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Nick Rees-Roberts

► **To cite this version:**

Nick Rees-Roberts. Single Men : Sixties Aesthetics and Vintage Style in Contemporary Cinema. Film, Fashion, and the 1960s, Indiana University Press, 2017, 978-0-253-02610-1. hal-03944109

**HAL Id: hal-03944109**

**<https://univ-sorbonne-nouvelle.hal.science/hal-03944109>**

Submitted on 17 Jan 2023

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# 11 Single Men: Sixties Aesthetics and Vintage Style in Contemporary Cinema

Nick Rees-Roberts

THE USE OF iconic film stars in contemporary fashion advertising includes a number of examples drawn from the cinema of the 1960s, such as Christian Dior's imagery of Alain Delon, used to relaunch its classic men's fragrance *Eau Sauvage* in 2009. The following year, Italian eyewear brand Persol reissued a limited edition of its iconic PO 714 sunglasses, made famous by Hollywood star Steve McQueen following their onscreen appearance in *The Thomas Crown Affair* (Norman Jewison, 1968). In 2011, the brand released an ad campaign using stills of McQueen shot by William Claxton in the early 1960s to accompany the item's reappearance as a contemporary classic. The campaign supported the brand's wider investment in screen culture, including its sponsorship of the Venice International Film Festival and a peripatetic exhibition tracing the parallel histories of craftsmanship in film and design.

The 1960s occupy a symbolic place in the layering of past styles in what Simon Reynolds has termed contemporary pop culture's "retromania."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it was the 1960s that gave birth to the idea of fashion as not only the material object itself but also a whole "regime of visibility" articulated through the conjunction of design, image, and label.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the legacy of 1960s cinema through the stylistic lens of "vintage," defined as an aesthetic strategy that reads history through attention to tone, mood, and sensibility, as much as through the standard categories of costume, accessory, or dress. The iconographic hold of 1960s cinema over contemporary filmmaking raises important critical questions of lineage, adaptation, and heritage. This chapter aims to go beyond a routine discussion of period costume or pastiche design that references simply the visual clichés of the 1960s (such as the surface gloss of iconic consumables) to consider a more complex handling of cinematic memory, evoking the diffuse sensibilities of the period, particularly in relation to the aesthetics of masculinity. The chapter also argues for critical debate concerning fashion in film to consider a more capacious understanding of the heritage of men's style in the context of contemporary

cinema. Drawing on a number of European films—including Joachim Trier’s *Reprise* (2006) and *Oslo August 31st* (2011), the latter of which updates Louis Malle’s *Le Feu Follet/The Fire Within* (1963)—I focus specifically on the forms of masculinity and their cinematic inscription within urban geography. The films under consideration all frame masculinity by dwelling on its formal shape and aesthetic design and mapping out the trajectories of the disaffected protagonists (the titular single men) as they traverse the cityscape.

While the film texts under discussion are European (with examples drawn from the cinemas of France, Norway, and the United Kingdom), the response to 60s aesthetics is more broadly international in nature. Popular cinema is persistently drawn to the decade through respectful remakes such as *The Thomas Crown Affair* (McTierney, 1999) with Pierce Brosnan taking on the McQueen mantle, or *Alfie* (Gilbert, 1966 and Shyer, 2004) in which Michael Caine’s cockney man-about-town morphed into Jude Law’s ironic Manhattan playboy. Other recent adaptations have cashed in on iconographic interest in the decade by purposefully shifting the timeframe to the 1960s for purely stylistic reasons: Rowan Joffe’s *Brighton Rock* (2010) self-consciously draws on the contemporaneous mod revival in menswear design through the casting of Sam Riley as the male lead, an actor known at the time principally as the star of *Control* (2006), Anton Corbijn’s ultra-cool biopic of postpunk band Joy Division, and as the face of Burberry menswear.

### Vintage Cinema

Critical suspicion of fashion on film has historically focused on the perceived over-investment in artifice and surface. Pamela Church Gibson has noted the entrenched elitism in much academic film scholarship that leaves the study of costume design for fashion historians or journalists, thereby diminishing its disciplinary legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> The target of such critical suspicion of fashion and costume is the sort of production design that submerges the narrative in a stagnant aesthetic coding that relies on the clichéd look of the still fashion image.

Fashion designer Tom Ford’s 2010 directorial debut, *A Single Man*, is instructive in this respect, for it self-consciously straddles the codes of advertising, branding, and art cinema, pointing to the surface perfectionism involved in the channelling of past styles. The film raises pertinent questions around the value of film authorship in the revised visual landscape of screen and consumer culture. What does the fashion designer bring to the creative and collaborative process of directing? Is the film simply part of a broader self-promotional strategy, with the product rolled out along with fashion and fragrance to promote the nominal brand? Church Gibson traces Ford’s strategic positioning of his self-financed film within the new consumer culture of fashion branding and celebrity that he helped to forge as creative director of the Italian label Gucci in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

Following in the footsteps of the celebrated US television series *Mad Men*, Ford's glossy adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's 1964 novel was criticized for its contrived shots of designed interiors and its overinsistence on immaculate garments.<sup>5</sup> Isherwood's cruel realism was replaced by Ford's luxury aesthetic, the elegant clichés of which served to neutralize the existential angst and affective allure of the original narrative. However, the main criticism of *A Single Man*—that it is an artistic project wholly conceived under the sign of affectation—might not have been levelled quite so vehemently had the director's background not been in fashion.

*Mad Men* is an influential example of vintage stylization within contemporary screen culture. The impact of Matthew Weiner's dark and sexy series on current revisions of 1960s glamour is that it animates the look of fashion photography and the superficial packaging of consumer culture with its sparkling surfaces by conceiving of them as transparent metaphors for the characters' hidden depths and deceits. The series is also notable for its fetishistic investment in the range of consumables (cigarettes, alcohol, clothing, furniture, and gadgets) that we now casually associate with the lifestyle and technology of the period. As Prudence Black and Catherine Driscoll argue, *Mad Men's* "embrace of period detail . . . is at once loving and fetishistic and it belongs, as in all period film and television, to the politics of the present." The series uses period detail to flag the radical difference between contemporary social values and those of the 1960s. "What that difference *looks like* is crucial to the way *Mad Men* represents history."<sup>6</sup> Casting aside a realist mode of representation, *Mad Men* imagines the past through the gaze of the adman, self-consciously channelling history through style.

In her seminal dissection of 1960s late-modernist culture, Susan Sontag distinguished between style and stylization, defining the latter as "creative mistreatment" occurring "when style and subject are . . . played off against one another."<sup>7</sup> The cinematic foregrounding of stylization is not a recent phenomenon. It was the cause of critical hostility toward the French *cinéma du look* of the 1980s with its aesthetic transfer of advertising, particularly the impact of the music video on narrative film. Fredric Jameson famously defined this tendency as the post-modern cultural sensibility knowingly assembling contemporary images from pop culture, fashion, and advertising alongside those from high culture and modernist art.<sup>8</sup> This pop sensibility forms part of the overall postmodern look of the work of contemporary directors attempting to stylize their subject matter not simply through surface design (such as the superficial rendition of 1960s fashion and interior design perceived in Ford's film), but rather through a more programmatic authorial strategy involving the intentionally jarring juxtaposition of subject with form. Examples drawn from contemporary cinema include Quebecois director Xavier Dolan's stylized melodramas *Heartbeats* (2010), *Laurence Anyways* (2012), and *Mommy* (2014), with their hybrid nods to pop music



and video art, and Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn's mannered neo noir thrillers *Drive* (2011) and *Only God Forgives* (2013), both featuring Hollywood "it-boy" Ryan Gosling figured as a cross between a model and a performer. Gosling's physical allure and nonchalant technique hark back to Alain Delon's feline presence in Jean-Pierre Melville's classic crime film *Le Samouraï* (1967).

These questions of style and stylization, of affect and affectation, of the fashionable pleasure of certain films that are valued as much for their mood or tone as for their actual costume designs, suggest a more capacious understanding of vintage as an aesthetic sensibility in contemporary cinema. Emiliano Morreale defines vintage cinema as one that fabricates nostalgia generationally as a form of imagery attached to the so-called generations X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Y (digital natives born roughly after 1980) whose postcollective identities are made up entirely of the memories of spectator consumers.<sup>9</sup> Taking his theoretical cue from Jameson, Morreale argues that the difference between the 1970s visual nostalgia for previous decades—manifested in US films of the era such as *American Graffiti* (Lucas, 1973) and *The Way We Were* (Pollack, 1973)—and post-80s vintage is the construction of the past wholly through media representation, leading to the stalemate position of contemporary pop culture, in which past styles are eclectically positioned in an ahistorical mash-up to ensure maximal emotional engagement on the part of consumer audiences.

This conceptualization of vintage as an interrelationship between cinema, fashion, and consumption, as an aesthetic space rather than a predominantly temporal structure, follows theories propounded by philosopher Michel Foucault from the mid-1960s that charted the epistemological transition from a focus on history, development, and temporal cycles (found in both nineteenth-century realism and twentieth-century modernism) to the spatial realm of juxtaposition, heterotopias, and simultaneity.<sup>10</sup> Vintage cinema therefore implies reading history through the lens of style (through attention to mood, affect, and sensibility, through structures of feeling such as gloom, melancholy, or nostalgia) as much as through accessory, costume, or dress. The fabrication of vintage space on screen does not merely equate to narrative masquerading as advertising, with production designers raiding image banks in the way the modern styles and designs of *Mad Men* quite clearly translate the narrative's underlying sexiness into visual terms. Vintage cinema can also read history against the grain.

The legacy of early 1960s European art cinema (specifically the French New Wave and the Italian New Cinema) and its iconographic hold over certain artistic forms of contemporary cinema is particularly relevant to this discussion for the issues of lineage, adaptation, and heritage it raises. Some of Christophe Honoré's recent cinema, for example, has toyed with forms of knowing imitation, quoting the films of Jacques Demy, Jean-Luc Godard, and François Truffaut. *Love Songs* (*Les Chansons d'amour*, 2007) employs pastiche dialogue, song, movement,

design, casting, and performance style; Louis Garrel pays imitative homage to Jean-Pierre Léaud's skittish performance as Antoine Doissel, the iconic dandy in Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses*, (*Baisers volés*, 1968). However, Honoré has expressed reservations about the issue of generational transmission, refuting the normative nomenclature of legacy, filiation, and lineage, preferring instead to talk of his output in terms of cinematic memory.<sup>11</sup> Film scholar Pam Cook has argued that the distinction between memory, history, and nostalgia has become blurred in academic discussions of film. "Where traditional approaches prefer to emphasise the differences between them, in order to sanction the legitimacy of history as a means of explaining the world," argues Cook, "it is equally possible to see them as a continuum, with history at one end, nostalgia at the other and memory as a bridge or transition between them."<sup>12</sup> Rather than simply positioning nostalgia as a reactionary formation, Cook emphasizes how it foregrounds the role of fantasy in the re-presentation of the past. The more critically self-reflexive nostalgic memory film, therefore, plays on "the gap between representations of the past and actual past events, and the desire to overcome that gap and recover what has been lost."<sup>13</sup>

Honoré's critical manipulation of mnemonic imagery is further developed through the temporal and stylistic framework of his later film *Beloved* (*Les Bien-aimés*, 2011), which continued the pastiche tribute to Jacques Demy through the familiar motifs of love and loss, and through the casting of film star Catherine Deneuve. Ludivine Sagnier plays Deneuve's younger self, Madeleine, a shop assistant and call girl in the late 1960s. *Beloved* goes beyond straightforward pastiche, however, rubbing the colorful idealization of Parisian youthfulness up against the backdrop of epoch-defining historical events (the "Prague spring" of 1968 and 9/11 in the US) and the emotional displacement of unrequited love, missing home, and feeling lost. Alex Beaupain's score evokes the melancholy of the present by punctuating the fragmented narrative. Music is skilfully used in counterpoint to the neonostalgic recreation of sixties Paris playfully sketched out through attention to iconic objects and fashions of the period. These include shiny vintage cars and Sagnier's coquettish look, with her bottle-blond wig, cutesy frocks, and emblematic Roger Vivier buckled heels, which echo Deneuve's iconic role as *Belle de Jour* (Buñuel, 1967), symbolically showcased in the opening title sequence and the poignant final close-up.

### Mood and Modernity

The final shot of *Beloved* focuses on the emblematic Roger Vivier heels and consolidates the film's affectionate investment in commodity fetishism. Honoré's calculated attempt to intertwine personal and public histories through the stylistic lens of vintage foregrounds a contemporary strategy that goes beyond a routine pastiche of stylistic clichés from past moments in film history and toward

a more complex handling of cinematic memory, a treatment that uses it to evoke sensibilities, affects, and moods such as nostalgia and melancholy rather than to simply reproduce the surface gloss of the 1960s through the fetishistic allure of consumables.

Critical accounts of European art cinema of the period, such as Mark Betz's provocative reformulation of the body of work in terms of coproduction and the contextual politics of gender, race, and decolonization, draw considerable attention to the aesthetic elements that define modernist films, what David Bordwell termed their parametric stylistic features, particularly the lingering slowness so routinely associated with Michelangelo Antonioni's cycle of films of the period—*L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), *L'eclisse* (1962), and *Red Desert* (*Il deserto rosso*, 1964), or the fragmented subjectivity of Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961).<sup>14</sup> Sontag's early criticism of the deep style of European art cinema of the period included an extended essay assessing Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), making parallel reference to the "abstract evocative-ness" of the château in *Marienbad*, its complex mental universe, its discordant internal relations, and its opaque fusion of reality with fantasy.<sup>15</sup> Sontag also admired the "anti-romantic, cool, mundane, clinical (in one sense, literally so), and bourgeois-modern" tone and design of *Persona*, which functioned to locate time in a perpetual present tense.<sup>16</sup>

Like Sontag's appreciation of Bergman's design aesthetic, Giuliana Bruno reads Antonioni as an "architectural filmmaker." She observes that "unlike early modernism, which was more interested in speed, velocity, and acceleration, the late modernism that emerged in the postwar period conceived of modernity as inhabiting different, extended temporal zones, and it set out to explore this new shape of modern times." Antonioni's articulation of filmic space dwelt, Bruno argues, "on the architectonics of time," privileging scenic description over action, "an aesthetic of *temps mort*, absorbed in framing and mapping (interior) landscapes, and drawn to the time of non-action, a time when actors stop acting and space tells its story."<sup>17</sup> Bruno's analysis takes in the contemporary slow cinema of both Chantal Ackerman and Tsai Ming-liang, evidence that the late-modern artistic preference for slowness and stillness has come back into fashion—giving space to time, in Bruno's formulation.

The aesthetic influence of 1960s modernism is particularly apparent in a number of contemporary films that do not seek to replicate the particular looks or styles of the era (in the sense of the heritage or period film) but rather pay nostalgic attention to the mood, tone, and feeling—the affective pull—of 60s modernist cinema. An example of this type of tonal influence is Andrew Haigh's bleak gay romance *Weekend* (2011). Accompanying a shoot for the October 2011 edition of *L'Uomo Vogue*, photographer Bruce Weber pointed to the influence of the New British Cinema of the 1960s on his own aesthetic trajectory in both still



and moving image.<sup>18</sup> The model chosen for the photo shoot was Tom Cullen, a British actor noted for his performance in *Weekend*, set in the postindustrial city of Nottingham, the same location used for Karel Reisz's kitchen-sink classic *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960). Haigh's low-key depiction of an aborted relationship over the course of a single weekend points to the film's roots in part in the British tradition of social-realist filmmaking, but also in the European modernist tradition. Haigh references the quiet, urban bleakness of Antonioni's cinema of the early 1960s through the subtle focus on the relationship's intimate and public spaces, together with the condensed timeframe lifted from *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Varda, 1962).<sup>19</sup>

Norwegian director Joachim Trier's films *Reprise* (2006) and *Oslo August 31st* (2011) similarly echo the mood and tone of the modernist European cinema through particular reference to films by Louis Malle, Eric Rohmer, and Agnès Varda. Trier's two films, in which hyperindividualized male protagonists navigate the spaces of contemporary Oslo, echo the framing of Paris of the 1960s, drawing on a number of visual intertexts, and as it was for Haigh's *Weekend*, the structure of Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* is a key reference point, as are Malle's *The Fire Within* (*Le Feu follet*, 1963), Rohmer's *The Sign of Leo* (*Le Signe du lion*, 1959), and Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne's later film *A Sleeping Man* (*Un homme qui dort*, 1974). Trier's films self-consciously bind questions of style, design, and masculinity to those of place, space, and topography.

Malle's earlier film *Elevator to the Gallows* (*Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, 1958) with its memorable sequence following Jeanne Moreau as she wanders the streets of Paris, influenced Antonioni's remapping of Milan in *La notte* using the same nomadic actress to highlight the dehumanizing space of the city.<sup>20</sup> The mere allusion to wandering and the nomadism associated with the style of the French New Wave protagonists situates contemporary films such as *Reprise* and *Oslo* quite clearly within the cultural heritage of the Western dandy and the attendant connotations of an affected Parisian melancholy, a nostalgic history Betz glosses by tracing the prototype of the *flâneur* back to Charles Baudelaire's Second-Empire Paris and Walter Benjamin's Weimar Berlin. The *flâneur's* body, expressed through attitude, pose, and style, is captured through the posture of melancholy, the essential condition of life within capitalist modernity: "Since there is no escape from the melancholy that attends modern urban existence, the *flâneur* focuses his attention on the precise perception of its environs and spaces. He goes through life with eyes open."<sup>21</sup> Anders, the suicidal protagonist of Trier's *Oslo*, much like his predecessor Alain Leroy in Malle's *Le Feu follet*, carries with him the attitude of the melancholic *flâneur*, although not excessively dandified in the style of Jean-Pierre Léaud's signature silk scarves and tweed suit jackets.

Anne Friedberg traces the *flâneur* back to Baudelaire's original conception of the artist and dandy (types used to focus questions of beauty, artifice and

fashion and their correlation to happiness) at the definitional core of modernity in his 1863 *The Painter of Modern Life*.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the ephemeral nature of happiness underscores much of the playfulness associated with the 1960s New Wave brand of fecklessness, youth, and daring, particularly the freedoms enjoyed by its male protagonists (although not exclusively male, with Varda's *Cléo* being an important exception). Friedberg makes the crucial link between the aesthetic pose, attitude, and image of the urban dandy and the foundational emergence of commodity culture through the nineteenth century, with its creation of "new illusions of spatial and temporal mobility."<sup>23</sup> Unlike Honoré's bittersweet homages to Demy, Godard, and Truffaut, Trier's films remember the form of late-modern existential solitude, expressed through the somber tone and visual architecture of that certain type of 1960s modernist European cinema, a style associated in shorthand with much of 1960s Antonioni and echoed in the portraits of loneliness and unhappiness in other celebrated films of the period by Bergman, Malle, Rohmer, and Varda. This aesthetic of masculine melancholy extended into the early 1970s with the example of Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort*, a monochromatic portrait of depression with a modernist patchwork design and behavioral attempt to map out a young man's personal alienation and affective retreat through his real and imagined navigations across Paris.

Jonathan Flatley situates melancholy as an affective practice as much as a psychological state of mind. He defines the term as "longing for lost loves, brooding over absent objects and changed environments, reflecting on unmet desires, and lingering on events from the past. It is a practice that might, in fact, produce its own kind of knowledge."<sup>24</sup> Flatley's formulation of affective mapping is concerned with the urban topography of melancholy conceived as an affect, an emotion, or a mood, as a relational state of being as much as a clinical condition. He turns to Benjamin's labyrinthine investigation into the material experience of urban living in determining "one's way of being in the world."<sup>25</sup> "Mood" is precisely the term used to articulate the structuring role of history on our affective lives. Benjamin famously used fashion as an example of our scavenging approach to memory and history, a "temporally disjunctive evocation of the past,"<sup>26</sup> and his metaphor of history as a tiger's leap was used to describe the symbolic meanings of fashion within modernity. Fashion historian Caroline Evans also turns to Benjamin's writings from the 1930s as a method of inquiry to analyze contemporary fashion's tendency to segue between past and present. Drawing on his historical metaphor to juxtapose contemporary and past styles, "to illuminate the way that the past can resonate in the present to articulate modern anxieties and experiences,"<sup>27</sup> Evans employs the topographical metaphor of the labyrinth to allude to fashion's own doubling back on itself to reveal the memory traces in those styles and trends that appear most modern.



## Cold Wave

Trier's dialogue with European cinema of the early 1960s channels imagery from across the arts through the layering of visual and sonic effects from the music, literature, and fashions of the period with those of the decades since, particularly new wave and postpunk pop music from the early 1980s. Much like the historical scavenging Evans detects in contemporary fashion's relaying of the past, the melancholic mood and acoustic design of Trier's cinema capture the disjunctive tones of the "new waves" of the 1960s (cinema) and the 1980s (music). The 2006 *Reprise* traces the artistic and sentimental adventures of two twenty-something aspiring novelists, Erik and Phillip, as they negotiate success, failure, rivalry, and depression. Whilst the film's study of the artist as a young man makes playful gestures to French New Wave cinema (particularly to Godard's temporal and spatial disorientation through jump-cutting), it also blends in references to post-war modernist fiction (including archive footage of Marguerite Duras and the radical heritage of the *nouveau roman*), juxtaposed with a soundtrack of later British new wave pop of the early 1980s.

Writing in *The New Yorker*, Richard Brody took issue with this flaunting of vintage styles, dismissing the film as a "pseudo-intellectual, faux-modernist pastiche of New Wave moods and tricks [lacking] any trace of spontaneity, the cinematic savvy, or the self-revealing emotional openness of the French New Wave's masterworks."<sup>28</sup> But in fact, the point of the prologue is to show off its pastiche affectation through the use of a future anterior tense, the hypothetical "what if" scenario used to fracture the narrative's dominant psychological realism. After Erik and Phillip post their finished manuscripts, the film toys with multiple possibilities of success figured predominantly as recognition by Parisian literary culture. The remainder of the film avoids the initial trickery, favoring a more controlled use of stylistic influence to trace both writers' personal insecurities and fractured relationships with women. The initial impression of glibness is carefully contrived to situate the film's opening flourish as an homage to the New Wave: close-ups of the pretentious book jackets, the use of ellipsis, disjuncture between image and sound, fast motion, black and white clichés of Parisian cafés, and an overlaid soundtrack borrowing the somber theme from Godard's *Contempt* (*Le Mépris*, 1963).

The acoustic effect of *Reprise*, however, points to the film's more ambitious formal composition. Laying down tracks from English postpunk and new wave pop music of the 1980s (the rhythmic patterns of Joy Division and New Order's *Substance* albums) onto the visual heritage of French New Wave cinema of the 1960s works to situate the film within a contemporary pop sensibility that layers its musical memories as part of a broader vintage style. Trier's creative mix of artefacts from across highbrow and popular cultural forms (skateboarding

alongside Maurice Blanchot) certainly situates *Reprise* within a vintage cinema of self-referential allusion and surface chic. Philip (played by Anders Danielson Lie) even sports a T-shirt of The Smiths' *The Queen Is Dead* album cover showing a portrait of Alain Delon.

This actually works to frame a more probing account of the futility of middle-class aspirations. The extreme close-ups of the photogenic actors Anders Danielson Lie and Espen Klouman Høiner certainly resemble the anguished realism of 1990s fashion photography. But the Scandinavian style of monochromatic formal attire mixed with pieces from sportswear such as band T-shirts or hoodies (a style particularly associated with the emergence of fashion-forward Scandinavian labels such as Acne, Tiger or Our Legacy) serves to establish the film's social milieu, tonal sensibility, and cultural frame of reference.<sup>29</sup> The young men's creative ambitions are framed by their hipster milieu, the style of which combines low-key streetwear with minimal ornamentation, the transfer of countercultural symbolism (associated with the impact of Belgian designer Raf Simons on contemporary menswear since the mid-1990s), and a local adaptation of the classic postwar US iconography of anticonformism (T-shirts, leather jackets, and jeans). Trier aimed "to make a film that focused on the poetic details of boy culture."<sup>30</sup> His portrait of masculinity gestures to the familiar dandy figure (updated to the less obviously affected metrosexual male) and to the characters' immaturity and pretensions. The men are shown at times to be crass and sexist. The passing intrusion of a female editor into the all-male company serves to underscore their laddish insecurities.

Trier's insistent focus on posing and style—visual, literary, and acoustic—is purposefully used to sketch out a portrait of postadolescent ennui and aborted professional ambition leading to depression, madness, and suicide: Phillip finally accepts that his writing merely recycled the styles of the great Norwegian writers. Alongside the more familiar references to the modernist fiction of Duras or the literary philosophy of Blanchot, there is the inclusion of a fictional literary idol, Sten Egil Dahl, said to have retreated from public life and renounced a literary career through his self-imposed silence. The character is modelled on Tor Ulven, an experimental verse poet who committed suicide in 1995, like his fictional counterpart, whose death is registered at the end of the film. In a creative parallel, the spectral figure of Joy Division's suicidal front man Ian Curtis looms large over the film's interrogation of psychological fragility and artistic originality, and the rhythmic structures and mechanical loops of the band's music provide the transition between *Reprise* and *Oslo*, which in turn focuses on the final day in the life of a suicidal heroin addict who returns to the city in a failed attempt at redemption.

Unlike the ironic prologue to *Reprise*, *Oslo* begins with documentary snapshots showing the city as it was, remembered as a provincial backwater before

the oil boom. The film ends with an elegiac long take of protagonist Anders's fatal overdose. Both the gesture to the subjective nature of memory (the reprise of Georges Perec's inventory invocation "I remember . . . I remember" relayed in voice-over) and the character study of intense loneliness indicate a careful elaboration of spatial design that is reminiscent of Antonioni's static shots documenting the cityscape. They also point to the influence of Perec's visual articulation of alienation through the topography of Paris, the sleeping man passing from one space to another.<sup>31</sup>

Trier's portrait draws attention to Anders' psychological state early on through drowning, showing his failed suicide attempt through total immersion. Like Varda's *Cléo*, a similarly moving portrait of a life in flux that unravels in almost real time on a single day in Paris from 5 pm to 7 pm, the temporal and spatial dynamics of Trier's film become themes in themselves, part of the film's contemplative structure. Trier's title, with its concise factual focus framing the narrative in both time and space (*Oslo, August 31st*), similarly underscores the protagonist's numbered days. Adrian Martin has described the effect of Varda's similar multiperspective approach as "the sense that it's not one person's story but a story that belongs to everyone who passes in and out of its frame."<sup>32</sup>

The elegance of Trier's film derives less from any obvious fashion sense or contrived aesthetic design than from the simple tracking of Danielson Lie's nonchalant movements through the city and his ability to capture the character's existential implosion through subtle physical expression. The dandy-rock style of *Reprise* morphs into a more neutral, monochromatic nonfashion: Anders's black leather bomber jacket is worn throughout to emphasize his ordinariness as much as his sexiness. Trier avoids the social realism prototype of the drug addict, instead focusing on Anders's concerted effort to overcome his addiction, to hang on to life.

The fleeting shot of him clinging on to a girl on the back of a bicycle as he is whisked away is intensely moving because it provides a striking contrast with the film's extended sequence depicting Anders' alienation through sensory perception. Seated in a glass-lined café, he observes the surrounding customers whose snatches of conversation become increasingly intrusive, disjointed and disorientating, allowing Trier to transpose into visual terms "the ways in which we perceive being alive."<sup>33</sup> This ontological sequence illustrates the character's psychological fracture through perception, through vocal inflection, and through extreme close-ups of Anders's drawn face, paying attention to his nose, mouth, and ears, rather than through the standard tropes of social realism more often used to stage an addict's decline through dramatic exaggeration.

This delicate attention to perception situates Trier under the influence of Varda, whose own more fluid sequence filmed at *Le Dôme* café followed Corinne Marchand as *Cléo* drifting in and out of conversations, cruising the outdoor

tables, gracefully circling the bar inside. Varda's continuous long take allows for the fluidity of movement to be maintained, unlike Trier's more truncated series of static shots of spatial perception. The modern Nordic design aesthetic, with its transparent surfaces and geometric shapes, its wood and glass, its simplicity and structure, stands in stark contrast to the animation, the promiscuity, and the bustle of the Parisian public space of the early 1960s.

### Ode to a Dying Hipster

Trier's ironic tribute to Pierre Drieu la Rochelle's original novel from 1931 and Louis Malle's screen adaptation from 1963 (an "ode to a dying hipster," as he calls it<sup>34</sup>) masks his sincere admiration for both source texts, which drew on the life story of the decadent Dadaist poet Jacques Rigaut, who shot himself in Paris in 1929. Man Ray memorably filmed the impeccably dressed dandy for his short "ciné-poem" *Emak-Bakia (Leave Me Alone)* in 1926, making use of his sharp sense of style by filming his starched shirt collars through revolving, deforming mirrors. He later remembered Rigaut in his autobiographical *Self-Portrait* as "the handsomest, the best dressed of the group—my idea of a French dandy."<sup>35</sup>

Malle's own interest in Drieu la Rochelle's fictional account of Rigaut was inspired by the feeling of passivity following the suicide of a friend. He channelled this personal trauma into Maurice Ronet's visceral portrayal of the recovering alcoholic Alain Leroy, whose demise is charted through a film that Malle described as austere and antidecorative.<sup>36</sup> The haunting piano refrain taken from Erik Satie's ambient *Gymnopédies* (1888) accompanies the slow pace and somber tone, heightened only by the pointed emphasis on appearance. Malle provided Ronet with articles of clothing from his own wardrobe of formal suits, glasses, ties, sweaters, and even the pistol used to stage the fatal climax. While *The Fire Within* is an intense character study of existential angst, it also includes polished black and white photography of the left-bank café society, documenting the scene at St. Germain-des-Prés, a concentration of Parisian intellectual styles of the period.

Following Drieu la Rochelle's preoccupation with artistic creativity and wasted talent, Malle pictured his protagonist, Alain Leroy, as a drifter who was politically apathetic (the film references the extremist French paramilitary organisation OAS formed to prevent Algerian independence) and unlucky in love (as in the novel, he has left his American lover Dorothy and returned from New York). Underlying Alain's inability to become a responsible adult is a nagging anxiety about being ordinary, his life perceived as a form of gilded mediocrity by his middle-class academic friend Dubourg. Trier's contemporary version includes touches of humor as Thomas (Hans Olav Brenner), a Proust scholar, exposes the reassuring banality of his petit bourgeois lifestyle, a safety net that Anders discards in his self-imposed failure to find employment as a journalist



in Trier's film. Malle's vision of artistic creativity as a palliative to life's hardships in *The Fire Within* echoed an earlier film by Eric Rohmer, *The Sign of Leo* (1959), which traced the fortunes of Pierre Wesselrin, an unaccomplished American musician in Paris whose bohemian good life is upturned when he is disinherited. The middle section of the film charts his physical decline from stylish artist to drunken bum across the Parisian public stage, a section of the film without dialogue apart from ironic snatches of overheard conversations that compound his alienation. Rohmer's pointed questioning of Wesselrin's wasted potential as an artist and musician is manifested through his outward appearance: his physical disintegration is presented as a symptom of his moral putrefaction.<sup>37</sup>

This focus on the male body as more than a site for superficial investment in appearance, as an index of prevailing moral and social values, points to a critical understanding of masculinity and style in conjunction with space and topography, underlining the basic centrality of corporeal display to filmic mise-en-scène.<sup>38</sup> From a theoretical perspective, Foucault's radio broadcasts from the mid-1960s articulated the productive tensions between space and the body, anticipating the philosopher's later reconfiguration of both from the vantage point of sexuality, bio-power, and the technologies of the self.<sup>39</sup> There has been a substantial critical relaying of Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" (spaces containing multiple layers of meaning, functioning in nonhegemonic ways) in cultural geography and architectural theory.<sup>40</sup>

Although the spatial turn has impacted analysis of film art of the 1960s, the dialogue between Foucault's early writing on the body and the contextual culture of the period has not received the same attention. In "The Utopian Body," Foucault situated the body's mirror image at the centre of heterotopia. The body is perceived as the ultimate place of confinement, the utopian image of which is expressed through attempts at cosmetic disguise and modification such as masks, makeup, and tattoos. The mirror image and the corpse are figured as the only mechanisms by which the body can escape pure utopia.<sup>41</sup>

Malle operates in a similar thematic territory in *The Fire Within* (with the ghostly transience of its original title, *Le Feu follet*, meaning "Will o' the wisp") particularly in his filming of Maurice Ronet, encasing the suicidal man (originally described in the novel as a naïve, splenetic dandy in the Baudelairean vein) within a disturbing artificial interior and a larger canvas of sex, decadence, and death.<sup>42</sup> There is an insistent focus throughout on the maudlin array of esoteric objects in Alain's room, an emphasis on his fading beauty and on the elaborate display of his accessories and suits, one of which falls from its hanger like a collapsing ghost of a man. Jeanne Moreau's striking cameo as Eva begins with the foreboding line "You look like a corpse," and Alain later comments to Dubourg that it was only when making love to women that he felt he had some hold on life.





Figs. 11.7, 11.8, 11.9, and 11.10 Queerness and disavowal: despite his fading looks, Alain (Maurice Ronet) still receives attention from other men (*The Fire Within / Le Feu Follet* (Louis Malle, 1963).

In short, Alain is out of place and out of time, anachronistic in the context of the emerging youth culture of the decade.

This idea of bodies being out of joint occurs elsewhere in Malle's cinema. Discussing Malle's earlier *Elevator to the Gallows*, with its prototypical rebellious teenage boy whose fierce leather jacket (the iconic symbol of 1950s anticonformism) is ridiculed in passing, Betz comments that it is a "film largely about modern



Figs. 11.9, and 11.10 *Continued*

time and the way it entraps characters who are either past their time (Tavernier, the ex-soldier) or before it (the teenagers), in either case never fully of it."<sup>43</sup> While Dubourg's daughter in *The Fire Within* is a fan of 1960s pop singer Sylvie Vartan, Alain is out of step with cultural change. Maurice Ronet's body is shown to move awkwardly and to age visibly through the course of the film.<sup>44</sup>

This coincidence of male beauty and aging also indicates the disavowed homonarcissism lurking in both the original novel and Malle's film adaptation. It is also suggestive of the type of same-sex look now more readily associated

with fashion and advertising imagery. The novel contains recondite passages describing a peculiar aversion to the female form, an expressive over investment in antique objects, and a pronounced disgust at male homosexuals. An allusive sequence in the film in which Alain exchanges glances with an attractive young man in the cloakroom of a café captures this sexual ambiguity through the use of a mirror to frame their communion. The handsome homosexual scrutinizes the fading Alain with an ambiguous blend of curiosity, desire, and disgust. Alain's solitude and distance from other men is said to be linked to his absence of goals, the dandy's aimless cruising of the city suggestive of not only the history of gay male occupation of urban space but also of a queer rejection of the normative regulation of time, with its coherent categories of adulthood and youth and its linear narratives of progress and accomplishment.<sup>45</sup>

Like Malle's *The Fire Within*, Trier's films *Reprise* and *Oslo August 31st* subtly interrogate the form, shape, and feel of masculinity by charting the movement of the male body through urban space, suggestive of how masculinity can be articulated through cinematic mood and tonal design as much as through costume or style. Trier's cinema gestures to ways of remembering not just the superficial aesthetic codes of 1960s European art cinema but also its affective sensibility without recourse to the more obvious excesses of pastiche reproduction. His films instead reinterpret the allure of the urban loner, the disaffected single man. They also echo Christophe Honoré's layering of cinematic memory (as opposed to mere visual quotation) as a means of capturing the more complex coincidence of tonal influence and creative design. This approach to evoking the 1960s moves critical debate of film, fashion, and costume beyond a one-dimensional vintage aesthetic and toward a more complex handling and understanding of heritage, masculinity, and style in contemporary European cinema.

NICK REES-ROBERTS is Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle--Paris III, France. He is the author of *French Queer Cinema*, and coeditor of *Alain Delon: Style, Stardom and Masculinity*.

## Notes

1. Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addictions to its Own Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).

2. Bruno Remaury, "Rituel de mode et objet de consommation," in *La Mode des sixties: L'entrée dans la modernité*, ed. Dominique Veillon and Michele Ruffat (Paris: Les Editions Autrement, 2007), 155–62, at 159.

3. Pamela Church Gibson, "Film Costume," in *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34–40, at 35.