mode that chiefly organizes the queer anti-pastoral, yet this stance additionally holds eco-critical merit, for as Leo Bersani argues:

Negativity in art attacks the myths of the dominant culture—the pastoral myth, for example, of sexuality as inherently loving and nurturing, of sexuality as continuous with harmonious community. Only by insisting on the bleakness, the love of power, even the violence perhaps inherent in human relations can we perhaps begin to redesign those relations in ways that will not require the use of culture to ennoble them. (*IRG* 34)

Here Bersani is rebuffing the pastoral myth for how it mythologizes sexuality, a position untenable to his Freudian reading of a latent aggression in sexuality—that is, how sexual intercourse can entail a failure to connect as much as it can create an alliance—and a position that fails to recognize an intractable destructiveness constituted by the death drive. As further intimated by the “pastoral myth,” he also suggests that negativity is what demystifies modernity’s romantic nostalgia for a rural past and thereby showcases how nature has been improperly endowed with the hierarchical and limitative values of the human subject. In order to approach a means to “redesign those relations,” Bersani’s anti-pastoral critique situates negativity as a political project that is within the vicinity of violence but also critical of it.¹⁴ It is

¹⁴ This is crucial, for despite critical reductions of Bersani’s work to a so-called “anti-social” or “anti-relational” thesis, there is an emphasis on “connectedness” that abounds throughout: homo-ness, he writes, “designates a mode

as if only by turning toward violence, spectacular or quotidian, that we may begin to learn how to move away from it. What the queer anti-pastoral compels us to consider, then, is how sites that are more disjointed and disruptive, whereby desire slides into violence, may nevertheless convey a queer environmental politics. That is, they lead us to ask: what happens when one loves the other or the environment *too much* and to the point that grief ultimately sets in?

Let's back-track now from that tableau scene of suspended violence at the end of *Calvaire* to the beginning of the film, then trace how grief generally unfolds through a few additional narratives of the queer anti-pastoral. In the opening sequence of the film, the protagonist Marc Stevens sings in front of a retirement community, warbling on how love subdues economic hardships. Despite his opaqueness, or perhaps because of it, Marc appears to be infused with eroticized attraction, and he becomes the unwilling recipient of affection from an elderly woman, then a nurse, whom gifts him boudoir photographs of herself and pleads for him to stay with her. After these uncomfortable encounters, Marc hits the road to travel to his next gig; then, his car breaks down within foggy, rainy weather conditions near the road that leads to Bartel's inn. Here he meets Borris, a rural man that reappears throughout the film desperately wandering around the woods and seeking his lost "dog" Bella, whom we learn at the end of the film is actually a calf. Borris takes Marc to the inn for shelter, and upon waking the next morning, Marc finds Bartel tinkering with his van and attempting to repair it. Bartel is ecstatic to host him because he is also an entertainer (a failed comedian), and like Marc, his ex-wife Gloria was, or is, a singer—past and present verb tenses constantly shift when Bartel speaks of her.

of connectedness to the world" (*Homos* 10). This term for the indeterminate sameness of same-sex desire, a type of erotic attachment to a different identity that still nevertheless mirrors one's own to some degree may be "anti-communal" (10), but it still "remains relational even when it seems to forswear relation" (*IRG* 101). It is through the grains of what seems to be a disconnection that new forms of interrelation may nevertheless be forged.

Marc then decides to take a walk through the forest and familiarize himself with the seemingly peaceful surroundings, but Bartel warns him not to go down to the village. Fighting back tears, he bumbles, “Those people are not like you and me. They’re not artists. [...] They’re all ... they can ... they’re all ... ” (00:20:11-00:20:38). Marc promises not to go to the village, yet he ultimately betrays Bartel and sneaks up on a group of male villagers gathered together in a shed, raping a calf. Despite the brutal cries from the animal, the townsmen refer to this moment as “tender,” and their leader Robert cheers on his son in what seems to be a familial bonding ritual (00:25:53-00:26:57). Horrified by what he witnesses, Marc runs back to the inn and does not mention his surreptitious voyeurism of the townsmen to Bartel so as not to upset him. The following day Bartel willfully misrecognizes Marc as Gloria and sets the van ablaze to prohibit “her” from leaving again. The remainder of the film depicts Marc’s captivity and his unsuccessful attempts at escape, before the male villagers reappear and likewise misrecognize Marc as Gloria, setting in motion the final attempted escape through the wilderness that freezes on the tableau of grief.

From the perspective of narrative, all of the characters in *Calvaire* exist in fallen states constituted by a loss or a failed love attachment. The women at the beginning of the film appear dejected by Marc’s rebuttals to their advances, and Bartel and Borris are depicted in various sequences on the verge of tears as they persistently recount Gloria and Bella’s abandonment of them. The townsmen, too, mourn Gloria’s absence, and they mimic Bartel’s misrecognition and mistreatment of Marc as her. Marc’s positioning as an object of intense sexual obsession for everyone in the film thus brutally veers focus from desire to fixation, and when he is in the anti-pastoral, this form of compulsion utilizes substitutions to compensate for the loss of an original love object. Calves become “dogs,” women become “calves,” and Marc becomes “Gloria.”

These shape-shifting transformations likewise occur in anti-pastoral films such as *High Tension*, where the lesbian Marie morphs into a rural male serial killer to dispose of her lover's family due to fears that her partner Alex will soon leave her, and in *Tropical Malady*, where the shy country boy Tong is inexplicably remodeled as a tiger that preys on livestock in the second-half of the film and must be hunted down by his lover Keng, shifting the ebullient romance of the first-half into one of destructive danger. What is absent or perceived to be moving toward an absence is thus remade starkly present through a slantwise orientation that perverts the integrity of the original object of affection and infuses the narrative trajectories with negative affect and violence.

Sometimes the remade lost object is the very source of one's pain, leading the victim to become the assailant in the queer anti-pastoral. We see an example of this in Bruno Dumont's *Twenty-nine Palms*. Rather than disrupt formal and affective conventions of rural fertility and harmony within the countryside, this film is situated in an already barren California desert near a small town. What is supposed to be a relaxing summer vacation for the heterosexual couple, David and Katia, is rigorously undermined by an imprint of the sublime. This occurs through formal techniques that repeatedly emphasizes the smallness of its human figures and their trek through the landscape in a gas-guzzling Hummer by distant long shots. The vastness of the desert is depicted as a space of monochromatic sameness with rows of human-made wind turbines. Suddenly and without narrative context, a pick-up truck full of rural men enter into the film to beat and rape David while Katia is stripped and forced to witness. Following this shocking act of violence that is compelled by a force of queer negativity, the film halts on another two-minute tableau of grief. This affect's curvature of the spine takes shape as David bends over and sobs, while the gravity of the image is compounded by Katia's slow crawl,

dragging her body across the sand, to provide him comfort—an empathetic encounter like in *Calvaire* that contrasts how this couple has heretofore been depicted as physically and verbally abusive to each other. After the tableau, David and Katia return to their hotel in the next sequence, and David shaves his head bald to match the appearance of his rapist in what seems to be an attempt to recover his masculine virility, then he stabs Katia to death. In the film’s final shot, David has presumably committed suicide; his nude body lies in the desert, depicted from another high-angle long shot and rendered insignificant in comparison to the expansiveness of nature. The form of substitution for loss in this anti-pastoral thus mirrors the traumatic origin of pain, rather than forwarding an intentional confusion generated by erotic obsession onto another human or nonhuman. The fact that the natural landscape stages destructive impacts on the environment by human relations—such as the Hummer and the wind turbines—is also key, for the anti-pastoral here maps these unnatural aggressions onto the characters themselves, brutally returning impositions onto them through the force of negativity.

In other instances of the queer anti-pastoral, grief appears entirely misplaced in ways that highlight improper hierarchies for humans and nonhumans. In François Ozon’s *Criminal Lovers*, for example, we encounter the “ungrievable life” of Saïd, who is positioned as the object of sexual obsession and racial fetishism for high school lovers Alice and Luc. Unlike the aforementioned films, Saïd does not undergo a painful substitution over the course of the film; rather, he is quickly murdered at the beginning, and his death sets the course for Alice and Luc to evade legal authorities in a countryside forest. While driving toward the woods, Luc accidentally runs over a rabbit, and the film depicts the rabbit’s burial in another tableau-esque moment with more care than it does Saïd’s quick commemoration into the earth. The couple is then captured by an unnamed male hermit and self-proclaimed cannibal, who has been watching them all

along. He proceeds to chain Alice in the basement of his cabin next to Saïd's dug-up corpse and begin a sadomasochistic sexual relationship with Luc, referring to him as his "little rabbit." In this sense, the erotic fixation initially cast against Saïd rebounds onto Luc, and the lonely hermit compensates for his isolation by remaking his object of affection into a piece of livestock, one that he persistently fattens up and fucks. The film presents this as a pleasurable sexual awakening for the men, however, before Alice and Luc eventually escape the cabin—to the dissatisfaction of Luc—and reenter the forest. Police officers finally catch up to them, Alice is murdered in a shoot-out, and the film ends on a melodramatic shot-reverse shot sequence of Luc and the hermit being taken into custody and lamenting their separation from each other.

In addition to the forms of misrecognition or substitution deployed against subjects that impact their sexual or interpersonal relations, these confounded expressions of loss are also drawn onto the natural environment itself in the queer anti-pastoral. This is most legible after Robert's swampy burial in the tableau of grief for *Calvaire* when the camera cuts to Marc alone in the snow (1:22:41), remains still for another twenty seconds, then ramps up into a series of quick cuts while moving left across the natural environment. The camera steadily tracks back into the foggy woods, and cuts twice on what appears to be the same forest. On the third cut, the camera is now handheld; it tilts from a dark row of trees to the blinding sky and back down to a plane of dirt. The shaky camerawork, stark lighting, and crowded forestry are then juxtaposed against the next cut, a more balanced framing of a nearly barren landscape, which appears entirely unrelated to the forest. Throughout the remainder of the cuts leading up to the credits, the framing consistently shifts between lightness and darkness, balanced and unbalanced camerawork, slow and rapid tempos with unruly frequencies. This queer anti-pastoral thus demonstrates a spatial and temporal disconnectedness leading up to, during, and following the

tableau for its dissonant human figures and for the environment itself. By undoing the pastoral schemas of seasonal patterns and inhabitable, domesticated landscapes, the queer anti-pastoral forwards an environmental consciousness on how aggressive human relations have altered the environment, and it is through the force of negativity that the queer anti-pastoral compels us to witness these disastrous consequences.

Recall that for Eugenie Brinkema, the formal affect of grief leads the film to mourn over its dramatic change, specifically that tableau of stunted movement in the face of death. Given that this tableau recurs across the queer anti-pastoral and interlocks with formal affordances of loss that rely on misrecognition, misplacement, or substitution, I propose the queer anti-pastoral grieves over the fault lines of love, connectivity, and community. In these spaces of captivity and despair amidst environmental displacement, we confront instances of queer sex that slip into violence and expressions of love in aberrant excess. Through transgressing the boundaries between desire and fixation, and at times, regressing the Darwinian border between the human and the bestial, the queer anti-pastoral directs attention to hierarchies of domination and their ongoing recalibrations. However, by binding together grief with eco-critical negativity, the queer anti-pastoral does not romanticize or champion these unjust orders; rather, it draws us toward violence to effectively lament its outcomes. Taking advantage of stasis as a mode of reflection, the queer anti-pastoral establishes a queer environmental politics that does not sentimentalize non-normative sexual expressions, nor does it memorialize natural spaces for how they enable ecological relations; instead, it applies a grievous disruption to urge us to consider the disastrous connections between humans and their environments that set in as a blockaded failure to find an inherent ecological interdependency.

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