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## **INTIMACIES BEYOND THE SCREEN**

Trans-visibility, the City and Exit Scapes in *Tangerine* (2014) and *By Crook or by Hook* (2001)

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## 1. Introduction

The movie *Wildness* (2012) by artist and filmmaker Wu Tsang portrays *Silver Platter*, a bar on the eastside of Los Angeles that has been a meeting point for transgender, queer and Latinx communities since the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Tsang, who also uses the space of the Silver Platter for parties, originally wanted to collect oral histories about *Silver Platter* but ended up making a movie about how this place has affected her personally and vice versa. In many of her works, Tsang explores *spaces of desire* where individuals and communities with different backgrounds mix, “lose themselves” and feel connected to other people through music and dancing. Tsang is especially interested in how movement can articulate emotional experiences that exist outside of language, as well as aesthetic forms of cinema that obscure voyeuristic dynamics and urge alternative ways of experiencing film.

I realized that when talking about cinema, there seems to be a strict barrier between the spectator and the moving objects on the screen. (Mis)representation, objectification and the “male/female/white gaze” are common discussion topics around TV series, films, social media and advertisements. In the early 90s, films of the *New Queer Cinema* movement have paved the new way of cinematic experience, especially through visual distortions of temporality, linearity and heteronormative narratives which were strongly influenced by the AIDS epidemic and its impact on individuals and society. Usually, these films that challenged the distance between viewer and image, did not aim to cater to a cis-hetero mainstream audience but created a space for the filmmakers and their community in a society where they were not supposed to exist. For many filmmakers of the movement, cinema became not only a necessity but also a means of dealing with death, oppression and drastic (bodily) changes.

Keeping this in mind, this essay seeks to understand how *Tangerine* (2015) by Sean Baker and *By Hook or by Crook* (2001) by Silas Howard and Harry Dodge can work as examples of trans cinema that let us sink into the depth of the image instead of just looking at it and by this, turn our gazes into awareness. Drawing on Wiebke Staube’s *exit scapes*, Lauren Mark’s *haptic visibility* and concepts of trans-phenomenology, this essay will explore how these movies employ

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<sup>1</sup> Wildness

aesthetic forms of cinema that go beyond a viewer/object dichotomy and thus challenge hetero- and homonormative processes of spectatorship. It argues that spatial and temporal movement, as well as disorientation in both movies contribute to a physical effect on the viewer that goes beyond identification and creates spaces and possibilities of trans cinematic bonding. It is not only about *losing ourselves* in the film but as Katharina Lindner contends “a contact between our body and the film’s body” (Lindner ) and ultimately, a desire to dissolve distances. In the following, these questions will be discussed: what are the politics of (trans-)visibility and representation (in digital media/ film/ the city) - and what is the role of the body? In what way are temporal and spatial movement realized in the movies and what are their effects? What “entrant points” and utopian spaces do they offer and create between, beyond and in front of the screen?

## **2. Trans Visibility Politics and Embodiments**

In *Fabulous -- The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (2018), madison moore explores ‘fabulousness’ as a political-aesthetic practise that is largely embodied by marginalized people and social outcasts. moore argues that a fabulous style is more than narcissism, shallow selfies and labels. Style, moore tells us, affords those who are marginalized “the potential dream, to inhabit another world, not in theory but in practice” (moore 71). This “expressive resistance” performed for the camera, the app, the blog, is a form of cultural critique of the “beautiful marginal” (moore 61). Media theorist Minh-Ha T. Pham has demonstrated the cultural power of selfies in her book *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet* (2015) where she writes that the “tendency to dismiss practices of sartorial display and extravagance as mere vanity, risks ignoring the lived experience of minoritized people for whom the right to be seen on their own terms and the right to take pleasure in their bodies and self-images that has never been a given” (moore 83). Thus, for queer, brown and other social outsiders, indulging in eccentric fashion and style has become a means of survival in everyday life and a way to showcase their vision of a better world. Yet, being fabulous on stage, in clubs and on the streets is a form of resistance that is often not acknowledged as such and even comes with daily street harassment, physical and verbal assaults against and homicides of those who perform it. While the extravaganza is often celebrated by mainstream society in

advertising and media, the reality of these marginalized people are hardly of any concern. moore points out the paradox of fabulousness, especially when it comes to social media. Platforms, such as instagram, have evolved into spaces where queer people of color are able to make themselves visible in ways they want to be seen. However, when talking to transfeminine multimedia performance artist Alok Vaid-Menon, they assert that trans, non-binary and queer people of color are “locked in a digital glass ceiling” where they are only allowed to exist on the internet. Instagram becomes a “digital zoo” where a lot of people can feed themselves with the spectacle and then go on with their lives without actively participating in social change. Vaid-Menon contends that “social media has created a facade, an illusion of trans progress, trans visibility, trans acceptance” (moore 53). What Vaid-Menon describes here is a politics of visibility that benefits corporations that are already in power rather than minoritized communities. The fact that many marginalized people gain visibility through social media gives an illusion of presence that rarely transfers into the real world. Not many transgender and gender-nonconforming people with high social media visibility are able to turn their online work into real institutional power or get financial compensation. Rather it is, as game and media scholar micha cardenas points out, big social media corporations such as Facebook, that make profit off of every click and scroll. The data and knowledge that is spread on the internet by trans activists, benefits the information economy that sells users’ demographic data to advertisers who pay thousands of dollars in return (cardenas 168).

In their anthology *Trap Doors* (2018), Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley and Johanna Burton reflect on the simultaneous rise of representation of trans people and anti-trans violence on the streets. Gossett writes that while the life of trans and queer Black and people of color are celebrated, consumed and sold as cultural products, they are hardly given the resources they need and deserve. In the last few years, these minorities were offered opportunities to enter mainstream media and become visible but not without consequences. Gossett has termed this the “trap door” of trans visibility to describe the contradictions that came with the rising media visibility of trans and gender nonconforming people where only few are granted state recognition at the cost of those who are unable or unwilling to conform to certain images (Nyong’o 2017). In their introduction, the editors write that trans people have been offered “entrances to visibility, to

resources, to recognition, and to understanding. Yet...these doors are almost always also ‘traps’—accommodating trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities” (Gossett, Stanley, Burton xxiii).

Similarly, film scholar Stevie N. Berberick asserts how mainstream media exclusively highlights certain groups of trans people and then makes it seem that society is much more progressive than it actually is (Berberick 123). For instance, the year 2015 was described by the American Vogue magazine as ‘the year of trans visibility’ and quickly a minority group whose life was solely confined to “tabloids of shock and titillation” became mainstream (Burns 2). The paradox then is that mainstream society only accepts, narrates and applauds portions of existence while others stay underrepresented or invisible. Berberick uses the metaphor of the *lush, velvet clock* to demonstrate this paradox that can be observed by how their stories are being told: narratives such as TV celebrity Caitlyn Jenner’s coming out story are praised as acts of bravery and societal progress that only function as “surface-level celebrations of diversity” while simultaneously putting much emphasis on the reveal (Berberick 167). These narratives are similar to the velvet clock because they operate on binaries and therefore erase all the nuances of experiences and multi-dimensional nature of identity. Binaries collapse people into boxes that are in relation to another and then normalize one box while casting the other as deviant (Berberick 167). Consequently, visibility, as Berberick puts it, is only to be looked at and not to be seen. The binary depictions of trans experiences and bodies contribute to a “heteroideological narrative” which keeps heteronormative complexes of power intact by “shifting the narrative consistently that is more of the same but appears as progressive and seeks to obscure complex realities” (Berberick 128). Roland Barthes argues that this ideological move depends on the “theft of fragmentation” or “limitation of the entirety,” for instance by seeing *any* visibility as progress. This is then mistaken as actual progress that allows for a consensual return to hegemonial structures (Berberick). In other words, it gives the impression that current heteronormative structures, at last, work out for everyone. Berberick also points out that visibility politics often neglect *material-realities* that transgender people face. While images of certain groups of transgender people entered the mainstream, their bodies are still depicted as static or bodies that have fully transformed into the “correct” sex, that are finally able to function within

heteronormative structures. The fact that only certain images of trans bodies are depicted in the media have direct consequence on trans bodies on the streets. As Vaid-Menon states: “The way I get street-harassed is not only because I’m failing to be cis but because I’m failing to be trans. It’s a double failure. I’m failing to be a nice, medicalized, beautiful woman, and I’m actually a failure as a man, as a woman, and a failure of this new media-constructed trans body” (moore 55). Accordingly, trans masculinities and transitioning bodies have barely any mainstream media representation because their bodies do not fit in any accepted categories. The nuances of transition are deemed unimportant and so are the histories of bodies in transition. In general, corporeal effects do not matter much in media coverage, such as the rising violence against transgender people, especially against trans women of color. While images of specific trans and non-conforming bodies are visible on the screen and ready to be looked at, the reality of their everyday lives on the street is not much of any concern. Berberick argues that the bathroom debate is one of the few spaces in mainstream media where trans masculinity is visible and a fraction of everyday life experiences of trans people is discussed (Berberick 139).

In their witty and poetic essay “The Guild of the Brave and Poor Things,” Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos talk about how bathroom doors have been literal trap doors for Black, disabled and trans people: bathroom cabins that are too small for wheelchairs, the history of White-only bathrooms and anti-trans bathroom bills. Quite ironically, it is the most private space that, as Jack Halberstam contends, sees the body as static and the debates around it that illustrate the “remarkably clear and flourishing existence of gender binarism despite rumors of its demise” (Berberick 130). Correspondingly, McArthur and Zavitsanos write that “[i]n this public space of single installed privacy, we don’t come alone; our privacy is public.” In fact, this reveals real life consequences of ambiguous bodies in and outside of the bathroom and thus put transition narratives to the test (Berberick 130). Ambiguous bodies, Halberstam posits, can be read as threatening when entering gender-specific bathrooms. Essentially, it is about “passing” as a “real men” or a “real women,” a narrative that “maintains both hegemonic bodily appearances and gender expressions that reject ambiguity” (Berberick 131). Similarly to the illustration of “social organization” made by McArthur and Zavitsanos in their essay, Sara Ahmed also asserts that bathrooms have always been an example of how space is designed to keep individuals in a

straight line (Berberick 139). It is paradoxical that such a private room in the public, usually seen as a safe space to relieve oneself, turns dangerous depending on the appearance of one's body. The bathroom bill has sparked a social media movement called *#wejustneedtopee* that uses body visibility to illuminate discriminatory and "dehumanizing spatial ordering" (Berberick 132). It is when the body becomes visible as flesh. In the midst of theories and images, it is therefore relevant to evaluate the position of the literal body.

Critic Andrea Long Chu states in her essay "The Wrong, Wrong Body: Notes on Trans Phenomenology," that many feminists and queer theorists "fear the literal" when evaluating their critical objects. In contrast, the sensationalization of the wrong-body narrative in the media extensively uses the flesh and its biological components as main argument. In her pivotal work *The Life and Death of Latisha King* (2018), Gayle Salamon examines the trial of 15-year old Brandon McInerey who shot his 14 year old classmate at E.O. Green Junior High School Latisha King in 2008. In the media this case was distributed as a homophobic hate crime. McInerey killed King after King showed romantic interest in him. However, during the trial McInerey discloses that his rage did not arise from King's romantic advancement towards him but the feminine clothing King was wearing, and King's decision to be called by the name Latisha. Salamon examines how the proceeding justified the murder of King as defensive based on a reading of gender as itself constituting an act of aggression. Not only the language of the media but also the language in the courtroom collapsed gender expression with sexuality. Salamon notes that in multiple instances in the courtroom, things that were labeled as sexuality, were actually gender expressions. Through feminist phenomenology, Salamon investigates how gender expression is perceived, showing that, even wearing a piece of clothes, King's body movements and the way she walked, are perceived as an sexually aggressive act, which is then seen as legible justification for murder. This especially highlights Madison Moore's understanding of fabulousness as a political act as it deals with the perception of non-conformity as a threat. The wrong-body narrative or the narrative of the body that performs deviantly, is thus a narrative that strongly relies on perception and restrained understanding of a "becoming" of the body, and society, that is not meant to be.

Accordingly, Chu contends that there is no passage from wrong to right or from dysphoria to alignment but rather, quoting Halberstam, a transition to a “space of time lived without a narrative genre” (Chu 144). She asserts that people who decide to transition do not feel trapped in the wrong body but in the wrong society (144). In other words, the body in transition neither aligns to heteronormative narrative nor does it fit into pre-given categories. Also, as Halberstam importantly points out, it is also a question of what defines the right body “since rightness could easily depend on whiteness and class privilege, as it does on being regendered” (144). That is, even if there was such kind of understanding of wrong-embodiment, these people will never be granted the “right body” but always be positioned outside the norm regardless of their transition. Altogether, the question of *what* exactly trans visibility is supposed to make visible becomes crucial, because there is no static archetype of a transitioning body.

Commenting on Jay Posser’s statement that “transition often proves a barely livable zone,” Chu states that the keyword is *barely*, which means when stating that transition is barely liveable, it implies that “transition is liveable, no matter how bare this life gets” (Chu 150), and this life also has to be talked about, too. Chu hints at the fact that the everyday life of trans people is often left out in the genre of trans narratives that are usually structured around sensationalism and exclusion. Seeing some trans people’s “felt sense” of themselves less as a body image that is changing and more of “nonce ontologies,” Chu attempts to bring back the mundane into the overtly theorized and binarized life of trans people. Nonce ontologies, she explains is “a phenomenological improvisation on the relationship between thinking and being that has always already taken root in an ethical and political being-in-the-middle-of something” (150). Consequently, nonce ontologies tell us to re-engage with what is “naive, sincere, uncomplicated, unironic, uncritical, unstrategic, or just plain ordinary about everyday being in the world,” or as Husserl puts it, a “return” to the naivete of life (150). As, Moore has stated, fabulousness is not a theory limited to “high-end academic discourse. [...] It’s a theory of the everyday that is happening right now, a theory of survival, a theory that’s alive, a theory we can look at, a theory we can experience” (Moore 71). The next part will therefore talk about *the phenomenology of the everyday life*, as well as dive into reclaimed spaces in the city, and then will move on to an

analysis of *Tangerine* and *By Hook or By Crook* that revolve around the mundane, the getting by, the everyday life struggles of their trans protagonists in the city, a dream place for many.

### **3. A Day and Night in the City**

In the article “Pulse, Beat, Rhythm, Cry: Orlando and the Queer and Trans necropolitics of loss and mourning,” trans studies scholar Che Gossett calls attention to the centrality of the beat: “Anti queer/trans necropolitical violence is about stopping the pulse of queer and trans of color life/ worlds and the club was the target because it is the flashpoint for eroticopolitized desire” (cardenas 167). Historically, the club has been the pinnacle of safe space and community for queer and trans people. The fact that *Pulse*, a gay club, was the place where 49 people of the LGBTI\* community were killed is therefore horrendous and traumatic. Where are we safe if not in the club? Professor of regional planning Petra L. Doan asserts that spaces for genderqueer and trans people are only physically present in gay or lesbian residential, or commercial areas that replicate heteronormative gender dichotomies (Doan 57). Genderqueer people are generally only able to occupy public spaces during dyke marches or pride parades (Doan 63), and are practically invisible in everyday life. Geographical literature dealing with space and sexuality have only dealt with heterosexuals, gays and lesbians, but have been silent transgender people and bisexuals (63). Trans right’s activist j. vreeer verkerke asserts that there is no safe space for transgender people because transphobia also exists among feminist and left wing theorists (verkerke 12). As Moore, Berberick, Salamon and Vaid-Menon have stated, individuals who challenge gender norms (on the streets) are seen as a threat and therefore trigger violent responses (Doan 60). Those who do not pass for neither gender are one of the most vulnerable individuals in social spaces and face discrimination in school, at work, in homeless shelters, by doctors, before judges, landlords and the police. As a result, many transgender people seek work on the street as sex workers, a place where they are especially vulnerable. Yet, because of systematic discrimination, it proves to be one of the very few spaces to earn money in order to survive. Temporal self-created spaces such as annual conventions, symposiums, film festivals, periodic public protests, political lobbying and parties are rooms for community building, desire and support. The question is then, how physical

spaces of urban areas can be claimed long-term, and this can only be realised by revisioning discourses on gender (Doan 70) . However, it is not only about the spaces itself but also the paths taken to claim these spaces. Seeing the world “slant-wise,” as Sarah Ahmed puts it, allows for a path that resist “straight” social ordering. Ahmed uses orientation as a spatial metaphor that refers to one’s tendencies that “establish one’s starting position, proximity to objects, people, and activities, direction of movement, objects of desire and ease in moving through a given space” (Ahmed . In opposition, the “queer slant” is not in alignment with the normative line. It does not follow the orientation that dominantly structures the space, such as the route to the bathroom. To move the body away from the normative line takes repetitious work and is dangerous. It requires constant movement and evaluation of the body in proximity of what surrounds it and eventually the literal adoption of a body that is off the line. Ahmed asserts that “inhabiting a lesbian body; the act of tending towards other women has to be repeated, often in the face of hostility and discrimination, to gather such tendencies into a sustainable form” (Ahmed 102). The sociality or the communal act is then built with people who are similarly off the line which is challenging but full of potential:

For lesbians, inhabiting the queer slant may be a matter of everyday negotiation. *This is not about the romance of being off the line* or the joy of radical politics (though it can be), but rather the everyday work of dealing with the perception of others...and the violence that might follow...Having not turned [onto the line], who knows where we might turn...The contingency of lesbian desire makes things happen” (Ahmed 107)

Who knows where we might turn? Which utopia do we want to imagine? And how do we get there? Moving away from the straight line also means to object heteronormative understandings of life, namely the fact that one must surpass several stages (birth, marriage, reproduction, death) in order to grow up and to become a fully socially accepted individual. Queer filmmakers have questioned this conventionality of longevity and futurity that, especially, in the face of the AIDS epidemic in the 90s, did not match with their life experience (Halberstam 3). Consequently, being off the line means that alternative imaginaries of being are necessary, if not even life-saving. José Muñoz writes in *Cruising Utopia* “that minoritarian subjects are cast as hopeless in a world without utopia.” In a reality where marginalized people are constantly pushed towards the fringe

of society, “daydreaming” about a utopian possibility is not necessarily an escape but a “should be and could be” (moore 70). Ultimately, moore suggests, that when talking about style as utopia it is essentially a creating of a separate space in the here and now, where queer and trans people get to play with ideas, creativity, and expression to create a new world. As moore beautifully puts it: “Fabulousness as queer utopia is about living in the present but carrying an alternative possibility, a certain future, and yanking it into the here and now” (moore 71). Here, carrying is used quite literally because it is the body that wears these clothes, *works* the streets, shows “attitude”, moves, and transitions, becomes a walking utopia. Similarly, Halberstam has eloquently declared that “the transgender body represents a utopian vision of a world of subcultural possibilities” (Halberstam 96). Here, The literal body becomes a focal point of change.

Walking through the streets beside the lines, dreaming in the city, feeling the beat of shaking club grounds, one can find temporal spaces of queer community, resistance and desire. The question of how to create a space that persists to be present permanently then is still open. However, cinema has proven to provide a space for queer people while being permanently present by its own, becoming a body that does not only exist through the community but also by itself. Halberstam has fittingly stated: “the queer cinematic world comes to represent a truly localized place of opposition” (Halberstam 94). For this reason, I will investigate how *Tangerine* and *By Hook or by Crook* embody these feelings of permanent dislocation and disorientation in the “liminal city” and how their trans protagonists sink into “exit scapes” in their everyday lives that may become our own as well. By regarding these films as bodies themselves, I will also consider the role of the spectator and their relation to the film as body, as well as the spaces within and between them that constitute a desire that is uneasy, and unrepentantly queer. In the following, the films will be analyzed through the three thematic blocks discussed above - everyday life/ visibility, movement and space/ exit scapes - and their connections to aesthetic forms of cinema.

#### **4) Tangerine**

Tangerine has been described as a road movie without a car. And certainly, after returning from prison, the protagonist Sin-Dee does a lot of walking around the city in search of the person who her pimp boyfriend has supposedly cheated on with. The opening scene could easily be mistaken as a beginning of a Hollywood romcom movie: underlined with a dreamy soundtrack, and ornate lettered film credits, it starts with a topshot of brown clasped hands adorned with a huge ring, and a gift exchange. The gift is a donut, Sin-Dee's christmas present for her friend Alexandra which of course, needs to be shared because Sin-Dee is broke. Both catch up on their everyday life, talking about the imprisonment as nothing special, Alexandra's physical changes ("The estrogen has been kicking in, the only thing it hasn't broken down was these fucking arms!"), their business as sex workers, paying rent and what has been happening on the block, while sitting at their local donut shop.

When Sin-Dee finds out that her pimp boyfriend has not been faithful, Sin-Dee jumps up and leaves *Donut Time*, walking down the street with fast steps. The camera movement switches from a forward tracking shot to a reverse and then to a parallel tracking shot in fast succession, all the while zooming in and out. Even when Sin-Dee stops walking to talk to a friend, the camera keeps moving in a shaky panning shot. Especially when Sin-Dee is dragging Alexandra after her, and the two of them are walking down the streets together, the camera alternates between different shots and movements (circular, zoom, upwards/downwards), not only pointing at the two friends but also their surroundings, such as the graffitis, traffic lights, a skydancer. The fast variations of shots and perspectives disorientate and destabilize the viewing position: at one point we are right next to the protagonists, in the next second we are cruising right pass them. The whole film was shot with an Iphone which contributes to a guerilla effect, irritating the eye. I argue that this affects us quite physically by making us dizzy and disorientated as well, losing our sense of our own proportions, not only because of the visual effects but also the fact that we only know as much as Sin-Dee does.

In her pivotel essay "Video Haptics and Erotics" visual media scholar Lauren Mark describes "haptic perception" as an invitation to *feel* what is shown. Rather than identifying with the protagonists, having sympathy or judging their actions through meaning making and cultural collective

knowledge, it is about being affected by the image, bodily and mentally (). Certainly, there is no time for identification when Sin-Dee is dragging us around the city but what we see might as well just be how Sin-Dee feels. Visual culture scholar Eliza Steinbock has stated in their fascinating book *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change* (2019) that “images are not purely visual but a complex of affectivity” (Steinbock 24). In other words, images are not only there to look at. What Steinbock hints at is a *looking at* that goes beyond object-based associations and turns into a *looking with* that is bluntly physical. When Sin-Dee takes the underground and soft lights are flashing on her face, while her friend Alexandra walks through the streets of L.A., touched by the warm light of the setting sun, it feels remarkably intimate. Mark beautifully describes such an effect as (moving) images that “approach the viewer not through the eyes alone but along the skin” (Mark 331). Further, she explains that in “haptic visuality the eyes become organs of touch themselves” (Mark 332). That is, based on the concept of haptic visuality, she does not see the cinematic experience as an experience of consumption but as a bodily engagement with the film’s body. Consequently, this defies the idea of the gaze. Donna Haraway has stated that we need “to reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere” (). How could a cinematic body transcend such distances in a place like a city that seems ultimately anonymous?

In “The City as Liminal Space: Urban Visuality and Aesthetic Experience in Postmodern U.S. Literature and Cinema,” Stefan L. Brandt writes that through the metaphor of walking, the city “in postmodern fiction is staged as a liminal space, a space that symbolizes transition and change” (Brandt 561). The metropolitan city is often described as an alienated place where the inhabitant “have lost their sense of orientations” (Brandt 562). It is therefore interesting that *Tangerine* depicts minoritized individuals who seem to know the streets of their city by heart: Razmik, as a taxi driver, and Sin-Dee because her life and work take place on the streets. However, at the same time they are disoriented, do not know where they are heading exactly, as it also depends on where they can find business. In contrast, Razmik’s white and cisgendered customers knew exactly where they wanted to go even in a state of complete drunkenness, or knew where they needed to go but seemed reluctant to ever arrive. Accordingly, the camera movements are put in juxtaposition. Whenever we are in the taxi car with Razmik, the

movements are focused, almost static compared to Sin-Dee's "wild chase" through the streets of the block, the underground, private spaces. I argue that this could be experienced as a cinematic "queer slant" in which our perception and position in the (cinematic) world is not only destabilized but also evokes a desire to take the routes to a destination that is yet unknown. Sin-Dee's disorientation becomes more appealing than the seemingly orientated people that pass her along the way. In "Questions of Embodied Difference: Film and Queer Phenomenology," Katharina Lindner argues that this kind of "sense-making capacities" are more readily engaged in non-traditional cinematic pleasures. It is when the effects on the body evoke a phenomenology that is composed based on the rational. Lindner further asserts that

the pleasures that a queer audience might take from the film are most usefully identified by an emphasis on sensuousness and bodily effect - and they are less likely to be found in the realm of the (psychic) identification and desires available in relation to characters and storyline (201).

Consequently, the city might be alienating for individuals who feel disconnected due to the seemingly endless possibilities that it can offer, who see the limitless opportunities of a globally driven society, while forgetting their very own physical position in their city, "home" and streets. In contrast, feeling disoriented means that one exactly knows where one wants to belong to but is quite literally displaced to somewhere else, or as Jacob R. Lau says, "to be disoriented means that you are effectively ejected out of social space, or more accurately feel beside yourself, feel the weight of scrutiny" (Lau 29). In fact, in *Tangerine* locality is put in the forefront, emphasizing the places Sin-Dee's is "ejected to": the local donut store becomes the "homebase" or the place for business, the food line, Sin-Dee and the employees at the burger restaurant are familiar with each other, she constantly encounters people she knows, sex workers, transgender people, while she is looking for Dinah, she walks the streets of her block leaving signs, graffiti and sky dancers behind, while cars, the primary form of transportation in L.A., pass by her anonymously. When Razmik's mother-in-law sits in the taxi, she says "Los Angeles is like a beautifully wrapped lie," and then proceeds to *Donut Time* where she basically sees the city unwrapped. Halberstam has stated that the politics of the local are often deemed meaningless, opposed to global discourses, as postmodern theorists seem to become highly irritated when confronted with "the concrete, the

specific, the narrow, the empirical, and even the bodily” (Halberstam 11). The spaces in *Tangerine* are not the usual media images we are used to see of Los Angeles but nonetheless, the everyday spaces of Sin-Dee, Alexandra, Dinah, Razmik and “Mamasan”. Walking their routes, our gazes, our readiness to judge, turn into an affect that allows a “sinking in” onto the image, consequently making us aware of the very own liminal, separated spaces we produce - while being yanked back into our very own bodies through cinematic aesthetics. This is in alignment with trans ontologies that how Steinbock asserts, are process-oriented rather than object-oriented (Steinbock 144). The fact, that *Tangerine* is essentially a body of film *in* movement on several different levels is distinctive for trans cinema.

Essentially, *Tangerine* is about the everyday life of their protagonists: (trans) sex workers of color, (queer) people of color that work at burger restaurants, donut stores, as taxi drivers trying to make ends meet, regardless whether it is Christmas Day or not. Most of the people that Sin-Dee encounters just want to go on with their businesses and do not want any drama. The whole plot revolves around Sin-Dee finding her (pimp) boyfriend’s new “fish”, her heartbreak and friendship - situations that are utterly mundane regardless of one’s gender. The conversations are often quite mundane, for example, Alexandra tells Sin-Dee about the puppet she owned when she was a child, while Sin-Dee herself is completely immersed in her rage against Chester. However, racism and transphobic comments are still part of their daily lives: Razmik’s white drunk customers call him “Mexican” and make fun of him, Chester’s business partner refuses to see Sin-Dee and Alexandra as women, and calls them “homeboys”, sex workers of color being asked for their “exotic” names, cis people using trans and drag interchangeably, and at the very end of the film, a physical attack occurs that is followed by transphobic slurs. The film does not depict glamour, no sensationalization of trans life and no huge emphasis on transphobic brutality. Instead it shows the many nuances of the everyday life of minoritized individuals. In the midst of everyday life “hustling”, drama, the mundane and all the hardships, there is always one thing for Sin-Dee and Alexandra that is particularly important for them: style. Here, madison moore’s concept of fabulousness as a queer utopia in the here and now materializes itself again. It does not matter how close the situation is to an escalation, Sin-Dee is always ready to comment on “the cute blouse”, the hair, the outfit. But especially the ending scene showcases the importance of

style for trans and queer people, as bonding, as compassion, as safespace: Sin-Dee runs away when she finds out that Alexandra also slept with Chester, heartbroken, she tries to find clients when a group of cis men throw urine in her face and shout transphobic slurs at her. Her clothes and wig are drenched in urine, her only tangible utopia destroyed in a second. Alexandra takes her to a laundromat and proceeds to give Sin-Dee her own wig. For Sin-Dee being fabulous in a complete miserably situation regardlessly, provides her an exit from a highly transphobic world.

There are several spaces in *Tangerine* that play with the definition of the private and the public, and also replicate the irony of the bathroom as safe space. The concept of privacy is turned inside out. The only physical home we get to see in *Tangerine* is Razmik's apartment where he is stuck with his wife's family. It is certainly not a safe space for him where his queer desires have no room at all. Instead he finds escape in quite mundane places such as the car wash station. In *Trans Cinema and its Exist Scapes*, scholar Wibke Straube defines an exit scape as a scene that allows an escape from a film's confining scene. Further, Straube defines *the entrant* as a "particular form of relationality between the film scenes and those who get involved with them" (). Similarly to Mark and Lindner, Straube is interested in the embodied engagement with the film's body. Exit scapes, Straube further explains, are "*through* spaces, not *outside* spaces. They *refuse* the idea of being able to claim a space *outside* of the normative interaction" (Straube 51). Exit scapes are not meant to be counter-narratives but instead they are entering spaces into a "permeable world of *becoming with* the film" (51). Further, for Straube the viewer is invited into "the particularly hopeful scapes of the dance, song and dream" (51). The car wash station/ gas station, a mundane but quite important location for the average Los Angeles car driver, becomes an exit scape for Razmik, Alexandra, and also the viewer. The car slowly drives into the car wash station, Razmik goes down on Alexandra, while the water splashes against the car, flushing away their miseries and worries, at least in this very moment, which allows "a short slipping into a different world, imaginative but nonetheless important" (53). The sound of the water is meditating and the visuals extremely calming. The car wash station becomes a room where queer desires are possible without any interruption. The scene is so beautifully intimate, it lures the viewer into its very depth of its exit scape. Another scene I identify as an exit scape is Alexandra's performance. In

fact, she already speaks about it at the very beginning when Sin-Dee gives her the donut. Throughout the day, she also tells everyone to come to her performance at the bar. It seems to be something that is always in the back of Alexandra's mind and keeps her going. When she is finally on stage and sings (to an almost empty bar), even Sin-Dee stops talking. Dinah does not understand the importance of this performance and does not sink onto this exit scape, even pokes fun at Alexandra when she finds out that she paid the bar to perform. In this very moment, only Alexandra and Sin-Dee, two trans people of color living their life at the fringe of society, experience this as a brief moment of being *elsewhere*. The shots are very close: Alexandra's face almost fills up the entire screen and the scenery seems to be covered by a dreamy haze. Sin-Dee listens to Alexandra and drifts away into another world, which is also stimulated by the crystal meth she just smoked with Dinah in the bar's bathroom. As discussed above, the bathroom is a safe space turned open space that takes the literal trans body as a debate platform. To have a space that is at the heart of mainstream transphobic discussions become an exit scape is therefore exceptionally significant. Surely, one could easily relapse to moral discourses on drug use but what should be in the center here is the intimacy enabled through the exit scape that evokes trans cinematic bonding. Especially, when Sin-Dee does Dinah's make-up the images of their connection approach us *along the skin*. Straube asserts that, the affective approach in film in her definition of exit scapes is not about "yearning for reparation or comfort" but it is essentially something that relies on a methodology "that allows to see connections between embodiment, identity and subjectivity and showcases the "importance of this interconnectedness for trans queer-feminist scholarship" (Straube 55). In other words, these exit scapes are not meant to be theorized as coping strategies but rather as an exit that fosters movement of resistance. Straube asserts that "exit scapes provide a world-making spirit in their temporary escapes from normative appellation" (56). It is a utopian becoming that persists to be permanently present and calls for engagement. Consequently, it converses with Reina Gossett's concept of the "trap door" that is neither an entrance to acceptance, nor an exit from current struggles but a secret pathway leading to an elsewhere.

The exit scape as a space of non-normative 'fabulation' and speculation especially becomes apparent when temporality is considered as well. Ahmed's notion of orientation does not

only address movement through space, which was extensively discussed above, but also a movement through time that is inseparable from this space. The way how bodies experience space is directly linked to temporality (Straube 90). In the following, I will discuss *By Crook or By Hook* that visually elaborates on the relationship between temporalities and ambiguous/ trans male embodiment.

## 5) By Crook or By Hook

Straube states that when dealing with Trans Cinema it usually means that one engages with films that feature trans female characters because there are not many film productions with trans male characters (Straube 38). As discussed above, this also holds true in the mass media, where transmasculine and ambitious bodies are barely visible, and if they do become visible, they are identified as a threat. *Hook or by Crook* is one of the few films with trans male characters that on top of it also embraces “nonce ontologies” and go back to the naivete of life. Close to the beginning, Shy makes clear that she does not want to be put into any category. When she is asked if she is a boy or a girl, she replies: *both!* Once this information was out of the way, the film goes on from there in a quite unperturbed fashion. When Val is beaten up, it is not clear if this was a specifically transphobic attack, but Billy was not surprised about Val getting beaten up. The “reveal” and “violence” happen fairly early, as if to put these sensationalizing topics aside in order to concentrate on the real deal: life and its absurdities. Once Val meets Shy, they are doing completely mundane and fun things. They eat donuts together, sing and smoke, go drink and dance, have their romances, have dinner with Billy at Val’s place. In between these activities though, they are also doing completely nonsensical things that all seem to be connected by Val’s non-stop nonsensical talk. This making of nonsense however, is in fact an undoing of linear and productivity orientated narratives of life and being, especially that of a trans body. It defies the narrative of the “wrong body” that is in linear transition to the “right body”. In fact, Shy says that he only started to dress like a boy because...Accordingly, \_\_\_ has stated that \_\_\_\_ do not feel like they are in the wrong body but in the wrong society.

The protagonists move through the city quite a lot as well, especially Shy who leaves her home at the countryside behind, walks through the city with no destination in mind, though, similarly to Sin-Dee, with a certain goal, namely to buy a gun and rob a bank. However, in this film, the viewer or the viewer's eye is not exactly irritated while Shy walks the streets but rather when the whole body of the film moves, rushes, jumps, strolls and drags itself through time. The different temporalities are realized through a multitude of cinematic aesthetics: Sudden insertions of clips that show Shy's or Val's childhood throw the viewer off-guard. While these images are also "covered by a dreamy haze" and occasionally overlap each other, the images also *move* in *irregular* slow-motion. Especially, during Shy's sex scene the fast alternating temporal effects, such as slow-motion to fast-motion and an oscillation of everything between, is what effects the viewer physically because we are pulled back and forth through time, and experience a narrative that is completely non-linear and off the clock. *Tangerine* mainly confuses the spectator spatially, while *By Hook and By Crook* triggers temporal confusion and disrupts normative notions of time. Furthermore, the plot feels circular because Shy keeps revisiting locations that she has already been to before, such as Val's house, the motel, the kiosk to do the very same things she did before which gives an impression that there is no or a very slow progress in plot development. Sin-Dee also revisits the burger restaurant and *Donut Time* at the very end but only after she found Dinah and finally wants to confront Chester. Another dimension of temporal irritation are the dialogues and monologues: Val's sentences do not follow a logical order which is why the viewer might cognitively pick up the conversations as stagnant. When Shy encounters her crush in the bathroom, Shy finds out that she has a very sharp memory that seems to be in complete alignment with whatever temporality there is, while in another scene, Val talks about them being kids when they were eating donuts at the restaurant and Shy replies: "you mean yesterday?" The different dimensions of temporal disruptions affect the viewer on a bodily, visual and mental level that propels them in a non-logical dream-like scape.

In one scene Val confesses: "Sometimes I cannot sleep, I just talk, talk, talk, talk." When considering the argumentation above, Val's situation could also be described as a dream-like state. Straube argues that the relationship between temporalities and trans bodies is elaborated in a dream scape that objects performances of progress and productivity. Straube further explains that

it allows objects and beings to enter the screen that are rendered useless in a capitalist, cis heteropatriarchal approach to value the fairy, fairy tales, imaginary realities, pop-cultural icons, and the belief in the mythical and magical and its non-rationalist underpinnings (Straube 174pp).

In fact, *By Hook or By Crook* is loaded with imaginary realities and the belief in the magical. For instance, Shy goes through the telephone contact book determined to find Val's mother. What seems like an impossible mission, turns out to be successful at the very end. When Shy and Val go to the tool shop to get a refund for something they did not even buy, the viewer has probably already put it down as something completely childish, but then finds out that it has actually worked out. Another fairytale scene is when Val, Billy and Shy want to break an automat with their plastic toys which seems absolutely absurd but nevertheless works out as well. Their reactions, that expose how surprised they are by the absurdity themselves, propels the viewer into a space that allows dreaming. It is an active "daydreaming" (Muñoz 144) of imaginary futures, fabulations, that such dream scapes promise to be possible in an *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*, that have yet to be discovered in the future or lived through in the now. The emphasis on the everyday and everyday resistance, as well as the mundane, again, propels me back to madison moore's concept of style (as utopia), something that is also often dismissed as unreasonable and irrelevant, which ties in quite well with these small actions of absurdity that in the end of the day, give hope for better times.

## **6) Conclusion**

We are returning back to Wu Tsang's party at *Silver Platter*. People are chatting and dancing, become more intimate, feel the music. Considering what I have discussed above, movement can take on different kind of shapes that communicate feels beyond the constraints of language, the logical, the object. Movement is essentially about letting the body speak and allow it to be in motion, to proceed and turn to *something* that is yet to be discovered. The emphasis is on *approach*, as an approach suggests a continuous reduction of distance, until the possible (physical) touch. While understanding the film as body, I have discussed distance through the

concept of the city and trans embodiment that are both visualized in *Tangerine* and *By Hook or By Crook*. I have shown that these films are physically and mentally affective because they irritate our spatiotemporal sense of self which is at the roots of transfeminist phenomenology that calls for a reconsidering of progress as linear, liminal spaces and selves, as well as stability. It simultaneously undermines the quest for a visibility politics based on representation that will always be fragmentary. Further, considering the interconnection of the viewer's and film's body, I urge for intimacies beyond the screen, and skin, that facilitate queer desires and fearlessly invest in utopian speculations that make permanent room for resistance, pleasure, and also, joy.

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