
EROS 183

SCAPEGOAT 9

Movimento #OcupeEstelita

“Entre a Denúncia e o Anúncio: Articulação e Participação Recife – Uma Nova Forma de Direitos Urbanos.”

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#Occupy Estelita: Postcards From Recife, Brazil

Alexandre Hochmann Béharda, Roberto Ferreira Guerra, Tiago Franca Barreto, Maria Collier de Mendonça, Izabel Amaral and Fábio Mosaner

Direitos Urbanos. See pt-br.facebook.com/biblioteca/gt/GT20/GT20_#OcupeEstelita/

Articulação e Participação Recife – Uma Nova Forma de Direitos Urbanos.

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Alain Guiraudie’s 2013 queer thriller L’inconnu du lac.

Throughout A Lover’s Discourse Roland Barthes makes frequent comparison between body and language. The body is nuanced, a site of involuntary signs to be interpreted, while language is trapped by performative extremes, at once “too much and too little.” The truest of messages, we learn from Barthes, are “that of my body, not that of my speech.” Outside the banalities of dialogue a parallel discourse on love can be found in gestures, looks, sighs. Such elements are given spatio-temporal charge in Alain Guiraudie’s 2013 queer thriller L’inconnu du lac. The film plots desire and violence across a secluded lakefront where forms of interpersonal exchange are organized by means of site-specific locations. Cruising scenes privilege the male body and trajectories of the self over language, provoking characters to be read as abstract points and vectors. The representational mode evokes architectural theorist Stan Allen’s definition of “diagram” as a configuration of “momentary clusters of matter in space” or a study of “potential relationships among elements.” Male bodies are figured on a continual search for the erotic subject, in flux, as matter in relation to the next possible configuration or relationship.

Can a discourse on love be abstracted as diagram, a mathematical set of figures, positions, and trajectories? Further: can the diagram be viewed as a means of realizing new relationships and models, not simply as a representational tool to communicate existing ones? Such questions that approach an abstraction of desire and the potential therein can be tested through two underlying schemas in L’inconnu du lac. The first charts geographic position in relation to actions and affect, plotting boundary conditions and spatial sequences between four major environments in the film. The second focuses on the practice of cruising, defined here as an active search for erotic intimacy, framing bodies in relationship to speed, distance, and orientation. While the study uses L’inconnu du lac as a means to produce diagrammatic models, the end goal is not purely representational. The model’s potential within a discourse on love, and even more so within the context of queer desire, lies in its generative capacity. To decode an organizational logic behind sites labeled queer, other, or outside is to approach a method of production for alternative spatial and social narratives. As Deluze has written, “[The diagram] never functions in order to represent a pre-existing world, it produces a new type of reality, a new model of truth.” Diagrams are not illustrations but abstract machines, capable of producing novel relationships of desire between site, activity, and matter.

Set on an isolated lakefront in Provence, L’inconnu du lac focuses on a summer cruising destination for queer men. The site
is located across from and in opposition to a heteronormative beach culture on the horizon, referred to simply as the "other side." Isolation is visually enforced by the cinematic fetishization of natural light, in its ability to render human flesh, vegetation, and immersive shadows during the late afternoon—as well as the utter darkness that characterizes its absence after dusk. While dialogue references a distant urbanism, the world of the film is strictly contained by wilderness. Consciousness is bound to the limits of landscape. The lakefront, a counter site supported by a geographic and conceptual position outside of heteronormative bounds, facilitates queer desire and provides a setting to act on and out varying cues and stimuli. It is a public space that allows for the unhindered interaction of strangers. Such actions exceed far beyond the narrow realm of homossexual sex to engage a conception of interpersonal relationships free from social constraints.

Franck, the seasoned protagonist, believes the site enables him to find love, whereas for the object of his desire, Michel, being there is an opportunity to engage in acts of brutal violence. The film charts their relationship over several days. Amorous encounters, all bound to the lakefront, are interrupted by a series of traumatic events that destabilize the identities projected by the two men as well as the desire that drives them towards one another.

Theorist Lauren Berlant has noted the inherent instability of desire, a quality with transformative potential for both the individual and society at large. She interprets the idea that personal identity itself is a constructed falsehood, merely one of many possible representations of the self given expression for the sake of stability. This stability is rendered particularly important in settings of “hetero-sexualized sexual difference” where social norms seek legible hierarchies in relation to status and power. Thus, sites of difference and anonymity—in which the lakefront of L’inconnu du lac serves as one example—provide opportunity for personal reinvention. They are places where desire and identity merge and complicate one another to produce multiple new modes of being.

While operating as a queer site for desire and identity, the cruising landscape of L’inconnu du lac is ordered by means of geographically specific zones of bodily action and affect. The non-normative is governed by a strict set of internal rules. Divided into parking lot, woods, beach, and lake, each space is governed by a distinct logic and environment. The dirt parking lot is a site of arrival and departure, characterized by both the anticipatory joy of being united with the other and the melancholy sorrow of perpetual loss. The beach functions as a space of exposure and bodily display, but notably within the larger dynamic of cruising as a space of internalized desire. Distinguished by physical and verbal control, there is a sense of affected ennu in which one assesses all possibilities of sexual encounter only to act on them at a later time. The beachgoer’s gaze is directed primarily to the lake, a zone that is imbued with a deep sentiment of fear. To enter the water entails exposure and risk, themes played out through a violent murder that occurs in the lake and a mythical fifteen-foot silurus rumoured to inhabit its depths. Sex acts are reserved for the woods where vegetation provides visual cover from both the beach and parking lot. There, trajectories of the male body are privileged over language, with speech reduced to banal greetings or eliminated completely. Desire is communicated through meeting the sustained gaze of the other.

One might consider the film a queer Carte de tendre, referencing Madeleine de Scudéry’s seventeenth-century map of emotional transport. Scudéry’s fictional geography is one of movement and traversal, characterized, as Giuliana Bruno has explored in her work on the cartographic form, as a schema that relates affect to place. In L’inconnu du lac natural boundary conditions are the primary means of organizing the act of cruising; despite the landscape setting and absence of formalized borders, it is the breaching of environmental thresholds that hold narrative significance. Environments that organize action and affect can be plotted in relation to one another to produce a diagram that links territory, emotion, and movement. By reconstructing the main spaces of the film as a series of zonal strips,
scenic relationships of part to whole become clear in terms of proportion and spatial sequence (Fig. 1). From the entry parking lot, visitors must pass through the woods to arrive at the beach. This passage is delivered in the film as a direct pass through the woods to arrive at the beach. The scenes that follow are each twelve seconds in duration and depict the act of protectionary distancing, both in cautionary approach and to block the other’s gaze when unwanted (Fig. 6). The third scene details a nuanced exchange between follower and leader based on speed, distance, and orientation. A man, conscious that he is being followed by another approximately twenty feet away, invites the erotic advance through simultaneous and opposite trajectories: while his body moves forward into increasingly dense foliage, his gaze looks backward to meet the eyes of the other. Within the larger context of L’inconnu du lac, the wooded landscape operates as a world unto itself, an environment that can only be experienced in full through the act of cruising. It is here that Scudéry’s concept of “tender” geography as one that facilitates and enables the individual to traverse boundaries. The woods support interaction but do not control it, allowing for the generation of multiple and new relationships between players and site. Male bodies are figured in constant flux, as points on an itinerant path without beginning or end. For some, it is a dynamic repeated daily; however, the experience is not predetermined as it is for the other zones of L’inconnu du lac. Each time one enters the woods it is coupled with anticipation, fear, and desire of the unknown.

The diagram specific to the woods and the act of cruising is that of the “field condition” defined as an accumulation of local connections that form a larger network. The repetition of elements and the serial nature of their interaction forms a recognizable system, but one that is not bound to an overarching geometry. Flocks of birds, herds of reindeer, and crowds in protest are examples of naturally occurring field conditions cited by Stan Allen, to which one may add the cruising bodies of L’inconnu du lac. Trajectories of the body and gaze are mediated at the scale of interpersonal dynamics to form a larger network or spatial matrix between players and site. This field condition is open to alterity, able to incorporate moments of indeterminacy and the incalculable while retaining the integrity of the system as a whole. In this regard the diagrammatic form serves as a mise en abyme for L’inconnu du lac, a spatio-temporal model by which one can
understand the film as a whole. (And prompts the question of where else such a diagram might be found or generated—is there an architectural typology of desire?) The open, indeterminate nature of the diagram nurtures the amorous search and its varied outcomes—sex, betrayal, rejection, violence—at times forming an indelible link between love and counter-narratives of destruction.

The diagram’s potential within a discourse on love and queer desire lies in its generative capacity. Diagrams have the ability to produce new modes of reality and, more importantly, provide a model for the construction of alternative spatial and social narratives. The models presented, situated in L’inconnu du lac but not bound to the realm of cinema, offer a narrative approach one may deem ephemeral, fleeting, or, even, cinematic—a means to figure the bodily signs so important to Barthes and the narrative approach one may deem ephemeral, fleeting, or, even, cinematic—a means to figure the bodily signs so important to Barthes and the

1 Thank you to Eugenie Brinkema for her insight and encouragement throughout the development of this text.
3 L’inconnu du lac (Stranger by the Lake), dir. Alain Guiraudie (Les Films du losange, 2013).
8 Theorist Tom Conley notes the spatial mapping of cinema mediates between the visible and discursive, bringing forward “the rifts and overlappings of things seen and things said.” Constructing such a map requires the author to account for gaps. This mediation alone separates the practice from the realm of pure representation and provides a distinction between representation and generative models. See: Tom Conley, Cartographic Cinema (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 11.
9 The character name “l’homme du mardi soir” translates directly to “the man from Tuesday night,” a reference to both the anonymity and frequency of sexual exchange at the lakefront.
10 Allen further describes the field condition as a “bottom-up phenomena, defined not by overarching geometrical schemas but by intricate local connections.” For him, form matters, but not so much the forms of things as the forms between things.” Stan Allen, “Field Conditions,” in Drawing Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City, ed. by the BABEL Working Group, 2012), 52.
11 An underlying organization of queer space—the concept of cruising as both activity and condition—gains further relevance in light of counter to claims by John Paul Ricco that cruising grounds are “unmappable” sites precisely due to their promiscuity to indeterminate paths and actions. See John Paul Ricco, The Logic of the Lure (Chicagao University of Chicago Press, 2003), 11.

Figure 6: Creeping ground, L’inconnu du lac minute 18:46-18:55. Source: Diagram by author.

1. Nathan Friedman

THE PLEASURE OF DIVING IN PUBLIC SPACES: THE EXPERIMENTAL URBAN SWIMMING LABORATORY

Vincent Moracchini

Water should be accessible, touchable, splashable. William H. Whyte, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

Three years ago during a trip to Europe our group discovered the pleasure of urban swimming in Amsterdam, an experience we then repeated many times in other cities. These unforgettable moments of joy led to the creation of The Experimental Urban Swimming Laboratory. Our agenda is to share and promote this universal pleasure.

Urban swimming is a practice and a movement arising in industrialized Western countries. Its power is explained by the joy of splashing. People have been swimming in cities for millennia, and this practice is being revived after its slow disappearance since the mid-twentieth century. Urban swimming generates many questions about city-dwellers and water. It questions our senses, as well as notions surrounding the kinds of public playgrounds we want, environmental public policy, the effects of climate change, the regulation of public spaces, and acceptable forms of leisure.

OVERCOMING REGULATIONS

In France it is prohibited to bathe in urban rivers, resulting in a fine of fifteen to fifty euros, for “hygienic” and “security” reasons. Apart from ignoring a few little signs, it may not seem like urban swimmers are infringing on any laws: there are no fences. The fine reflects the fact that we have become estranged from the idea of swimming in urban areas, and that today it appears unimaginable and improper. Despite the ban, our group may publicly announce the swim ahead of time, or spontaneously go for a pleasure dip. The goal is to show that