“I LOVE YOU MORE THAN MY EYES”: GLIMPSING THE OBLIQUE IN DEREK JARMAN’S *CARAVAGGIO*

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Reading Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit’s understanding of the visual challenge to logocentric epistemologies presented by Caravaggio’s paintings in *Caravaggio’s Secrets* against their reading of Caravaggio in film, the biopic *Caravaggio* by director Derek Jarman found in their monograph of the same name, produces fascinatingly contrary conclusions of aesthetic postulations of alternative relationalities and systems of knowing. Bridging this gap are the very bodies whose irreducibility drives the critique of narrativization read into Caravaggio by Bersani and Dutoit, but surprisingly not extended to Jarman, whose work and life as “Britain’s most up-front and articulate advocate for homosexuality” is profoundly offered in *Caravaggio* through a similar methodology of irreducible bodily presence. This paper seeks to explore these two different readings of Caravaggio as the consequence of a search for the noncoercive image, the mark of its critique of epistemology being its very ineffability.

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For my dad.

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I. "How to come unglued from the mirror?" asks Barthes.[1] He leaves the movie theater with two proposals for the conscious spectator. The obvious first one: to come into the cinema armed with a discourse counter to self-commodification, but this strategy runs the risk of creating a hostile observer and not allowing oneself to enjoy films on principle. Such a person is not likely to spend much more of their time going to the movies. The second: to become doubly enamored with the movie theater, with the darkened anonymous film hall as much as with the film itself. The obscured crowd of captive bodies, the accompanying soundscape of speakers playing to a full auditorium, the projector, the screen, the ray of light between the two, the person operating it all; the means of conveyance are as fascinating to Barthes as the sounds and images conveyed, and he suggests that the observation of these fabricated surroundings is enough to break the spell of hypnosis – the intent to fill, the desire to be captivated – between movie and moviegoer. But we do not all have a perverse body to accompany our narcissistic one, as Barthes puts it, ready to fetishize the discrete distance between spectator and spectacle as much as the spectacular itself. While this reflexive noncritical affection is not so easily assigned to the movie theater by the non-flaneur, it does present an important model of cinema as the spectacular concentration of desirous ontologies produced by and productive of a mass culture predicated on the affective authority of the image. Further, to escape this culture, to break free from the hypnosis of the spectacle, the spectator must redirect their amorous gaze to the entire means of production of the spectacle, to even the methods of obfuscation as much as the process of illumination. To not just the man behind the curtain and the gadgets and gizmos with which he projects the great and powerful, but also to the curtain itself.

[1] Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," *The Art of the Personal Essay*, 421.

This is no small task. Barthes suggests that the uncoerced consumption of the image is only possible by an awareness of the affective potential of both the visible and the hidden. The spectator is in no position to perform this, the cards are stacked against him: "It's as if, even before he went into the theater, the classic conditions of hypnosis were in force: vacancy, want of occupation, lethargy; it's not in front of the film and because of the film that he *dreams off*–it's without knowing it, even before he becomes a spectator" that he does so.[2] The reinforcing layers of our collective consumption that are always already productive of both the spectator and spectacle long before they crystallize into the analogous film are labyrinthine. We cannot leave the movie theater. Even if the spectator was to awaken both his critical and noncritical faculties in an effort to combat his captivation by the image, his newfound lucidity does next to nothing against the spectacular industry of images arrayed against him. Some discursive authority persists then, hopefully, with the filmmaker whose ethos is not merely to entertain, and who understands the potential of their craft as art, the principle of which remains to awaken the entranced from his stupor: "Of course, it is still possible to conceive of an art which will break the dual circle, the fascination of film, and loosen the glue, the hypnosis of the lifelike (of the analogical), by some recourse to the spectator's critical vision (or listening)… the very methods of an epic art, the spectator's culture or his ideological vigilance; contrary to classical hysteria, the image-repertoire vanishes once one observes that it exists."[3] Drawing the spectator's attention away from the spectacle and to the means with which the spectacle is produced, the intentional promulgation of disbelief and emphasis of the dissimulation of cinema continue to separate radical dissidence from normalizing entertainment in the art of image-making. The

[2] Barthes, 419.
[3] Barthes, 421.

collective desire of the crowd can be dispelled by the spectacular which is aware, and informs, of its role in the reproduction of the society of the spectacle.

The most precise producer of this trance-breaking film in the 20th century, according to Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, was Alain Resnais. *Night and Fog*, Resnais' 1956 Holocaust documentary, intentionally conflates the past and present, blurring visual distinctions between the two as the only newly recorded scenes are of empty, slow panning shots through the dreadful interiors and desolate perimeters of abandoned concentration camps. Bodies, the principle actors of any film, are shown only through archival footage recovered for the film's production. There is no speech or sound aside from the narration and ponderous, nearly mundane score as the gruesome imagery of mass extermination anxiously builds from the cattle cars, to the ovens, to the piles of mutilated bodies. What is past and what is present becomes less distinguishable as the ostensibly new, in-color shots of the now begin to alternate between color and the black-and-white visual of the past, calling into question what is archival and what is contemporary. The short documentary, just thirty minutes in length, climaxes with a question, "Who is responsible?" as camp officers, capos, and administrators deny their guilt before war tribunals. The ending sequence is of the countryside; grass, moss and frost growing over the rubble of Auschwitz and Majdanek, fading into blackness as the narrator reminds us that the age of the camp is not yet over. The dissociation of the hypnosis between the film and the viewer is achieved by a reassociation of the reproductive relationship between spectator and spectacle, the foregrounding of the cinematic mechanisms that create visual narrativization in film:

> Resnais draws our attention to the various procedures by which our looking is being disoriented. The blurring of past and present; the discrepancies between what we see and hear; the ingenuities of Resnais' montage; the failure of the camera's tracking movements to organize the visual field into a narritivizable totality: all this draws our attention to the film's own making, away from its content and toward its aestheticizing devices.[4]

[4] Bersani, Leo and Ulysse Dutoit. *Caravaggio*, 51.

Bersani and Dutoit perhaps go too far in saying that *Night and Fog* draws the viewer's attention away from its horrifying content – the visual material of which is, at its peak the repetition of naked, emaciated, disfigured and decapitated bodies lined up on tables and bulldozed into pits, and at its base the alternation of brutal camp architecture, workers, and haunted *muselmänner* – but Resnais does present his images in a way as to make them persist between past and present, between the coherency of sight and sound to create a liminality that does not easily lend itself to narrativization. This puts the spectator in the difficult viewing subject position of deciding for himself what is history and what is now, and of what was recorded and what is recreated, as with many of the undocumented byproducts of the mass exterminations. What number of bodies were turned into compost, or their skin into parchment, or their fat into bars of soap, is unknowable. Some acts, such as rape and torture, remain undocumented by their evil nature, and the narrator states truthfully that to show them would serve no purpose. Some shots are almost obviously fabricated for the purpose of the film: a vault-like room full of women's hair, zooming slowly out to show the sheer scale of production; the hair reaches almost to the ceiling and was purportedly woven into fabric to be sold for fifteen pennies a pound. Were it not in black-and-white, this scene would adhere completely to the ominous visual style of the rest of the 1955 Eastmancolor footage newly shot for the film.

Night and Fog, through its entire anti-cinematic posture, leaves it to the spectator to decide whether the horrors of the Nazi regime are confined to the past (a mere decade before the film's publication) or are indeed a sight of our times. Resnais having disallowed the film a conclusion of Nazism, the viewer takes a more active role in the spectation of the documentary and the reproduction of the spectacle that is the extermination of the marginal for the supposed benefit of the majority. The very viewing of the film is the means of its accusation, and the

viewer's participation in the visual reconstruction of genocide is the development of a conscious spectator over the mere viewing subject—viewed object relationship of most films: "Resnais has made the images of Nazism an active part of our contemporaneity. We move within them easily. The Nazi past is already being repeated inside our sensory collaboration with this film, a collaboration that Resnais encourages us to feel as a kind of self-identification and, consequently, as an inescapable complicity."[5] It is the purposed dissociation from the generic conventions of the documentary as concluded history, as the final say on real events, that allows *Night and Fog* a great measure of critical inconclusiveness, a step towards a noncoercive filmmaking practice.

Yet, this intentional reversal of documentarian responsibility could be read as a singular instance of the sheer weight of a subject matter overcoming the natural inclination to narrativize. How to tell of genocide? How to represent, in film, the industrialized murder of millions? The reality of the Holocaust still boggles the mind, and there is no moral recourse but to let it speak for itself. Indeed, Resnais initially resisted the challenge to make a film for the French ten year anniversary of the Holocaust, believing the project would be better headed by someone with first-hand experience, and only finally accepted the offer upon the assured collaboration of a concentration camp survivor in the poet Jean Cayrol. More difficult still, the position against historical conclusion could itself be read as a kind of narrativization. When the film plainly asks "Who *is* responsible?" it also silently suggests, by the very means of its visual disentanglement from a historical past: "You are, viewer." Though historicity may be done away with, there may always be in film the inherently coercive necessity of narrativized time.

> However repetitive or static a film's images may be, it can't help but *move on*… however difficult a film may be, it always carries us along. It encourages a perceptual passivity which is crucial to its power. A film makes decisions about what to look at next *for us*; but in thus assuming the burden of perceptual time, it also tyrannizes perception by demanding an unflagging attention. Look away, and you've missed something, and when

[5] Bersani and Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais*. Harvard University Press, 187.

> you come back you won't know how important what you've missed is to what you now see. A total surrender of attention is the price film asks for the precious service it performs: that of briefly relieving us from the burden of using time in order to organize space.[6]

As an intentional counter to the generic conventions of the documentary, *Night and Fog* asserts its violent past into the viewer's present, but still does so within the space of half of an hour of their captured attention, and this film can certainly not be considered a "movie." All films are the reorganization of perceived time, narrativized or not, and the production of a film is the exercise of power at the phenomenological level. The innate narrativization of time remains the gate and key for any potential practice of a noncoercive filmmaking method, if at all possible.

[6] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 50.

II. There is a noticeable tension available immediately within Bersani and Dutoit's reading of Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*. The equally eponymous monograph, published five years after the early AIDS-induced death of the director and a dozen years after the biopic's first screening, seems to be the recovery of a singularly profound film despite the larger body of Jarman's work, the reading of this one instance of artistic magnanimity against the larger current of Jarman's life. Their critique opens: "What did Derek Jarman learn from Caravaggio? There is no easy answer to this question (if indeed it can be answered at all), and it is not the same as asking why Jarman was attracted to Caravaggio. Jarman himself helps us to answer *that* question, and the account of his interest in the Italian painter is straightforward and persuasive. It seems to have been almost entirely a matter of self-recognition."[7] Across space and time Jarman appears to have found a kindred spirit, not just in terms of sexuality "as a gay hero in a homophobic culture," but also as a personal progenitor in the visual arts. Not only are religion and history major themes for both image-makers, but Jarman even goes so far as to say Caravaggio had invented cinematic light in his chiaroscuro, and that if Caravaggio was to be reborn as a filmmaker, his career would have consisted of the same kind of public intellectualism and political critique as Pier Paolo Pasolini. Jarman's image of Caravaggio is that of a radical iconoclast, a visionary who "brought the lofty ideals down to earth," "the saints out of the sky and onto the streets."[8] He saw Caravaggio as an artist who expressed himself through his work in a radically uncompromised fashion. Caravaggio was to Jarman, in an entirely inspirational and self-identifying way, "the most homosexual of painters, in the way that Pasolini is the most homosexual of film-makers."[9]

Caravaggio and Jarman's shared homosexuality is the beginning and end of Bersani and

[7] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 7.
[8] Ibid., 8.
[9] Jarman quoted in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 9.

Dutoit's critique of the British filmmaker for whom they square the circle and suggest that if Caravaggio was born into the 20th century he "could just as well be Derek Jarman" as Pasolini.[10] *Caravaggio* is, entirely, the aesthetic postulation of this self-recognition between artists beyond time and beyond language. Every frame and every sound of the film is dedicated to this specific parataxis, from the recurrent anachronisms jolting the audience out of any misconceptions that they are watching a period piece, to the blatant and unexplained Englishness of its dialog and actors. Over a period of seven years Jarman wrote the script for *Caravaggio*, writing and revising different versions of it, from autobiographical details and a contemporary setting to a historical drama and finally somewhere in between, Jarman wrote himself in and out of Caravaggio's life. The film's entire plot is based off of Jarman's personal interpretation of certain paintings of Caravaggio's: the Kansas City version of *St. John the Baptist*, *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, *David with the Head of Goliath*, and the 1608 version of *The Beheading of St. John* held in Malta, Caravaggio's only signed painting in which the artist writes in the saint's blood at the bottom of the canvas "I, Caravaggio, did this."

Jarman understands these paintings, nearly all composed after Caravaggio's expulsion from Rome following the circumstantially ambiguous death of a certain Ranuccio Tommasoni, apparently the pimp of one of Caravaggio's models (she is seen most prominently in *Judith Beheading Holofernes*), as evidence of the painter's guilt. Jarman reimagines this Ranuccio as one of Caravaggio's models as well, creating a murderous love affair borne out of jealousy between the painter and his subjects. The Kansas City *St. John*, the only painting composed by Caravaggio before he was exiled but taken and kept by the painter all the last four years of his banishment, then becomes a portrait of the slain ex-lover Ranuccio, the *Martyrdom* a sign of

[10] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 7

unrequited love, *David* a picture of self-punishment, and the *Beheading* an admission of guilt. As a biopic, Jarman's *Caravaggio* is "a biography in which a single attested biographical fact – Caravaggio's murder of Ranuccio Thomasoni [sic] – is novelized by way of a highly selective, highly personal reading and juxtaposition of a few paintings."[11] It has no real logical or historical connection to the 16th-century painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, and is all the more true for it. What Jarman learned from Caravaggio, or at least what he showed he might have learned, is what Bersani and Dutoit understand as Caravaggio's visual challenge to epistemic knowing: "Caravaggio's rejection of both the claim that knowledge of the past (in art, its successful representation or re-creation) is either possible or useful, and the willingness to use this claim as a pretext for evading our responsibility to the present."[12]

This merely aesthetic connection is proposed most powerfully and paradoxically in the ending sequence of *Caravaggio*, and it will take the length of this paper to ground it in tangible meaning. I hope not to betray Jarman and Caravaggio in the process. In a four minute sequence at the end of the film, after Caravaggio has killed Ranuccio, a younger version of himself – a boy innocent of both the nascent sexuality of the teenaged Caravaggio played by Dexter Fletcher, and the jaded maturity of the aged painter portrayed by Nigel Terry, Jarman's favored leading man – is dressed in cherub wings and stands watching the Easter procession of cross bearers walk solemnly by. He is accompanied by a guardian, a young man named Pasqualone whom he later describes as his true love. The young Caravaggio, called Michele throughout the film and most intimately here, turns curiously to a shrouded doorway behind him and is startled by what he sees, calling to Pasqualone before standing awestruck at the entrance of the room. Pasqualone follows and can only kneel down, crossing himself and setting down the basket of red poppies he

[11] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 24.
[12] Ibid., 9.

was holding to lace his hands in prayer before the shared vision. It is *The Entombment of Christ*, posed in tableau vivant of Caravaggio's famous altarpiece. The older Caravaggio is the Christ, held up by two male pallbearers and backed by three female mourners as a soft credo plays, the camera juxtaposing a sequence of extreme closeups of the dignified faces of every actor, from the men holding him to the women mourning, to Michele, Pasqualone, and Caravaggio, to the red poppies, to the painter's stigmata. The scene ends but the music continues, turning to another entombment as the old painter lies on his deathbed, the same mourners and pallbearers now dressed in black and looking on as Caravaggio lies still, his eyes covered with coins and a rosary held in his dead hands as his own younger assistant silently proclaims his death, ending the film.

To Bersani and Dutoit, this near inexplicable scene is the self-dispersive act of artistic identification between two image-makers, thus concluding an expansive narcissism founded on lonely homosexuality, a formation of identity that potentially realigns the individual's desire beyond the physical, sexual, attainable, and towards solidarity within universal similitudes:

> These slippages of identity from one body to another, this interchangeability of being, help us to re-define homosexuality: no longer (merely) a particular sexual orientation, it can be seen as the sexuality most appropriate to a perceived solidarity of being in the universe. Identities are never individual; homosexual desire is a reaching out toward an *other sameness*. Homosexuality *expresses* a homoness that vastly exceeds it but that it none the less has the privilege, and the responsibility, of making visible. [13]

This interchangeability of being is predicated upon the affective authority of the image, it is the recognized insignificance of the signified in the relationship between viewing subject and viewed object, that is the signifier or image, as the originating relationship from which meaning is made. The role of homosexuality as the recognition of sameness and therefore the premise for an undesirous relationality is a potentially subversive configuration of dominant formations of relationality, though homosexuality is not inherently undesirous. All dominant relationalities,

[13] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 47.

Caravaggio, *The Entombment of Christ*, 1603-1604. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City.

all conventional relationalities, are desirous, are formed by desire. This universal similitude proposed without words is read by Bersani and Dutoit as an extension of their reading of the historical Caravaggio. Using the work of Jean Laplanche, the two propose the enigmatic signifier as Caravaggio's visual challenge to the epistemic in his work. This enigma is a dual signification and concealment of an originary signified object in recognition of conventional, dominant relationality as founded entirely upon the desire to penetrate the unknowability of another being:

> Caravaggio's enigmas are not meant to be read. At least since Oedipus, the enigma in Western civilization has been an epistemological challenge. Its unreadability has been fantasized as provisional and, far from blocking knowledge, the enigma holds forth the promise of new knowledge, of expanding the field of epistemological appropriations. Caravaggio resolutely rejects opportunities for such expansions.[14]

It is because of the painter's consistent and emphatic visual postulation of the enigmatic signifier that Bersani and Dutoit consider Caravaggio "a crucial figure in the history of a suspicion fatal to the procedures and the confidence of philosophy: the suspicion that truth cannot be the object of knowledge, that it cannot be theorized."[15] Universal interchangeability of being is not the enigmatic signifier. It is perhaps the opposite. Where Caravaggio seduces the will to know the "truth" of the viewed subject just to block it by a purposed uninterpretability, Jarman surrenders to the reinterpretability of art, the interchangeability of the signifier, enigmatic or otherwise disclosed. *Caravaggio* is as much a film about a painter as it is about painting, a movie about imagery, a film about filmmaking. It is a biopic about Caravaggio, a story about Derek Jarman.

And thus begins Bersani and Dutoit's problem with Jarman. It is not personal, but a problem of disconnected, potentially incompatible discourse. There is no more pertinent example than Jarman's textual interpretation of Caravaggio's practice of self-insertion found in *The Martyrdom of St.Matthew*, a continuation of Jarman's surrender to reidentification and what they

[14] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 13.
[15] Ibid., 42.

call a "crude fantasy-reading of the painting."[16] Where this method of self-portraiture is read by Bersani and Dutoit as a critique of narrativization by the reminded presence of the image-maker in Caravaggio's paintings, Jarman instead sees, or at least says he sees, a sexually submissive longing between painter and model: "[Caravaggio] gazes wistfully at the hero slaying the saint. It is a look no one can understand unless he has stood till 5 a.m. in a gay bar hoping to be fucked by that hero. The gaze of the passive homosexual at the object of his desire, he waits to be chosen, he cannot make the choice."[17] This written description of passive homosexual "cruising" read into Caravaggio is found in Derek Jarman's autobiography *Dancing Ledge*, and to Bersani and Dutoit it represents the director's propensity for reframing his own work via supplementary texts to attract and indulge queer audiences. Jarman does this everywhere, from autobiographies to screenplays, to annotated scripts, and Bersani and Dutoit read it all as "Jarman's willingness to sell himself short for the sake of being immediately recognized and applauded by a particular audience."[18] To them, this ingratiation almost comes at the expense of Jarman's art: "Indeed, Jarman's film would not be worth talking about if he treated Caravaggio's homosexual desires at the level of his critical comments."[19]

Happily, Jarman treats Caravaggio's homoness much more seriously in his movie. The tableau vivant of the *Entombment* is an advancement of Caravaggio's practice of self-portraiture done by Jarman in almost direct contradiction to the commentary found in *Dancing Ledge*. He clearly understands the powerful arrest of interpretation that is the self-insertion of the artist in having Terry pose for the painting's reenactment. In fact, he makes no comment of the scene in *Dancing Ledge*, when he goes to great pains elsewhere to repackage the meanings of his films

[16] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 11.
[17] Jarman quoted in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 11.
[18] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 15.
[19] Ibid., 11.

via their supplementary texts. Jarman does not annotate this scene in his advancement of Caravaggio's self-portraiture because it is not the arrest of knowing that is created by the tableau vivant but the dispersal of identity, the interchangeability of being that is only possible by allowing the visual to remain uncaptured by articulation of its meaning. Bersani and Dutoit agree on this, but ultimately understand *Caravaggio* as a step backwards from the logical conclusion presented by the enigmatic signifier as indicative of an undisclosed being foundational to relationality. I argue that, while problematic, Jarman's perverse willingness to critically debase his own art is not only a continuation of his recognition of the pointlessness of reasoned interpretation, but perhaps implicitly informative of the pair's reading of him. Where Jarman's garrulousness turns Bersani and Dutoit off from his other films, his lack thereof with the ending sequence of *Caravaggio* helps to set its uniquely profound gesture of faith in art.

> [T]here is only silence surrounding the strangest, most powerful element of Jarman's most powerful film. *It can be shown, but it can't be said.* Jarman's work, for all its silence about this, is an extraordinary psychic unveiling. *Caravaggio*, however, goes so far as to propose the inadequacy of such self-exposures. Profoundly faithful in this respect to Caravaggio himself, it even begins – and we will have to recognize that it only begins – to expose its own structure of anxious desire as bringing us only to the threshold of the aesthetic. [20]

The two would happily jettison Jarman's self-supplied commentary if not for its role in potentiating and summarizing the then-popular dialogue around Jarman's work: "Since the simplified relation they assume between the victimized homosexual and an oppressive society is congenial to certain forms of queer politics, it has been picked up by Jarman's critics as a reason for praising his work. His films have in large measure been admired as acts of political resistance."[21] The dominant interpretation of Derek Jarman around and after his passing was to see him and his work almost entirely in terms of his sexuality as innately contentious. Bersani

[20] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio,* 30.
[21] Ibid., 12.

and Dutoit cite a 1996 collection of essays edited by Chris Lippard, who introduces the filmmaker as "perhaps the prominent queer man in Britain over the last decade."[22] Joseph A. Gomez named him "Britain's most up-front and articulate advocate for homosexuality, and probably its most 'in your face' critic of Thatcherite values."[23] In his essay "Perverse Law: Jarman as gay criminal hero," David Gardner believes that "the shock value of a declaration of one's marginal desire, the insistence on one's existence, the dramatization of the struggle itself" within Jarman's filmography to be "a resistant reading" signaling "strength and activism."[24] These assessments capture Jarman in the same terms with which he described Caravaggio, as a gay hero in a homophobic culture, and run completely counter to the way Jarman wished himself to be understood politically, as expressed most powerfully in a 1991 interview just months before the release of *Edward II* and two and a half years before his death:

> I am not an outsider. The one thing I really regret about my career was that I was put into the position of being anything but the most traditional filmmaker of my generation. I hope this has not disappointed you, but this is what I really wanted… Yet I was made into a fake revolutionary. The older I get, the more I believe in tradition. The tradition of hedgerows and fields with flowers – in opposition to the commercialization or the destruction and rape of the countryside and cities.[25]

At the same time, Jarman had the screenplay for his cinematic interpretation of Marlowe published as *Queer Edward II*, annotated not just with his own production commentary, prefaced by such a shocking, in your face bromide as "Fuck poetry… I chose this play solely for its subject. The poetry, like my production values, is of secondary importance," but also queer rallying slogans like "Jesus Was a Drag Queen," "Don't Cry, Maybe You're Just Going Through a Straight Phase," "You Say Don't Fuck – We Say Fuck You," and "Anus – the Last Place the

[22] Lippard qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 12.
[23] Gomez qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 12.
[24] Gardner qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 12.
[25] Jarman qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 72.

Government Should Be Poking its Nose," plastered at the top of every page. [26] The film itself contains a scene made up entirely of an OutRage demonstration, a queer rally organizing body that was active throughout the 1990s and 2000s. To Bersani and Dutoit it becomes clear that Jarman's willingness to sell himself short for the immediate applause of a queer audience was eventually not limited to just the textual repackaging of his films, and ultimately forced him from the cinematic contemplation of art extant from violent ontologies of desire that drew them to him in the first place, and towards the violence itself, reinforced by a fame that was both Jarman's creation and his undoing, "a tribute to his limitations rather than to his very real talent."[27] The last of their assessments from the 1996 essay collection, on Martin Quinn-Meyler's "Opposing 'Heterosoc': Derek Jarman's counter-hegemonic activism," illustrates the duo's frustration:

> Quinn-Meyler also manages to see the violence frequently associated with homosexuality in Jarman's films not as compelling us to acknowledge certain complicities in homosexual desire with the very violence that oppresses us, but rather as 'always an act of subversion with the potential to destabilize the control of Heterosex'. 'Militarized queer sex' is always 'oppositional'; no matter how nasty it becomes, we can always count on 'militaristic and physically aggressive' queer lovemaking to come down on the side of the 'counter-hegemonic'. It is apparently only by maintaining this oppositional purity that Jarman could continue to be promoted.[28]

Jarman's acquiescence to oppositional purity explicitly on the side of political activism in the later stages of his career can certainly be understood in terms of his anger at a country that was foreshortening his lifespan because of his sexuality. As a victim of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Jarman was one of many to be denied life-saving healthcare as the emplacement of vital therapeutic systems was deprioritized in the homophobic perception of HIV/AIDS as a "gay problem." Yet Jarman's own concurrent statements about his dissatisfaction with his status as a revolutionary can contradict this reading of *Queer Edward II*, "dedicated to the repeal of all anti-

[26] Jarman, *Queer Edward II*, qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 14.
[27] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 15.
[28] Ibid., 12.

gay laws," when read in a strict valuation of traditional ideals as heteronormative and hegemonic in contrast to and in combat with militant and physically aggressive queerness whose violence is, in actuality, a complicity to and maintenance of the very structures of hegemony that arbitrarily exclude and exterminate.[29] Bersani and Dutoit's disappointment in the popular critical reception of Derek Jarman was not just for its possible redirection of the filmmaker's career, but for the terrible reification of paradigmatic hegemonies operating on exclusion for the maintenance of a normalizing center, regardless of sexuality, to the point of a largely stultifying discourse:

> It often seems, for example, that there is a new standard of excellence in academic conferences: audiences warmly receive what they already know and agree with. There is nothing surprising, or harmful, about this in political rallies, but it doesn't do much for original thinking… Our audiences tend to be those who already agree with what we have to say – which doesn't leave much room, or tolerance, for questioning the value of the rights we are unjustly deprived of (such as marriage). While fighting for those rights, gays and lesbians might also be thinking, as it were, to the side of them – in a 'place' that questions the very assumptions about relationality that have led in the first place to the privileging of conjugal intimacy as a superior form of relationship.[30]

This "place" to the side of political action, inside yet outside of the structures governing relationality, is one only "occupiable" by its "place"-ness, that is the knowledge that it is unlocatable, ungrounded, without a base upon which to establish relational modes or a position from which to construct sure meaning. The place where outcasts are sent is not the "place" of Bersani and Dutoit, though that is closer to it than the dominant space, for that is an exteriority marked by negative relation to the exclusive center. Bersani and Dutoit's "place" is a wholeness of relationality that is both unbothered by a discourse of superior-inferior, yet inimical to it by its ineffability within systems of dominance and institutionalization communicated by languages defined by opposition. The violence intrinsically linked to sexuality within Jarman's films is the illustration of a lifetime of intimacy with hegemonic structures of violent exclusion, as he

[29] Jarman, *Queer Edward II*, qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 14.
[30] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 18.

illustrates in a passage from another of his autobiographies, *Kicking the Pricks*. Jarman's sardonic description of his own upbringing in terms of his father's heteronormative impositions can be read as an ultimately positive formation of identity through oppositional self-definition: "It's the classic fag's father. Thank God they exist, and thank God I had one. After all, childhood only lasts to puberty, then one has the rest of one's life to enjoy oneself unravelling the damage."[31] Bersani and Dutoit read this "refreshingly perverse" take on queer identity formation as a reversal of classic psychoanalytical turns towards victimization, restoring not only agency to the homosexual son, but also suggesting an advantage of perspective created by such austere upbringings: "The 'unhealthy' lack of supportive affection from the father – unhealthy from the perspective of a normative development toward genital heterosexuality – might in fact be crucial in nourishing that aversion to patriarchal authority in the name of which many queer thinkers recoil in horror from such ill-intentioned psychoanalytic clichés."[32] This psychoanalytic reversal is, largely, Bersani and Dutoit's reading of Jarman's career as a filmmaker. His navigation of violent imagery is at times refreshingly and profoundly perverse, but overall Jarman is himself coerced into uncritical reproductions of the entanglement of violence and sexuality:

> Not only do his films have a thematic and narrative rigidity only partially concealed by a superficially open, 'directionless' succession of images; not only does his world tend to be non-problematically polarized between violent oppressors and innocent victims; he also engages in exercises of power not unlike those he thought of himself as exposing and struggling against. [33]

Inversely, yet still caught in the opposition of the rally that presupposes its queerness to be counter-hegemonic no matter how violent it may become, Jarman's earlier work critiques homophobia and anti-gay policies by presenting the tragic homosexual male as the innocent

[31] Jarman qtd. in Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio,* 18.
[32] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 18-19.
[33] Ibid., 55.

victim of violent acts and structures of heteronormativity, as seen in *Sebastiane*, Jarman's first movie. The homoeroticism of the film itself drives gay male bodies toward their violent ends in a clash of sexualities, juxtaposing queer lovemaking against straight violence as the naked Sebastian is shot full of arrows while tied to a post, the lingering conclusion to the movie. Where he does not self-victimize early in his career, Jarman turns to the violent potential of the queer rally against his oppressors later on, as in *Edward II*. Yet both are just cinematic affirmations of the same hegemonic structures that produce such visual exercises of power as the movie in the first place, the application of violence energizing the movement between self-victimization and defiance. For his closing act, Jarman simply gives up on the image. *Blue* presents an unmoving screen of the same color, subjecting the viewer to a portion of Jarman's own HIV-produced blindness for an hour and fifteen minutes, yet even this still image is read by Bersani and Dutoit as coercive, with the accompanying narration and sounds picking up the narrative slack left by the blue stillness, that blindness itself acting as a preparation for a wholly audial narrativity. The arc of Jarman's fascination with the violent implications of his own sexuality can be read in this last turn as a complete surrender. In the same movement with which Jarman abandons the visual medium to which he dedicated his life, in one last tragic gasp as the deviant artist whose vision was slain by the state, *Blue* can be read as the ultimate expression of totalizing power:

> He blinds us not in order to re-direct us, but as the ultimate nihilistic expression of his directorial power… Jarman's unintended message that there is no alternative to power (except those wholly unexamined images of sweet gay love) seems to have led to his fascination with a power that can't be resisted, that is, a power that totally destroys. [34]

So what did Derek Jarman *learn* from Caravaggio, and what *attracted* Bersani and Dutoit to Jarman in the first place? The two are quite convinced that film is irreducibly coercive, that it operates phenomenologically upon the reorganization of time as narrative, that with no

[34] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 59.

narrativized time there is no movie, that even with a directionless sequence of images, or no moving image at all, the film itself must move on. Bersani and Dutoit's monograph on Jarman's *Caravaggio*, much more an artistic biography of Jarman himself, comes in the same period of the pair's collaborative thought on the historical Caravaggio. In *Caravaggio's Secrets*, published a year before the monograph, Bersani and Dutoit examine how Caravaggio represents a visual wholeness of being that operates entirely outside of desirous ontologies, that Caravaggio offers a noncoercive relationality as much as he critiques the subject-object relationship of viewing art, of all claims to knowing and interpreting, that produces art to be viewed. The medium of the painting as timeless, as not operating upon the reorganization of time but only the reorganization of space, is crucial to Bersani and Dutoit's reading of Caravaggio's noncoercive image-making practice. This undesirous relationality, so consistently presented throughout Caravaggio's paintings as a visual challenge to acquisitional knowing, creeps its way in edgewise into the vision of even this most violent, most homosexual of filmmakers. Out of all of Jarman's films, what is singularly striking about *Caravaggio* is that it declines to participate in the discourse of violence as sexuality that Jarman so explicitly reproduces in the rest of his work. *Caravaggio's* portrayal of desire is not in terms of the counter-hegemonic, but instead rejects hegemonic hierarchizing in its representation of various relationalities, perhaps even an undesirous ontology. That *Caravaggio* was made by the same directorial vision that produced *Sebastiane*, *Queer Edward II*, and *Blue* only adds to the profound challenge that the movie presents. This challenge begins with an understanding of the homosexual image-maker's complicity to violence.

III. Bersani and Dutoit understand the relationality of Jarman's *Caravaggio* as a modification of the classic psychoanalytical model of homosexual identity formation. Rather than the mere reversal of the Oedipal configuration which places the mother in the position of the rival and the father as the object of desire, "*Caravaggio* suggests that the boy's rival is *always the father*, and that homosexual desire is, first of all, the erotically inflected persistence of that rivalry and, profoundly and paradoxically, the militantly heterosexual refusal to renounce the mother as an object of desire."[35] This militant bisexuality forms a desirous relationality that premises the entire action of the film. This main action takes form in a violent love triangle between three visually iconic lovers. Sean Bean as Ranuccio and Tilda Swinton as his girl Lena make their film debuts alongside the veteran Terry as Caravaggio, whose painter's studio is the setting by which this Oedipal formation is framed. Rather than a prostitute and her pimp, Lena and Ranuccio are a pair of tramps turned models. The relationship is begat and ended in blood, and this visualization of violence is explicitly posed by Michele's frequent painting of his lovers, both his rivals and his objects of desire, into images, the first truly cinematic images, if Jarman is to be believed.

Michele initiates his relationship with the prizefighter Ranuccio after seeing the powerful athlete's dominance over his then-lover Davide (Garry Cooper) in a knife fight. He rewards the champion with gold and primacy of place in his studio, discarding both his intimate and working relationship with Davide for the more dashing Ranuccio, whom he fashions into an icon of violence. With a sword in one hand and Caravaggio's gold in the other, Ranuccio is painted into the central executionary figure of *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew* in a much more proactive initiation than the passive cruising that Jarman described. Here Michele is the master of the configuration, the Laius to Ranuccio's Oedipus. He seals the deal with a knife fight of his own,

[35] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 78.

Caravaggio, *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, 1599-1600. Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi.

dominating the younger man and throwing him to the floor only for Ranuccio to realize the weight difference, pretend at truce, and then stab him in the abdomen. Ever the master, Michele aestheticizes the betrayal and anoints Ranuccio with his own gore, proclaiming the two blood brothers, his display of masculine magnanimity causing Ranuccio to lean forward for a kiss.

The executioner is a figure central to the historical Caravaggio's visual epistemology, the emblematic center around which Caravaggio paints and the received system of relation that Bersani and Dutoit write against in their proposed reading of him. Caravaggio's practice of self-insertion as seen in *The Martyrdom* is the represented act of witnessing, of spectatorship, that creates the spectacle of violence that is figured by the executioner. Caravaggio's self-insertion here, to the left of the executioner's raised arm, is then the re-simulation of the dissimulated act of spectating, the seeing that purports to be knowing, that produces and reproduces the violent spectacle by its eventual representation of the spectated act. The original act of violence does not matter in the creation of the spectacular, it is the replacement of the act in the manufacture of its representation, artistic, historical, or otherwise, that is itself violent and originating:

> The work's meaning is what happens at the moment of an engagement—an engagement between the work and the viewer, between the painter and his models, and between the painter and subject he sets out to treat. This engagement is not without a certain violence. It is a violence prefigured in the painter's material preparation for his work, in the grinding of his pigments into a fine powder… In painting, matter is pulverized in order to become a signifying material. In his relation to his subjects, Caravaggio performs an analogous act of reidentification.[36]

The destruction of the material in the production of the spectacle is just the physical trace of a violent resignification that is only implicitly indicated in *The Martyrdom*. This small, arguably hidden self-portrait is barely a visual contemplation of the spectator's role in recreating the spectacle, a question that is posed maybe most explicitly in *David with the Head of Goliath*.

[36] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 46.

Caravaggio, *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1609-1610. Rome, Galleria Borghese.

Understood by Jarman to be Caravaggio's last painting, and perhaps composed as a begging of pardon to his Roman patron, the Cardinal Scipione Borghese, near the conclusion of his own violent life, Caravaggio nevertheless offers the viewer his head. The executioner holds him forth in a grip not unlike that with which Caravaggio himself might hold his paintbrush. David looks pensively upon his bloody prize, sadly resigned to both of their fates, his to be the executioner and the painter to be his victim. And where is the light coming from? From the left and downwards, illuminating David's naked torso and half of his and Goliath's faces, but not the executioner's clothed arm which holds the sword? Bersani and Dutoit agree here that Caravaggio's chiaroscuro, that cinematic lighting, does not abide by any realistic properties of light and instead emanates from the figures that populate his paintings to emphasize that they, their bodies, and not an objective or "real" or "truthful" source of light, are the more true source of our viewing of them; our relational subject-object perception is constituted, more truly here by the body than any arbitrarily realistic light setting imposed by the painter in coherence with the real world ever could. The main purpose of that coherence to an objective reality in artistic representation, "realism", is the dissimulation of the resignification of the painted subject:

> The light emanating from Caravaggio's figures is the sign of their transformation from merely historical persons to ontological cartographers: Caravaggio re-presents them—which means here that he presents them for the first time—as mapping modes of being. Caravaggio's paint is the metaphysical X ray that compels us to see particular histories and particular myths as *instituting relationalities*. [37]

Unlike *The Martyrdom*, the act of execution is re-presented here as the only thing to see. Any dissimulating historical or mythical setting is obscured by darkness as the instituting relationality is thrust forward in all of its resignedly spectacular, compliantly violent signification. The blood spewing from Goliath-Caravaggio's neck, the deadness of his eyes, the decapitation from his

[37] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 42, emphasis original.

body, arrests interpretation as the violent resignification that it is, stopping any connection to the biblical episode dead in its tracks. The painter's head, severed from the emanating body, denies relationality at the same time David's corporeality, the source of illumination, invites it. The viewer is put into the position of the executioner and the painter becomes the one sacrificed, the dissimulation of his role in the production of the spectacle foregrounded as the signification of the spectacle is that which slays him and holds him aloft as viewed object instead of relational subject. Thrusting his objectified, slain, former subjectivity into the darkness is a subjectively centered spectatorship, reemphasizing the subject-object relationality that produces spectacle by the slaying of the historical subject: "There is perhaps no spectacle prior to a certain kind of witnessing. That witnessing produces the spectacle (realizes the move from a relational narrative to relationality itself) that it also contemplates."[38]

This is why Terry as Michele turns, points, and screams aloud "God curse you! You!" at the top of his lungs, directly into the camera, directly at the viewer, at the seventy-three minute mark of *Caravaggio*. Lena, once Ranuccio's lover, and then Michele's, and then Borghese's, has just been drowned. Her body is found floating along the Tiber. Michele, in violent mourning, manhandles her dead corpse and gropes about her hair and head for some semblance of meaning, an extraction of narrativity out of her death that he eventually finds. He sets her still body and accompanying models up to be painted into *The Death of the Virgin* and decries aloud the sanctification of the spiritual that is the violent resignification of nonviolent relation as religion, even as he actively creates it: "I've trapped pure spirit in matter. What should have no value and grow like the lilies of the field is horribly perverted, placed high on the altars of Rome in mockery." Shots of Ranuccio banging his head bloody against the walls of his jail cell alternate

[38] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 66.

with shots of Michele painting. The bellicose Ranuccio, the executioner, the icon of violent relationality who conflates love with murder, and who indeed did drown Lena, is as aware of his crime as Michele, thus equating the visual signification of material, the narrativization of slain life that is the objectification of a subject, with as violent, stupid, and self-deceptive an act as a man beating his own head bloody, and yelping aloud, for a crime which he knows he is guilty.

Believing in Ranuccio's lie that it was Borghese (Robbie Coltrane), nephew of the pope, who had killed Lena after the two had met at a party, Michele exchanges his silence and a portrait commission with his holiness Pope Paul V (Jack Birkett) for Ranuccio's release. Here the wonderfully flamboyant Birkett elucidates for Michele and the audience that placating the population via artwork is an old game for the church, far and away the dominant institution of early modern Italy: "Revolutionary gestures in art can be a great help to us. Bet you hadn't thought about that, you little bugger. Keeps the quo in the status. Never heard of a revolution made with paintbrushes!" In just four lines Jarman condemns painting, filmmaking, the church, the United Kingdom, and himself, before directing our attention to Michele and Ranuccio's reunion in the very next scene. Leaning against an old truck, one of many anachronisms that Jarman places in *Caravaggio* to remind the audience that his film is not at all a period piece, Michele happily exclaims "You're out!" as Ranuccio saunters onto screen. The two share a misunderstood laugh before the witless Ranuccio proclaims "We've tricked the bastards!" to Michele's utter confusion. The older man asks what he means before Ranuccio answers "Why, Michele, you're blind. I did it for you! For love… For us." The dumbfounded Michele cries out "You murdered her!" before pressing his knife against Ranuccio's throat. He looks into the young man's silent, all-yielding eyes and slices, spraying Ranuccio's lifeblood across both their faces, the painter executing the executioner and confirming the violence of his art and sexuality.

Clearly, the image-maker is far from the unwitting victim of the violent processes of signification. The executioner's painterly grip on his victim's head in *David* is prominently posed as the source of illumination in *The Taking of Christ*. There Caravaggio ambiguously inserts himself on the right side of the painting as either a lantern bearer helping to light the way for the soldiers' rush to capture the messiah, or just a looker-on, observing the spectacle of Christ's temporally transfixed betrayal. Regardless of the position of Caravaggio's self-portrait, the painter's hand is posed as the illuminating source of the spectacle. Even as the lantern does nothing to cast light onto the back of Judas's head and another source of light shines onto the soldiers' armor and Christ's interlaced hands, it is the outstretched hand of the painter in conjunction with the observing eyes of the spectator that illuminates and witnesses the scene. Caravaggio is both witness and witnesser, spectator and producer of the spectacle that is as originary an act of violence as the betrayal of Christ; indeed, it *is* that betrayal as the signified event is lost to time and replaced in the act of its visual signification. It is lost to resignification. Caravaggio's religious, mythical, and historical subjects present for the first time the violent relationality that governs the production, reception, and reproduction of the spectacle that is the resignification and origin of their meaning, that is the flattening of their temporality into the visual, non-historical, irreligious, atemporal and actual, spatial form of relational being:

> Caravaggio's paintings constitute an ontological laboratory. His religious subjects provide the representational material for a repertory of modes of relationality. The de-temporalized physicality of his work creates an austere sensuality, a sensuality of forms.[39]

This spatial form of relationality is not governed or narrativized by time as the film is, but the originating receptivity of resignification of bodies by other bodies. The enigmatic signifier is not the undisclosed signification of, or gesturing to, an originally signified object,

[39] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 59.

Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, 1602. Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland.

but the disclosed signification of enigmatic unknowability as that which founds relationality. This unknowability, the premise of all relationalities, is played out in one of two ways. The classic psychoanalytical configuration is the first, and perhaps always first in order of formation of relational being. It is the acted upon desire to penetrate and know the unknowable other. This desire is what causes Oedipus to kill Laius and marry Jocasta. It is what drives Ranuccio to kill Lena for Michele, just as Michele kills Ranuccio for Lena, and paints her for himself. Desire is the acted upon will to know the self by "knowing" the "truth" of the unknowable. This desire begins when two bodies meet and relationality is formed in response to the unknowable other. Desire is what makes us sexual, relational beings. The will to know is what makes us "rational," reasoning, desirous entities. It is what makes us think, learn, write, and create art in an ever self-describing, self-effacing attempt to know the unknowable.

> The inability to decipher the enigmatic signifier constitutes us as sexual beings, that is, beings in whom desire or lack is central. However peculiar it may seem to speak of desire as an epistemological category, we propose that desire as lack is constituted, originally, as the exciting pain of a certain ignorance: the failure to penetrate the *sense* of the other's soliciting—through touch, gesture, voice, or look—of our body.[40]

Desire produced by discontentment with the empty truth of one's being is the logocentric epistemology which has always dominated western ontologies, an episteme that Caravaggio paints against. Perhaps the only other response to the enigmatic signifier is to reject the desire of knowability projected upon the unknowable other as a solicitation by the empty self. This potential contentment, this wholeness of being, is formed in *Caravaggio* by homosexuality, but is ultimately produced, in Bersani and Dutoit's reading, by loneliness. The *Taking of Christ*, as with almost all of Caravaggio, "makes visible a certain kind of relationality, one in which only a receptive passivity can give direction to and identify a violent onslaught."[41]

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[40] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 40.
[41] Ibid., 57.

This is why Caravaggio thrusts his head into darkness, into nothingness. The head of the painter, the unknowable subjectivity, by a disconnection from the illumination of the body, does not solicit relationality. But at the same time it forecloses subjectivity and arrests desire, it also disperses interpretation by the transtemporal act of its severance. Bersani and Dutoit read the dual significance of Caravaggio's black canvas as both the concealment of a historical-religious setting that is the re-presentation of dissimulation seen elsewhere, as in the *Martyrdom*, and the indication of the spatiotemporally expansive space of interpretation, of resignification:

> Devoid of narrative elements, Caravaggio's ambient darkness is the painter's provision, at once generous and self-confident, for all the glances that, from inside and outside painting, in his present and in the future, will meet at his severed head. This fruitful collision might even propel the head out of its morbid fixity… Far from foreclosing all interpretation, Goliath's severed head, surprisingly, sets interpretation itself afloat.[42]

Despite his dead eyes staring unevenly into space away from the viewer, and his aghast, wide open mouth unable to form intelligibility, Caravaggio's head still invites interpretation, his decapitation in fact demands signification. Jarman could not categorize the painting into his Caravaggio confessionals otherwise. The severance of the painter's head from his body forces the viewer to acknowledge the violent desirousness of their ontology, that their form of relationality is not only capable of slaying, of objectifying the subject position but also of continuing to project subjective interpretation upon its discursive objectivity. This is an extreme solution, and perhaps the last ever issuance of Caravaggio's theme of enigmatic signification. While Caravaggio here shows how we are ultimately slain by desire, he elsewhere proposes a solution to this desirous and violent relationality, the wholeness of being and magnanimous receptivity indicated by Christ in the *Taking*, a generous and undesirous mode of relationality that does not consider violence in its unconscious dismissal of hierarchizing, binary ontologies.

[42] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 90.

The Kansas City *John the Baptist* that Jarman characterizes his reading of Ranuccio off of was not the last version of the theme of St. John in the wilderness. The one held in the Galleria Borghese is thoroughly analyzed by Bersani and Dutoit as a clear example of a noncoercive image-making practice visualized in the produced image itself. The painting is one of seven, and perhaps the last, by Caravaggio on the theme of John as a youth. It presents, unapologetically, a disinterested boy who seems to want no part in the process of image production, let alone the prefiguration of Christ. Even the ram in the background, busy nibbling away on some viny plant's silhouette, plays a more active role in linking the image towards that of St. John by its place in the tradition of his iconography. Were it not for the ram, the staff, and Caravaggio's previous work on the theme, this painting would likely not be recognizable as one of St. John at all, so antithetical to its purpose is the presence of the model, a boy off the streets of Rome clearly consigned to spending too many hours of his week boredly and silently posing for payment. The mundanity of his posture is overwhelming, and potentially subversive to the process of resignification and the sanctioned, status quo keeping purpose of image-making:

> …this massive indifference itself can be read as an inarticulate protest against his representational *use*. The opacity of his deteriorating flesh is also the resistance of a contemporary body to a veritable industry of symbolization. He'll do anything, but he won't let us forget that that's all he's doing: agreeing, without interest and without rebellion, to do as he has been told… Caravaggio allows his model to persist in a disturbing presentness that defeats Caravaggio's own attempt to impose, however provisionally, another identity on him.[43]

Just as Jarman foregrounds the grinding of pigments into paint, a resounding action throughout *Caravaggio* that Bersani and Dutoit readily observe, Caravaggio disallows the violence of resignification to grind his model into meaning here. He instead restores a measure of agency back to the image, a subjectivity arrested and focused by decapitation, but severed nonetheless.

[43] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 47.

Caravaggio, *John the Baptist*, c. 1610. Rome, Galleria Borghese.

Caravaggio, *John the Baptist*, c. 1604. Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

This version of *John the Baptist*, so central to Bersani and Dutoit's understanding of the historical Caravaggio's visual postulation of undesirous relationality, is never shown in Jarman's film. Yet the rendition held in Kansas City upon which Jarman bases his entire novelization of Caravaggio and Ranuccio is. This issue of the theme is much more cinematic, much more artistic in its reidentification of St. John as a brooding, unhaloed, decidedly handsome young man sitting shirtless in the wilderness, goat skin and red cloth draped around his muscular frame. This painting is cinematically iconoclastic, classically Caravaggesque, in its interpretation of the holy man, once again unidentifiable if not for the presence of one of his icons, in this case the cross staff which he casually wields in repose. Ranuccio the executioner is first shown modeling for the painting, potentially infusing it with violence. In fact he poses for it as he first witnesses Michele enact upon his desire for Lena, sulking there in jealous anger as the two kiss each other. Yet it is actually Jerusaleme (Spencer Leigh) who is painted as the real St. John of *Caravaggio*. Jarman announces as much in the first of Michele's framing monologues, spoken over an image of the young man waking shirtless in bed near a ram, blowing his whistle at it and stroking its horn: "Poor dumb Jerusaleme, no use as a shepherd. You looked a true St. John brought from the wilderness." Jerusaleme, the painter's assistant who grinds pigment for Michele throughout the film, is a mute yet visually preeminent presence in *Caravaggio*. His silent subjectivity is quietly articulated throughout the film and actually resolves it.

Jerusaleme, with just his carved bone whistle and his intense features, has a habit of making himself heard and seen through gestures, the silent mouthing of uninterpretable words, the ubiquitous grinding of pigments into paint, and the always listening absorption of and reaction to events around the painter's studio. When Pipo (Dawn Archibald), the model for *Amor Vincit Omnia*, describes the chic high society parties of Rome's aristocracy, one they will be

attending later that night for his unveiling, Jerusaleme places his arm around him and listens. When Michele yells at his restless models in frustration, Jerusaleme listens and smiles at the painter, garnering a smile in return. When Lena tells Michele that she is pregnant, Jersualeme hears this and drops the vase of water that he was carrying in shock. He even quietly tells the news of her death to the Cardinal Del Monte, Caravaggio's then-patron. Jersualeme listens and interprets everything around him throughout the film, yet never illuminates to the audience the conclusions he makes in so many words. His relational mode, unlike every other character in the film, is inarticulate, undesirous, and nonsexual. Unlike the several pederastic relations that Michele is the younger subject of throughout the film, Jerusaleme is adopted as the painter's son at the beginning of the film and there remains until the end, framing a narrative of desirous and violent relationality with an undesirous and generative tenderness.

After Pipo's partied unveiling for which Michele gave Lena a dress and a kiss to attend, and during which Ranuccio placates himself with another woman, kissing her and eating her jewelry in his ever-consumptive desire, the tired painter walks slowly back into his studio to see Jerusaleme asleep before the painting of St. John. He is posed and dressed for it perfectly except for the fact of his sleeping head resting upon his shoulder and crossed staff. Michele resignedly proclaims to Jerusaleme, as much as to himself "You are my St. John, and this is our wilderness." Waking up, Jerusaleme laughs. He laughs not even at the proposed resignification as he was not conscious to hear it. He simply laughs at Caravaggio's ridiculous outfit, a pretentious black and gold affair complete with a ruff, poking playfully at the painter's clothing and face with his cross, helping Michele chuckle in turn. Jerusaleme rejects resignification in the natural carrying on of his own business, not in denial of it. While the painter is unsuccessful in his attempt to turn Jerusaleme into his image of St. John here, Jarman quietly does so throughout the film.

Caravaggio's death frames the entire narrative of the movie, it drives the main action of violence and desire, bookending the plot and interjecting it throughout with scenes of Michele struggling under a fever, Jerusaleme his only companion in the white room of Porto Ercole that eventually serves as the artist's deathbed. Another layer of this frame are the frequent monologs that Terry performs, describing in modernistic vignettes another life, completely unshown but entirely spoken and often during the transitions between scenes. Ultimately, it serves as just another narrative, but one that helps to reemphasize the importance of Jerusaleme's silence. These are the autobiographical details that Jarman wrote out of the final script, and left instead a sort of fictional biography of Caravaggio's past life with Pasqualone, a reality long since ended by the time of Ranuccio and Lena. Pasqualone, shown only at the end of the film, has his historical basis in Caravaggio's life in another violent squabble over a woman, documented by court deposition. Despite Michele characterizing him as his "true love," and his presence at the end of the film, these vignettes reveal another desirous relationality:

> Pasqualone yawns into the blue sky. "Time stops for no man," he says, caressing himself. I watch the ripples in his trousers. "Can I put my hand in?" The words fall over themselves with embarrassment. Pasqualone sighs and removes his hand without looking at me. I kneel beside him and reach timidly into the dark. There are holes in his pocket, my hand slides in. His cock grows warm in my hand. Pasqualone says his girl Cecilia holds it harder. "Harder, Michele." The air hisses through the gap in his golden teeth. Touch mine, touch mine! But my mouth is dry and the words refuse to come. An ice-cold bead of sweat forms and trickles down my back. The seed spurts. His body tightens. He swallows. "Harder, Michele! Harder!" The violent words fly around me, like the marble splinters in my father's workshop, stinging my cheek. Do it. Do it now.[44]

The pederasty that Michele is subjected to throughout the film begins here, though it is shown much earlier on and in fact begins the main action, just after the end of the prologue in which the older painter adopts Jerusaleme. The young Michele is on the streets of Rome with his pimp, an unnamed man who peels an apple with a knife as the teenaged Caravaggio (Fletcher) paints, the

[44] Jarman, *Caravaggio*, 00:59:20-01:00:35.

two of them sitting on stone steps as an older Englishman approaches, looking to buy the *Basket of Fruit*. When the Englishman balks at the asked for price, Michele's pimp silently gestures for him to proposition the older man and the teenager submissively stands up to indicate his willingness. The man asks "Have you more at home?" to which Michele casually qualifies "It'll cost you" before the two of them leave together. Michele and the Englishman are then shown dancing half naked in a dilapidated apartment, the young Caravaggio tiring the Englishman out before pulling a knife on him and telling him in both Italian and English: "I'm an art object, and very, very expensive!" He takes the man's entire wallet and gestures with his knife to get out, telling the Englishman he has "had his money's worth" as he is left alone in the room. Sitting down on his pallet, Michele counts his cash, drinks the leftover wine, places a wreath upon his head and reimagines himself, in Terry's monologuing narration, as the *Young Sick Bacchus*: "I built my world as divine mystery, found the god in the wine, and took him to my heart. I painted myself as Bacchus and took on his fate, a wild orgiastic dismemberment. I raise this fragile glass and drink to you, my audience. Man's character is his fate."[45] The next scene is of Michele sick in a hospital, meeting the Cardinal Del Monte, his new patron, for the first time and showing him the *Bacchino Malato*, both the painting and his self, both art objects for sale.

Another powerful interpretation of Caravaggio's self-portraiture, Jarman here positions painting and patronage as transactionally similar to prostitution and pimping, an equivalency that Michele is only fully aware of by the end of the film as he reluctantly sells his skills to the pope. Del Monte is as much Michele's pimp as Ranuccio is Lena's, an economy of bodies and artwork interchangeably traded, from the highest offices of Rome down to its gutters. The operation runs smoothly until an idealistic painter, a romantic fool, thinks he can love beyond lust. This is as

[45] Jarman, *Caravaggio*, 00:10:43-00:11:06.

Jarman, “Dexter Fletcher as the young Caravaggio,” 1986, in Bersani & Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 34.

much the message of the parenthetical monologs as it is the main thrust of the film. They are Michele's monologs after all, a tragic remembrance of a violent, desirous soul discontent with the playing out of his attempts to know unknowability. As much as they are difficult to track, let alone receive the images they convey at the same time as the imagery shown on the screen that they accompany, Terry's disembodied narration does nothing to reveal the dissimulation of the film's re-presentation. They merely reinsert the viewer into another facet of the life of Jarman's Caravaggio, a desirous relationality by the spoken word instead of the moving image. They are as much a preface of *Blue* as they are Michele mourning his own tragedy. "I love you more than my eyes" he says, as he tightly grips Lena's dead skull, searching for the meaning of his vision within her stillness.[46] The very last of the narrations, spoken as Michele holds the dying Ranuccio in his arms before the ending scene of Caravaggio's *Entombment*, reads as such:

> The first light of dawn falls through the open window of my bedroom. A swallow flies in, swoops, dark as an arrow along the beam, landing with its wings spread black as a crucifix on the wall. "Itys, Itys, Itys," the swallow whispers. The golden dust cloud eddies in the rush of air. I lie, eyes open, facing the ceiling on the great wooden bed which is the barque that bears me across the ocean of night. I bury my head in the pillow and dream of my true love Pasqualone. I am rowing to you on the great dark ocean, you soar dolphin-like out of my sight, laughing. "Dolphins are not caught with smiles but cruelly with hooks, Michele. One day you will learn to be cruel." "Michele, wake up!" Cecilia stands in the doorway holding her feather duster on its long bamboo pole. She leaps cat-like at the swallow, swishing her broom through the dusty stars like a palm tree in the sirocco. The spell is broken. Pasqualone stands at the window, smiling.[47]

The spell is not broken. Pasqualone and Cecilia are nowhere to be found at the film's proper end. Instead, Michele learns to be cruel, as Procne and Philomela did at the hands of Tereus, another violent love triangle. "And still she cried, and still the world pursues, / 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears" or "Itys, Itys, Itys" to Jarman's. Is that all there is left to do? To gesture at the silent and sacrificed, as the articulate thrust our heads into darkness mourning over those we've slain and who slay us?

[46] Jarman, *Caravaggio*, 01:13:08-01:13:10.
[47] Jarman, *Caravaggio*, 01:22:10-01:23:22.

Bersani and Dutoit propose as much in their reading of *Caravaggio*'s equation of art and the feminine. Michele's understanding of death proposed in these monologs is a watery one, an abyssal liquidity to which all things go, or to which all things must return. As Caravaggio stands in for Christ and Lena stands in for his mother, Lena's death by water becomes a unity of birth and inconsolable loneliness in the mother's absence from the son's inner being, the distance of unknowability between mother and son that forms his relationality by her being denied to him:

> Thus, in Jarman's cinematic biography of 'the most homosexual of painters,' the ultimate 'truth' of homosexuality is represented as an inconsolable heterosexuality. There is no dissociating the homosexual from the heterosexual in *Caravaggio*… Indeed, *Caravaggio* suggests that the Oedipal structure itself merely 'rationalizes' an earlier experience of the mother's inaccessibility. The boy had already lost her before the father demanded that he give her up. And his loss was inscribed in his desire; it was the *sense of his desire*… This is a heterosexual desire which no condition in life could ever satisfy; it is therefore inconsolable before it is frustrated or forbidden.[48]

This relationality formed by denial, this originating homosexuality as a desire for an other sameness becomes a desire for inconsolability, a desire for loss that is only met in the death of the mother and the son in a return to death in liquidity, to the "intrauterine immersion in liquid which originally nourished us into life and which has now become a death shared with the mother in a devouring vortex."[49] Death then becomes rebirth, a return to and recirculation of life in the downwards transcendence towards unity in the abyssal, unconscious and final knowing. It is what explains the many images of circulation in the film. The teenaged Michele leading his client in circles around the apartment, Pipo's circular dances of self-celebration, Jerusaleme running around in circles as a boy when he first meets the painter; the scene of the New Year's celebration as Michele holds a circle of shakers as Davide rides a horse around the room in circles and Jerusaleme twirls a red flag in the same motion. These scenes gesture to Bersani and

[48] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 78, emphasis original.
[49] Ibid., 77.

Dutoit an enactment of life's spinning around to catch itself in death to reborn into life. It is how they make sense of the ending sequence of *Caravaggio*, of the resignification of the painter's life in his *Entombment* juxtaposed against the signification of the painter's death in his wake. The Passion of the Christ and the Deathbed of the Painter become one and the same in the dispersal and recirculation of identity in a universal interplay of being, spun around back into itself.

> It is not so much that Christ's death is *like* Caravaggio's, or that Caravaggio's is *like* Jarman's, but rather that Caravaggio's and Jarman's art *could* substitute one death for the other. The possibility of these substitutions is inherent in the activity of art… From this perspective, the enacting of analogies – of Caravaggio becoming Christ, of Jarman becoming Caravaggio-Christ – is the source of the artist's martyrdom. And the motivating force behind such identifications may be nothing more than the ease with which they can be aesthetically postulated. The artist is martyred by that ease… within and by an activity that dissolves and shatters identity.[50]

That my own reading should now diverge from theirs based on the definition of three words, *like*, *could*, and *martyrdom*, can perhaps indicate the difficulty of understanding any resistant piece of art in terms as close as possible to the ones it proposes, and the fact that *Caravaggio* is indeed one such noncoercive image produced in entirely faithful representation of Caravaggio's style, despite Bersani and Dutoit's misgivings about its movement in narrativized time. I believe that Jarman-Caravaggio's death *is* like Christ's and that martyrdom is only achieved by the willing subject's submission to, as Bersani and Dutoit name it, "the beneficent martyrdom of art" in complete yet difficult belief in the generative power of the subject's representation, or rebirth, or resurrection, in art by the slaying of their subject position in the resignification of their body as viewed object, their death given meaning and, in and by their belief in art, new life. This is the work of Christ, the art of his Passion, as much as it is the work of Caravaggio or the art of Derek Jarman. There is as much rationally tangible evidence of Christ as there is of Caravaggio. The truth of their life, of their living, is only obtainable in the interpretation of their representation.

[50] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 47.

Christ never spoke. We have no words of his writing or reasonable evidence of him ever having said or done what we are to believe he has said and done. We have only the words of his followers and the documentation of Roman and Jewish historians to go by. This is a fact well understood by Caravaggio in the production of his paintings using the tramps and prostitutes of the streets of Rome to represent the saints of Christianity, those saints which were placed high upon the altars of the church in mockery of their having lived lives slain by institutional force. I believe that Jarman was fully aware of this in his own production of *Caravaggio*, and interviews at the time indicate this, but it remains a method of production, a relationality, incapable of reasoned articulation as it is diametrically opposed to it. Bersani and Dutoit show us as much:

> Christ of course was not martyred by art – or perhaps he was. As an identifiable figure, he is, after all, nothing but centuries of representation, representation… without a model. His appearance, once conventionalized, became recognizable in art, but it is never repeated in exactly the same manner, with the result that his multiple presences are identical to an unending disappearance. The identity of Christ is an identity at once exalted and martyred by centuries of representation. The historical Caravaggio is unique in that he seems not only to have known that but also to have wanted to make that knowledge visible in his work. Referring to the scandal provoked by Caravaggio's use of models too easily recognizable *as* models (brought mainly from the streets of Rome into the painter's studio), we spoke of the resistance of those models' bodies to a veritable industry of symbolization. They refuse to be seen through, but in emphasizing their own visibility they are also making Christ or the Virgin *more* visible, visible as whoever represents them. It is as if they were proclaiming that the subject on the other side of their represented bodies is nothing but that: *their bodies*. The models, standing in for figures nowhere else to be found, enact the brute suppression of icons whose glory they have been ordered, and paid, to serve, and who they replace by their very service. This is certainly a martyrdom more abstract than the bodily suffering of Christ on the cross, although in a way it is even more radical in its consequences. Those consequences were perhaps unintentionally anticipated in the Biblical episode of Mary and Mary Magdalen failing to find Christ in his tomb. Between his crucifixion and his resurrection, he disappears, and we might say that his resurrection in Christianity *is* his disappearance. It is a referential art; but it refers to a body having become a ghost in a 'body' of art that, unlike its inspirational source, enacts the *Dis*incarnation. Was all this familiar to Jarman? He certainly never spoke of martyrdom by art.[51]

What is the Reincarnation of Christ, rationally, if not a story about the reincarnation of Christ?

[51] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 48.

To claim that the martyrdom of art is fundamentally different from the martyrdom of Christ is a misunderstanding of belief, a misunderstanding of the martyrdom and re-presentation of Christ, that is, the presentation of Christ for the first time, and perhaps a misunderstanding of art. As a text, the historical origins of the Bible have no tangible connection to the stories told within it by the very dissimulation of its production that Bersani and Dutoit take as the object of interrogation in their interpretation of imagery, both static and moving, only in its finally presented form, as either phenomenologically coercive or not. To understand the martyrdom of representation of the body as only possibly unintentionally anticipated by the empty tomb is to understand the Bible as a merely religious text, or even worse, a historical one, and not the revised and continuously revised product of thousands of years of concentrated interrogation of the difference between belief and knowing, of ecumenical councils dedicated to the canonization of lifetimes of work committed to the interpretation of texts themselves written in conversation with other writers to reproduce, infallibly, the origins of truth and the paradox of its representation. Oddly enough, to treat the Bible as a historical account is to believe in it as a direct representation of the signified object, or in other words, divine. Bersani and Dutoit reveal themselves here, despite their commitment to Caravaggio as crucial to a suspicion of truth as the untheorizable object of knowledge, to be aligned with the disclosure of narrativity in favor over the undisclosed image.

This is why they read the two endings of *Caravaggio* as they do, and why I propose a third, undisclosed (un)ending, a reading to which Jerusaleme's silence is crucial, and one which enhances the conventionally posed conclusions of the film with a resolution of its own, one that hopefully proposes only a provisional answer to the question of the possibility of noncoercive film and one that relies almost exclusively upon belief. Inserted quickly into the second ending that concludes Michele's narration of self-mourning, between shots of the painter lying dead,

dressed up in Catholic tradition against his wishes, and Jerusaleme mourning him, gesturing, possibly, quietly with his hands and mouth for Michele to rest in peace, is a flashback to when Jerusaleme and the painter first met. Michele holds the boy in his arms, smiling at his innocence as the child rests his head against his chest, as much an image of tenderness as it is of fatherhood, before setting his eyes into the distance, pondering, perhaps resolving never to allow this boy to be subject to the violent sexuality that he himself was formed and killed by. He then closes his eyes and rests against Jerusaleme. The scene is cut and returns back to his deathbed, the painter's eyes closed by coins for Charon, the rosary he refused held in his hands. His self, his dispersed spirit, rests now upon Jerusaleme who quietly blows his whistle (as there is no sound but the credo) in hopeful proclamation of a life well spent. He smiles and the scene fades to darkness, the end of the film.

I do not argue that Bersani and Dutoit did not see all this. It is impossible not to see, just as it is impossible to make rational sense out of. The postulation of the visually oblique is one that precludes rationalization, forecloses objective seeing and logical rearticulation. *It can be shown, but it can't be said*. And I hope not to betray Jarman by naming Jerusaleme as the visual signification of the distance between desire for the enigmatic signifier and contentment with the disclosed signifier as originary, a gulf of difference as deep as it is narrow. I propose the aesthetic interchangeability of being as not a step backwards from the representation of the enigmatic signifier found in Caravaggio, but an advancement of the undesirous relationality found in the painter's wholeness of being in or despite recognition of the disconnect from the signified object. It is the advantage of the phenomenologically coercive reorganization of time in conjunction with organized space that bridges the gap of difference between representation and represented object, jettisoning entirely the notion of an originary signified in the captivation of its movement.

The movie demands attention, it arrests the viewer's vision and requires full submission to its narrativization of time to extract meaning from it. It is why Jerusaleme is so hard to see in the first place. He waits so patiently in the wings of Michele's dual performances that it is easy to miss him on a first viewing of *Caravaggio*. Yet his presence continuously perplexes the viewer from his first introduction to his final gesture, the final "word" of the film, becoming only more important to grasping the inner being of the movie upon subsequent replays. When the viewer is finally capable of sitting down with Jerusaleme they begin to see what Jarman-Caravaggio-Christ had always been inviting them to see, despite their perception of the solicitation. The film does require surrender, as perhaps all films always will, but this invitation to surrender will yield, as perhaps all films always should, a glimpse into the unreal and irrational relationality of mutual trust and contentment with a loving sameness met between two souls beyond time and space. It is a consolable relationality. It can generate sons and daughters despite the knowledge of its having slain the father and lost the mother. Wholeness of being does not care for hierarchies of coercive or noncoercive image-making practice, but will continue to love beyond and through those difficulties of conventionalization, of institutionalization and hegemony, of form and production. It is perhaps the only way the once most notoriously gay man in Britain could pose himself, more truly, as the body of Christ than any church ever could.

There is a reason that red poppies and the credo are posed against Caravaggio-Christ's stigmata in the tableau vivant. The credo, the melodized singing of the Nicene Creed, is the spoken canonization of Christian belief that has defined the Catholic Church, and many other Christian denominations, for nearly two millennia. The red poppies are a particularly British symbol of mourning and remembrance of those lost in war. In this case, the wars fought by the military of the most historically dominant empire in human history. Is it possible to believe in an

Jarman, *Caravaggio*, 65.

individual, subjective meaning of these symbols in spite of the institutions they signify? Is the affective authority of the signifier enough to supplant the objective disconnection from their signified truth? This is the question that Jarman asks us by Jerusaleme's silent conclusion to the film. Again, it is entirely possible that Bersani and Dutoit saw all this, as they do agree that "*Caravaggio* emphasizes the ontological dignity of an uncertain or fleeting visibility, of pushing beyond our form in order to circulate within universal similitudes."[52] However, they also never make mention of Jerusaleme's stunning conclusion to the film, reading him only as an accessory to the painter's loneliness. The pair do not analyze Jerusaleme's silent, film-ending whistle in their examination of the "extraordinary scenes of oral desperation" that frequently end Jarman's films as silent, psychotic expressions of desperate frustration and self-exposure beyond words.[53] Neither do they make mention of the flashback to Michele holding the boy in his arms. Do they not see Jerusaleme or do they wish, like Jarman and Caravaggio did, to express the ineffability of undesirous relationality? This is again a problem of discourse as their reading of him seems to be based upon his lack of pictorial or historical basis. He is entirely Jarman's invention, and they wish to ground him and the relationality he represents in the lonely noncoercion of painting:

> There are interesting moments in *Caravaggio* of a pregnant loneliness – one that might give birth to new relations, in particular relations not constricted by desire. These moments are all connected to painting… Jarman (somewhat inconclusively, it's true) associates painting both with aborted desire and a non-desiring exchange.[54]

I argue that Bersani and Dutoit did not see Jerusaleme because the visually oblique is not meant to be seen, but merely glimpsed. As for my articulation of his meaning, I think we must do better than gesture to the dissimulation of the signified as the violent resignification of bodies is more tangibly counteracted by undesirous relationalities between people than between viewers and art.

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[52] Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio*, 81.
[53] Ibid., 60.
[54] Ibid., 64, 65.

Still, I hope not to purport to be a better reader than Bersani and Dutoit. This work would be impossible without their profound insight into both Caravaggio and Derek Jarman. But I do understand myself as a reader, or viewer, not aligned to so steadfast a theory of the noncoercive image as only that which does not move to capture attention and captivate the eye. The reality is that I do not live in the same world that Jarman, Bersani, and Dutoit shared. I live in a world now well beyond the proliferation of the internet that was only beginning around the time *Caravaggio* and *Caravaggio's Secrets* were published. I live in a world largely made up of computer screens and televisions, smart phones and streaming services, social medias and video games. A world so dominated, and increasingly dominated, by movement of the image, not by its affective authority but by the sheer force of its industrial reproductivity. The image is even beginning to make itself, in the objectively true sense, as artificial intelligence learns to recognize and create "art." Art? Perhaps the loop between signifier and signified can be closed after all. Regardless of the soon to arrive newest media revolution, I am still revolutions away from Jarman and Caravaggio. Film is now as much a thing of the past as painting. The commercialism of Hollywood and the industry of the image churn ever onward, using and replacing bodies and artists like burnt lightbulbs. The movement of the image is no longer the re-presentation of a relationality but the reproduction of an algorithm, the equation and interconnection of networks to other networks with bodies moved mercilessly in between. It seems that we have already lost film, lost the cinema, and that protests to and original thinking against the ubiquitous captivation of our sight are both hard to come by. Is there anything left but to thrust our heads, spinning, into this darkness? Or is there still room to believe in art, to believe in and demand a practice of noncoercive imagery and relationality as faithfully and irrationally as we might believe in the old fashioned traditions of hedgerows and fields of flowers, of Christs and credos, of red poppies and redemption, of going to the movies?

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