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« Kurzfilme, kurze Filme, kurzgeschlossene Filme. Eine Einführung. »

# ***The Powerful Queer Space***

**Naïla Guiguet's Short Film *Dustin***

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## A Reflection & Personal Statement

Before diving into the article, I want to make a reflective statement. I find it necessary for any type of scientific and academic paper that discusses any type of issue, and in regards to this article, especially about the trans community, to self-reflect and put oneself as a researcher in perspective.

I approach topics concerning transgender individuals through the lenses of feminist, queer, and trans theories. However, I am always aware of the implicit limitations in constructing my discourse due to being cis, white, gay, and Euro-centered. My situation of privilege within the scheme of relationships of power and oppression must be taken into account to understand how I structure the analysis objects. Even so, this reflection on the place I occupy allows readers to understand from which place I speak. Finally, like other researchers, such as Tortajada et al. (2021), this article is situated within the framework of transfeminism and tries to be useful for the well-being of trans people. I express this because I genuinely believe it is essential to discuss this topic.

My motivation to write this article is not only because I have to but because I genuinely believe that *Dustin* is a piece of art and holds an extraordinary message that must be heard and spread. The trans community is diverse, complex, and intersectional, coming from every region of the world, from every racial and ethnic background and from every faith community. This means that different members of the transgender community have different needs and priorities. Thus, this article and the discussed topic regarding *Dustin* are not a generalisation and cannot be seen as that. *Dustin* is still fiction, as well as Dustin as a character is simply created, and both represent only one possibility of an unlimited amount of transgender representations.

# 1. Introduction

“Being trans is seen as a stigma — you should be ashamed of being trans, you should be ashamed of being queer [...] We’re told constantly to just be quiet, to go live in the dark, to be secretive about who we are. And if we step forward, we’ll only be punished.”

(Montpelier 2019)

This quote about hostility and suppression against trans people by *Pose* (Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, Steven Canals, US 2018-21) producer Janet Mock, the first trans woman of colour to sign a multimillion-dollar deal with a significant content company, concisely summarises the issues LGBTQ+ individuals have to face daily. Within that, conversations about the rights and lives for/of trans people are far from over—which strikes a heavy chord of desire that needs to be heard, seen, and felt.

Indeed, we might live in a more diverse driven age of transgender representation.<sup>1</sup> Recent shows such as *Pose* or even *Queer as Folk* (Stephen Dunn, US 2022), *Orange is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, US 2013-19), and *Euphoria* (Sam Levinson, US 2019-present), and feature films like *Tangerine* (Sean Baker, US 2015) and *A Fantastic Woman [Una mujer fantástica]* (Sebastián Lelio, US 2017) have given the world nuanced, diverse transgender characters in stories that treat them with sensitivity and purpose, without falling back into sucked-dry, harmful stereotypes, such as the murderous, villainous, comedic, tragic, fashionable, or transgender personas as well as storylines with focuses only on misgendering, transition- or body-fixation (cf. Trota 2014). This tipping point is vital with the shows and movies mentioned above because it holds powerful potential for positive change. Furthermore, studies showed that it can be argued that an updated trans representation will generally influence how we view and treat transgender people in the future (cf. McLaren, Bryant & Brown 2021; Hughto et al. 2021). Assumable is that it respectfully nudges viewers’ perspectives positively because, ultimately, trans people are people with daily struggles and ordinariness and are individuals that deserve every right to be treated like anybody else and not as a spectacle to astonish or as a cinema of attraction.

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<sup>1</sup> This article defines representation as a) a fact or process "of standing for, or in the place of, a person, group, institution, etc., esp. with the right or authority to speak or act on behalf of these," b) a subject (person/group) or object "which stands for or denotes another [person, object, idea or meaning] symbolically," and c) as a depiction or portrayal "of a person or thing, typically one produced in an artistic medium" (representation, n.1).

Dustin Muchuvitz, trans woman and name-giving protagonist of the French short film (abbr. ShF) *Dustin* (FR 2020), said in an interview with *Variety* that “[i]n fiction, we often expose the subject in a one-sided way” (Trans.: J.R.: Rambal 2021). She goes even further and talks specifically about trans representation in film:

“We don't have trans actors playing trans roles, even though it's a difficult experience to portray. [Some] films treat the transgender question as estranged, something unusual, by systematically focusing on cases of prostitution or over-sexuality.”

(Trans.: J.R.; Rambal 2021)

This is unquestionable because the history of trans and gender non-conforming people on screen has been saturated by negative, dangerous, and dim-lit stereotypes (cf. Trota 2014; Reitz 2017). However, the ShF itself, with its discourse, has fewer tendencies to be dependent on a heteronormative, white, and cismale society since any ShF can run under the radar and act more socially critical (cf. Staiger 1985). Consequently, this type of freedom and independence has the potential to deconstruct negative representations of belittling and violating the trans community—eventually strips trans individuals of their agencies (cf. McLaren, Bryant & Brown 2021). Therefore, analysing the ShF regarding representation of transgender people seemed logical. Furthermore, one could argue that the ShF takes the chance of actively subverting the public's lack of understanding and acceptance of the transgender community by potentially deflating transphobia and discrimination by representing the ordinary.

Furthermore, especially in regards to transphobia and discrimination, it can be proposed that Naïla Guiguet's ShF *Dustin*, which is about a transgender woman and her queer friends during a night out clubbing, offers itself as a rich artifact about the representation of transgender. Thus, the article demonstrates how ShFs in general, and especially Naïla Guiguet's short film *Dustin* and its representation of a single transgender person's daily life can potentially promote the liberation and normalisation of transgender people by portraying non-stereotypical, non-othered and active trans women. Despite the alarming absence of contemporary academic research and analyses about advocacy, and scholars' theses against transphobia<sup>2</sup> and neurosexism<sup>3</sup>, this article adopts theories about the ShF and representation. Section one, *Theorising Queerness and Potentialising the Short Film*, will be devoted to the theories of ShFs and, eventually, connects ideas about

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<sup>2</sup> “Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against transgender people” (cf. “Transphobia”)

<sup>3</sup> “The assumption that behavioral differences between males and females stem from variations in brain development rather than from socialization” (Casada & Petzel 2017)

representation in the ShF. Subsequently, section two, *The Power of Dustin: Analysis of an Ordinary Representation*, will use the established theory from section one and analyse *Dustin's* parameters. For example its narrative and visuality, that sensitises people by depicting the inner life and universal feelings of a (yet, fictitious) transgender individual, as well as how the dialogue addresses daily struggles subtly and politely to educate the audience without pointing any fingers.<sup>4</sup> This is all rounded off by a short conclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> This article use the methods by Bordwell & Thompson (Film Analysis), Richard Raskin (ShF Analysis), and Werner Faulstich (Sequence Protocol); although this research paper is an independent work, it also serves as a publication for Talking Shorts. However, this does not mean that this text departs from the usual formal rules of an academic seminar paper.

## 2. Theorising Queerness & Potentialising the Short Film

As mentioned, this section serves as a consortium of theoretical aspects collected within the seminar's lessons and explicitly researched for this article. This gathering of theories and ideas is vital because the ShF, especially *Dustin*, offers an intrinsically specific and unique potential that must be highlighted and viewed in connotation to other theories and ideas.

As Matthias Brütsch writes in his text *The Art of Reduction: Notes on the Dramaturgy of the Short Fiction Film*, “[one of many] reasons for not taking the short format seriously are of an economic nature” (2008, 2). Indeed, ShFs do not generate a capitalistic cash flow that enriches filmmakers materialistically and financially and may not have the dramatic foundation to call for much attention. Furthermore, as Brütsch also mentions, the characteristics of ShF, such as shortness, reduction, and simplicity, are often seen as “a handicap precluding certain effects a ‘real’ film is supposed to have” (ibid., 2). However, he argues that these misconceptions and minimalistic characteristics should be viewed “not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity” (ibid., 2), and there are three clues that this article is going to explore to second that statement.

### 2.1. We Are Here, Queer—and Short

A first indication that ShF can even offer trans individuals a platform to give society a glimpse into their experiences and daily lives can be found in theories and perspectives about the form and aesthetics of ShFs. Arguably, it is a space for minorities and socially critical themes because it is placed at the periphery of the film industry as a whole—as Brütsch wrote—and also because it is a minority itself and, thus, even queer.<sup>5</sup>

The book *Discovering Short Films: The History and Style of Live-Action Fiction Shorts* from 2015 by Cynthia Felando is one of the few very thoroughly constructed texts defining the ShF's features. Her chapter about the specificities can offer first answers. According to her, “Unity,” “Characterisation,” and “Endings” are the most significant features that represent shorts. With the help of contemporary film historian Kristin Thompson and 19th-century goth horror author Edgar Allan Poe, she defines that form, format, length and narrative of the ShF are compact not simply because the format is

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<sup>5</sup> This article sees queer as intersectional.

short<sup>6</sup> but because it is “an important model of unified storytelling” (Felando 2015, 47). Moreover, it “focuses on a single event, character, situation, or moment with no subplots [which] enable[s] narrative intensity [and] ‘making short things alive’” (ibid., 47-8). These hyper-focus, cut-to-the-chase characteristics of a ShF’s format lead to “unity of effect” (ibid., 48), extracting only the essence and purposely isolating a specific idea that is told.

The decisive act of a creator’s mind<sup>7</sup> and the isolated POV of a person eventually integrate any real-life social and historic referentiality.<sup>8</sup> Due to this characteristic, protagonists of ShF narratives tend to have an “elusiveness” and “ambiguity” to them, and since there is no time for character development, compared to *feature films*, they are usually constructed quite broadly (cf. ibid., 52-3). Therefore, ShF characters may depend on intertextual components, such as references to other films, music, or art, which supports the idea of adapting outer-filmic social and historical structures to tell any short story. Intertextuality linked to cross-medial connotations is arguably needed to build a connection to the viewer in such a reduced time.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it explains why protagonists of ShFs tend to be less “heroic” and more “isolated,” “marginalised,” and “lonely” (cf. ibid., 53-4). Eventually, making them the perfect soil for catharsis and instrumentalisation to mirror specific (outer-filmic) societal issues. Therefore, they can always be read as metaphors or stand-ins for, e.g., minorities and social inequalities.

Having said that, Felando’s explanation reads itself as sort of an educating feature of ShFs in that she writes, “one may sympathise with such an isolated, lonely protagonist, [but] one is not encouraged to identify with [them] as with a more active, decisive, and successful character.” Understanding that sympathy results in making viewer and character more “agreeable to each other” or creating a “community of feeling” (sympathy, n.), and thus, assist what characters feel and what stories and narrative want to tell, of which intertextuality and broadness are robust aiding features of the ShF. It helps to educate and transmit a critique or statement to the audience without pointing fingers.

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<sup>6</sup> The distinction for “short” in terms of duration is always difficult in ShF studies. However, since *Dustin* is max. 20min long. This article considers everything under 20min as short, even if strictly seen that would make it a “novellefilm” (2014, 29), as Raskin defines in his text. But since it is at the border of being a “real” short film, the text argues anyway that *Dustin* is non-confirmative—so, it fits.

<sup>7</sup> Meaning any artistic hand that had something to do with the film, e.g., producer, director and/or writer.

<sup>8</sup> One might add that it is still the POV of the writer, not the film. Therefore, it is always a subjectified (outer-filmic) POV, one that is always constructed.

<sup>9</sup> This article defines “intertextuality,” as a “text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other text” (“intertextuality, n.”). Text is here understood beyond the usual literary connotation. It also includes across other medias, such as film, music, art, etc.



If a ShF ends with a 'shock,' it might add another deepening layer because the unexpected may unify the whole short and its narrative as well as deepen the educational feature. After all, it is practically highlighted that a narrated story must be both "unexpected and sharp" (Felando 2015, 59). Even long-deceased luminary Sergej Eisenstein appealed to withholding important story information to viewers to 'shock' them and to strengthen the story's meaning and message (cf. *ibid.*, 49). Likewise, Felando spotted two types of endings in her analyses: the "surprise" and "twist." Although both offer something unexpected, the "surprise," on the one hand, involves something that has not happened yet and offers unexpectedness to characters *and* viewers (cf. *ibid.*, 58). On the other hand, the "twist" reveals some knowledge that has been withheld from the viewer and, therefore, changes possible expectations of the outcome (cf. *ibid.*, 58). The unexpected and delayed revelation of story-knowledge to the viewer by withholding knowledge that could have been made available earlier is also called a "suppressed gap" (cf. *ibid.*, 59). Coined by Bordwell, it means only when the suppressed is revealed does the viewer become aware that the omitted information is necessary to fully understand the story, which encourages re-evaluating the narrative's development even after the film has ended (cf. *ibid.*, 59). Brütsch adds to the viewer's psychological aftermath that while *feature films* need "to make sure that in the end all questions raised are adequately answered," the ShF may "leave issues open, in suspense, undecided" (2008, 7). Moreover, since characters are usually constructed broadly, the ending achieves an intriguing ambiguity of (critical) messages due to this suppression (gap), leading to openness yet unifying the short in general. However, an open (at times) unsatisfying ending without answers leaves the viewer in 'shock', forcing them to self-reflect and think beyond the filmic message. Additionally, this strengthens the claim that the ShF is a space of/for minorities and socially critical themes because it places format, narrative, and character at the periphery. The interplay of suppression and revealing information creates an educational interaction with(in) itself, its characters, and the viewer. Lastly, the ShF is luckily damned as a peripheral space, but nevertheless a space for the abandoned and socially ostracised, the visible and ignored unseen.

Furthermore, to zoom out of the detailed aesthetics such as narrative and form, Johannes Binotto offers in his German text *Instabile Verbindungen: zur Explosivität kurz(geschlossen)er Filme* a different approach to shift perspectives regarding 'shock'. Namely, to a more electrical term: 'short-circuited' or 'short-fused' (in German "kurzgeschlossen"). He argues that the ShF's format causes 'short-circuits,' meaning

collapses, breakdowns, disintegration and disassembles established codes. Therefore, the ShF with its format (narrative included) contains inconsistencies that do not agree with others (ideologies or media formats) (Binotto 2016). Because of this, the ShF, its format, and narrative could be described as a “heterotopia of film” (trans.: J.R.; *ibid.*, 3), but as a space where linear time, and any comfortable code, such as hegemonic ideologies,<sup>10</sup> cinematic language, perception, and application, are suddenly blasted wide open. This lets outer-filmic and inner-filmic reality collapse, triggering (social) trauma (cf. *ibid.*, 6), as Binotto calls it, that eventually does not only manifest itself in the form of specific images but instead consists of the unstable connection of the format (narrative) itself and everyone/-thing that it reaches. This is further supported by the comparison of experimental filmmaker and avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren. Namely, she argues that “[ShFs] are short because it is difficult to maintain such an intensity for a long period,” which emphasises Binotto's results in an explosion due to the ‘short-fuse’. She further explains that “[ShFs] are comparable to lyric poems, and they are completely a vertical [...] construct” (Deren 1953), as if the ShF interrupts any form of normality, dailiness or ordinariness by a simply short-circuiting or -fusing.

Taken one step further, this article argues that the ShF is not vertical but tilted. Just a bit so that it becomes diagonal. Suddenly, it not only opens up additional dimensional spacing but also becomes uncannily queer (German: *quer*). Concluding that, in regards to features, form, and aesthetics, these pieces of theory about how the ShF defines itself as a medial form not only open up a peripheral space but also a queer space—one for the non-normative, abandoned, and socially ostracised as well as the invisible, ignored, and unseen—letting the ShF shine in a new light. Moreover, this existential characteristic offers a potential that the *feature film* primarily cannot meet due to the fact of its length and structuralist history of narratives. David Bordwell notes that “classical Hollywood’s feature-length films usually have two storylines, one of which involves heterosexual romance”. Therefore, ShF is a spectral space for all queerness, characters of minorities, and cultural- and social-critical saturated themes because it is set apart from the normative, hegemonic film industry as a whole and, thus, is a minority itself and fundamentally queer.

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<sup>10</sup> For clarification, hegemony is “the willing submission to governing rules of behaviors within a dominant group, whereby resistance to dominant norms is punished through group reprimands” (Mocarski et al. 2019).

## 2.2. Once You Go Political, You Always Go Short

After theorising the ShF as a metaphorical peripheral space for queerness and the marginalised, a second indication might clarify further indications as to why the ShF offers a potential platform to positively influence society, especially regarding the liberalisation<sup>11</sup> of trans individuals, normalising representation and their daily lives. Simply establishing the ShF as queer is not enough a connotation to its political influence. Certain philosophical theories and perspectives regarding aesthetics, practice, and canon can explain the perpetual, invisible bond to the politics wrapped around ShF.

First, it is crucial to understand that “politics” are understood as “activities involved in getting and using power [and] being able to influence decisions that affect [...] society” (“politics, n.”). However, philosopher Jacques Rancière thinks about politics on a more abstract level. As he writes in his book *The Politics of Aesthetics*, the political base is “[t]he distribution of the sensible [which] reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community” (Rancière 2013, 8). This part of visual politics includes the misconception that a (false) sense of democracy regulates equally and evenly distributes the sense of perception, thought, and action. Although this is sometimes more connotated with the power of the mainstream film industry versus the ShF industry (cf. Staiger 1985), e.g., festivals and cinemas, they are feasible factors. However, this article does not focus on that, but rather shifts to the political power of aesthetics in representation, cinematography, and visuality that the ShF owns and, later on, *Dustin* will show as a representative example.

Debatably, aesthetics does not mean the same as the previous chapter (format, narrative) established, which might be confusing. However, it is the political act, the political visuality, meaning what is distributed cinematography (eventually on screen) and its associated decision of the creator that “[define] what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common [here: film] language, etc.” (Rancière 2013, 8). This idea of aesthetics is understood as that, despite a momentary imbalance of social equality, the ShF is a political format, or in this article's case, a queer space that fundamentally possesses and negotiates social, cultural, and historical structures. The politics of that (queer) space “[...] revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who can see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities

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<sup>11</sup> Here: the action “[t]o free someone (usually women, and here transgender people) from restrictive[,] discriminatory social conventions” (“liberate, v.”).

of time” (ibid., 8), making representation a truly pivotal part in this whole theoretical complex.

Coupled with Binotto’s idea of the short-circuit feature, the ShF’s “politics of aesthetic” automatically blows up any normative linearity and hegemonic prison. A “politics of aesthetic” does not only effect the ShF within a de-hierarchized canon but also every marginalized character on screen, whereby the aesthetics (cinematography) negotiate topics of any political connotation, such as topics of representation or post-gender. In contrast, the short-circuit resembles the psychotic breakdown, and thus, will always be in a state of dislocation, or as mentioned before, (social) trauma and 'shock' that is constantly mediated to viewers (trans.: J.R.; cf. Binotto 2016).

Furthermore, Rancière’s idea of “artistic practice” is why it is essential to separate cinematography and visibility from format and narrative. It is because the artistic hand and technical decisions, such as camera, lighting and so forth, creates an occupied space that disrupts “ways of doing and making” and intervenes in the “distribution of the sensible,” such as norms (or stereotypes) of any kind. In addition, this means that any connotation they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility is equally disrupted. This disruption is possible because they are automatically engrained with political statements and social commentaries. To quote Benoît Turquety, “[t]echnical decisions are systematically related to an economic, political, or environmental context, as well as to formal characteristics” (2019, 31).

ShF is, therefore, prepositioned to act politically. Moreover, it is why ShF has this incredible potential to re-evaluate stereotypes and social topics and experiment with narrative and cinematography. It is not only due to its trauma-infused short-fusing existence (Binotto), but also due to its specific “politics of aesthetic” that inequality and misrepresentation can be overcome. Thus, is it even possible to argue that ShF can disrupt, affect, exchange and change ideologies politically because it constantly interacts with whatever and whoever is around and in contact with it. ShF is mostly endlessly inventive and a historically contingent document of a certain Zeitgeist.

### **2.3. Short Spaces of Transgender Representation, Normalisation & Liberation**

Lastly, it is important to spread awareness about how hegemony has a forceful influence on every part of the above-described dynamics around ShFs. Zooming out of that focus, these dominant norms impact everyone, especially transgender individuals, on

multiple levels, such as communal, private, and social levels. Re-evaluating representation is important because participating in those structures happens mainly passively and unconsciously, as the insidious nature of hegemonic ordering infuses all systems (cf. Mocarski 2019, 419). Therefore, it is often invisible, ignored, and inescapable all at the same time (cf. *ibid.*). Moreover, this inescapability can manifest in positive and negative norms (cf. *ibid.*, 429). In particular, the current hegemonic ordering of gender binaries does not allow space for transgender people. This results in them having to adapt to the system by, among other things, changing their appearance because the social norm says that it must be (often violently) corrected, and either are made to disappear from all visibility or are used for attraction or amusement (cf. *ibid.*, 423). This issue mainly affects transgender representation in media, where fictitious figures are not shown as subjects to identify, mainly since they are shown in false, stereotypical ways (cf. *ibid.*, 428).

However, the ShF, with its short-fused, queer features, can offer access to a cathartic experience through tight conclusions, such as Felando's idea of "Unity," "Characterisation," "Ending," and Binotto's *Kurzschluss*, Deren's vertical poetry as well as Rancière's "politic of aesthetics". Within this, transnormative<sup>12</sup> perspectives introduce a new cinematic dialect of narrative and cinematography that *Dustin* has due to its active fictional transgender representation. It is crucial to critically use the queer space, liberalising transgender individuals from representation in popular culture and highlighting the adverse effects of normative constructions of the transgender experience.

The seemingly never-ending battle of binaries explains this negative effect of a narrow view (cf. *ibid.*). Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* describes the necessary need to decouple sex, gender, and sexuality (cf. Butler 1990). In her exploration of the hegemonic ordering (of gender), she revealed that society has to fundamentally deconstruct institutional norms to end this false indoctrinated norm of binaries of gender, sex, and sexuality (cf. *ibid.*). Sadly, hegemonic orderings ensure that "non-normative portrayals are attached in a dominant vector of [heteronormative] power" (*ibid.*, 419). It therefore seems logical that there is this constant repetition of misrepresentation of transgender people in *feature films*.

ShFs, however, as much as transgender identities, undermine that a(ny) norm—in this case, *feature films* and gender—is predetermined or "normal". Moreover, ShF and genders are social constructs and therefore fluid. It all comes back to the fruitful concept of

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<sup>12</sup> This article sees normative more in regards to "normalisation," and thus, "[t]he action or process of making [something or someone] normal or normalising" ("normalisation, n.").

Binotto's short-circuit and Deren's vertical poetry because even these theories set the ShF on a spectrum, increasing the inclusion and acceptance of transgender persons in media and other spaces. Within this lies the potential to deconstruct robust, hegemonic linearity. Therefore, ShF, as a non-conformal format, is fundamentally representative because it is broad, queer, and intersectional. With all of this, it is clear that the ShF holds the potential to liberate<sup>13</sup> and represent transgender people, that it will not be undercut by reliance on other hegemonic vectors of power, and that it will not deny or exclude other non-dominant representations.

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<sup>13</sup> Definition comparable to footnote no. 11.

### 3. The Power of *Dustin*: Analysis of an Ordinary Representation

The following chapter analyses *Dustin* and its cinematic parameters, such as form and narrative, cinematography, visuality, and dialogue. Additionally, it is essential to mention that the established theory might work for other ShFs, but the upcoming analysis only works for *Dustin*. It cannot be seen as a generalisation of transgender representation, since any ShF moves fluidly within the vast spectrum that ShF-making entails, which is also part of its beauty and supports the idea of it being absolutely and genuinely queer. As ShF-theorist Richard Raskin wrote, ShFs should be “non-formulaic [and] tailor-made” (2014, 34).

#### 3.1. *Transnation*: The Power of Form & Narrative

145bpm. Hard, deep, and digitally synthesised noise percussion fades in; black screens and horizontal rose-pink lettering follow. Subsequently, a swift sonic shift to a heavy, heart-pounding, and core-rattling tempo: pure techno music. Simultaneously, a hard cut to a noisy, green dim-lit space happens: a rave club. One bottle-drinking, dancing silhouette draws our attention: transgender woman Dustin.

Naïla Guiguet’s narrative—due to the short format and limited amount of minutes—loses no time and throws the audience with a Berlin-sound-ish<sup>14</sup> slam into Dustin’s world, without hesitation, as unapologetically and harshly as the music implicates. Within twenty minutes, the story follows Dustin and her boyfriend Felix, as well as her friends Raya and Juan through a usual night out clubbing. As the kaleidoscopic *strobo pop* drags the night on and eventually rises into truth-facing daylight, the collective pill-popping, drunken euphoria morphs into bittersweet melancholy, ordinary conflicts, confusing miscommunication, and harsh realities, and ultimately reveals the longing for pure tenderness and visibility in a post-gender world.

Indeed, *Dustin* follows the classical ShF narratology by creating a “unity of effect,” “isolated characterisation,” and an “open ending,” as introduced in chapter 2.1. The following shows how *Dustin*’s narrative has the power to subvert transgender stereotypes by using the “ordinary.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, *Dustin* unifies by creating a feeling of “ordinary” within the viewers and “ordinariness” towards the character. However, the narrative isolates and

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<sup>14</sup> A music genre that influenced LGBTQ and counterculture of 70s Berlin (Chou 2020).

<sup>15</sup> A feature the seminar developed.

represents Dustin's storyline inconclusively within a limited time. For example, the short's environment introduces her without revealing her name or that she is trans; it is a given. The ShF and its narrative have no interest in what she has been through except that specific extract of her life (story) as well as depicting it as "regular, or usual" ("ordinary, n."). The addition of "suppressed gaps," however, keeps the story from being distractingly uninteresting but rather universally exciting, such as the plot conflict about the reason behind Felix's sudden aversion. Another indication is that Dustin's persona is overall constructed as hard to read and somewhat gloomy, subtle, observing, and ambiguous. Yet, she is also bubbly, calm, soft, fun, caring, and innocent. This diversity of her personality traits broadens her character to such a paradoxical degree that due to the format, she becomes, on the one hand, a multidimensional unit and, on the other hand, a broad surface for any viewer's projection. Recipients do not need to identify with her; instead, the ShF evokes empathy and sympathy with her life, character, and temporary situation.

Consequently, the narrative's as well as Dustin's broadness and openness positively condition her as a "commonplace character" ("ordinariness, n."), without being received indifferently because everyone is able to connect to her feelings and situation. Moreover, without losing her in a two-dimensional dilemma, her individual representation evokes a sense of discrepant familiarity. Thus, it softly nudges viewers' ideologies to unconsciously self-reflect, open up, and re-evaluate anything they know about a transgender person's life due to misleading representations. This is attributable to the ShF's 'shock'-feature, and Guiguet's deconstructive handicraft to heteronormative structures, because the viewer sees more (ordinary) facets.

In fact, due to the narrative and format of ShFs, Dustin's story about her ordinary night-out indicates a shift in stereotypical narratives of transgender people because the story does not revolve around "trans facts," such as the usual queer "coming-out," or "transition story" (cf. Tortajada et al. 2021). Instead, the ShF presents a story about love, intimacy, friendship, and sex, urging for the construction of loving intimacy. Such universal topics—that are still perceived differently due to the POV of Dustin as a transgender individual—offer a stunningly educational effect on the viewers and normalize transgender individualistic experiences through such stories (cf. Masanet & Dhaenes 2019). Dustin herself subverts stereotypes because she is never introduced as "the trans woman" (cf. *ibid.*), which is defined by milestones or objectives of transitioning. Moreover, this does not mean that the short avoids the topic of transition altogether; it just does not focus on it exclusively. The result is that this ShF eventually escapes the (outer-filmic) social construct



of transnormative representation, such as the usual narratives on body transformations that must be followed and achieved.<sup>16</sup>

*Dustin's* subversive character is also linked throughout the story because various 'short-circuited' conflicts are implied and reignited over and over, but never fully discussed or resolved. *Dustin's* anti-climactic conflicts ('shock,' surprise, and twist) intensify the feeling of openness. Dustin and Felix's relationship, which is also the narrative's leading strand, is a great example. Their conflicts are gradual within the plot and are foreshadowed right in the beginning when Dustin asks Felix to come dancing, but he declines rather indifferently.<sup>17</sup> Later in the story, she finds him outside, making out intensively with another man (surprise).<sup>18</sup> Instead of confronting him, she does not talk about it for the rest of the time. At this point, the narrative does not suggest any clue about their relationship status or label. The viewer does not know whether they are in a monogamous relationship. Frankly, the film does not care. Eventually, Dustin tells him that she saw him kissing another man, indicating that she is more hurt because of his constant lashing out at her and miscommunication instead of a typical (heteronormative) form of infidelity.

Nonetheless, a big bang never happens. Felix walks away from Dustin once again after her open and honest attempt at discussion. The story's twist exposes the underlying issues he has with her changing (or transitioning) and him being gay and thus only interested in masc-looking cismen. Obviously hurt, she seeks intimacy and physical affection with drug dealer Erwan. After an ambiguous<sup>19</sup> make-out session with him, she is emotionally confused, and her performance seems rather sad (fig. 9 & 10). Her character and actions, though, are thereby more central than anything else about her. Regardless of her feelings, she cares for Felix through a simple gesture: putting a blanket over him while he is asleep (fig. 11). This shows how the narrative progresses with Dustin even further by shifting away from a body-transitional-centric narrative as well as by imploding social constructs that are more common in heterosexual melodrama (of *feature films*) (cf. Felando 2015, 55). Moreover, in spite of leaving a character's development somewhat absent, *Dustin's* characterisation or narrative is never abandoned or lost within these structures but shows her agency.

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<sup>16</sup> Not saying that this is wrong—not at all. It is important to tell different stories about transitioning. However, since it has been a generalising, monopolising, and excluding topic, the issue lies within the fact that there are more facets to stories about trans individuals.

<sup>17</sup> 00:00:56-00:01:18.

<sup>18</sup> 00:03:28-00:03:41.

<sup>19</sup> It is unclear whether they had sex or not. However, it is strongly implied within the *Leerstelle* (ellipse).

Indeed, Guiguet's cinematic dialect never allows for any of the situations, or the characters, to implode and dissolve melodramatically. None of the character's decisions have long-lasting, serious consequences<sup>20</sup>, which is a more positive and healthy outcome for them. That is only possible due to deflating reactions and, generally, any possibility of a toxic (heteronormative) conflict. Finally, this supports the feeling of "ordinariness" and familiarity because *Dustin's* story leaves (toxic-)heteronormative ideas about love and relationship, as shown multiple times in Hollywood movies, and moves forward to a more relaxed and accessible figure. The ShF constructs a more (outer-filmic) realistic and complex character with Dustin. This also becomes clear when related to accurate (outer-filmic or real-life) personas, such as SOPHIE, a former transgender artist and musician who unfortunately met an early death due to suicide. Much like her very personal lyrical-I confesses in an unreleased hyper-pop-song *Transnation*, Dustin wants to "play in this world (Transnation) / Have fun in this world (Transnation) / But at the end of it all / [She] want[s] a simple life (It's prison) / Where the milk only comes on a clear day" (2021). Dustin's actions are essential to note because her relationship with her friends and her romance with Felix and Erwan break particular trans- and heteronormative structures. The characters's constellation constructs and portrays Dustin as "ordinary," "normal," likable, and complex, as well as giving her "recognition" by making her a subject of love, a human being who is appreciated and valued, and not only wanted for a fraction of attraction or fetishizing her body (cf. Vegas 2019).

Therefore, these indications show how *Dustin* expresses ordinariness and dailiness due to the film's format and narrative. Moreover, these two features pave the way for the story and its characters to move away from stereotypes, topics, and themes about transgender people, bodies, and transitioning. Receiving positive representation in the narrative, shown through Dustin's individuality in the context of her nonetheless everyday, ordinary life as a transgender individual, holds the ultimate power to deconstruct stereotypes because these types of characters are less othered and more relatable without exclusion by needing to identify with a character on the viewers side.

### 3.2. *It's Okay to Cry*: The Power of Cinematography & Visuality

Truly, *Dustin's* narrative already goes beyond the "trans phenomenon" because it is not limited to solely presenting Dustin's "coming out" or her "transition," but also explores other facets of her reality, therefore presenting a complex and multidimensional story. This

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<sup>20</sup> Which makes sense because there is literally no time.

complexity indicates that, as introduced in the theory section, the ShF offers marginalised people a space that, in addition, symbolises a social place attributed to the character through an (outer-filmic) system of intersectional oppressions (cf. Solomon & Kurtz-Costes 2018). Especially in fiction, trans people regularly move in peripheral places occupied by explicit intertextual categories of marginalisation (cf. Serano 2016), such as the rave club in an old warehouse serves as an intertextual reference to punk culture (cf. Chou 2020).

*Dustin*, though, goes beyond the narratological potential by placing its transgender protagonist outside of any tragic or body-fixated and mostly stereotypical visuality. The ShF plays with cinematographic alternations between a dark, marginal, yet, sensual, loose, and dream-like space (club) as well as a space of truth, reality, and awareness (apartment). This dualism creates Dustin's (fictional) reality (POV) and an "ordinariness" or normality to the character (and to the viewer). However, within these spaces, Dustin's peripheralisation and marginality are lifted unnoticeably. Guiguet's "politics of aesthetics," or chosen absence of any explicit visuality, highlights Dustin's central, positive, and unique representation as a transgender individual. Her spatial relations, far from having an exclusively physical component, contain a condensed visual meaning that saturates the screen, cinematography, and visuality (cf. Lefebvre 1991). This allows the viewer to analyse and understand (empathy/sympathy) the different subversive elements that Dustin exaggerates.

In good old ShF-fashion, *Dustin's* opening montage does not reveal any context of the story's setting. Hardly visible silhouettes in a vast, dim-lit room force viewers to look actively for something to recognize and entirely dip into the atmosphere of the rave club (Fig. 1). Meanwhile, the club is loud, crowded, and gloomy (Fig. 1-2). Now and then, greens, reds, blues, and all sorts of diegetic artificial lighting morph in, out, and into each other, creating a spectrum of new colours (Fig. 4). Eventually, the club stands in as a space that symbolically creates introspective fluidity and transformation due to lighting and colors. Additionally, it allegorically creates a paradox of acceptance, freedom, confusion, and uneasiness, especially since her conflict with Felix unravels within this space. Next to wooden pallets in the dark and shabby side of the room, she experiences his beginning withdrawal (fig. 5). Cooler, white tones and tricky lighting set the mood and foreshadow what Dustin's space is and reality will look like later on, such as in the apartment. Scenes like these contrast situations of comfort, familiarity, or tranquility versus a sense of mistrust, fear, or mistreatment. *Dustin* constantly reflects on her internal conflict and interpersonal relationships through the fusion of scenarios where the night (out) takes

place. The additional fast editing—perhaps due to the short format—and extra- and diegetic sounds, such as music and silence, activate the viewer to participate with the unknown, viewing it as Dustin's reality and, as a result, reversing stereotypes and representation. Additionally, in both spaces, Dustin does not experience any sort of fatal violence apart from physical harassment. However, with the latter, she consistently stands up for herself and even claps back if necessary. The characters generally hold no worrisome consequences, although the viewer is constantly on edge because of society's indoctrinated representation of transgender individuals and their constant experience of and exposure to violence (Korolczuk 2020).

Taking this thought one step further, the frame at one of the *coups de théâtre*, when Dustin sees him kissing another man (Fig. 7-8), is overburdened with people and the low, red lighting flattens as well retards to us what our character spots right away. Moreover, the “suppressed gap” subtly exposes Dustin's relation to Felix at this moment. On the left hand, the lighting is intensely pink, representing Dustin's sensuality and romantic love for Felix, and on the right hand, the lighting is white and harsher, where he is making out (fig. 7-8). This dualism subverts the illusionistic, dream-like space of the rave club and sobers Dustin and the audience back to reality—out of a heteronormative relationship to a more sensible representation, so to speak. Because interestingly enough, a heteronormative, melodramatic, and mainstream outburst fails to materialise. Dustin's expression withholds any sort of emotional clarity. Subsequently, she is contemplating about what has just happened as well as about her relationship to Felix with the exact same mimic, sitting by herself while rocking back and forth to the music and taking big gulps of beer (fig. 12). The lighting in this scene is cool and filled with a dirty green, catering to Dustin's need to numb her disordered thoughts of judgment and envy. However, the composition subverts spatial relations and representations with that lonely corner with cement walls, and Dustin's (non-[re])action offers an introspective psychology toward a desire for prosperity, hope, and an enhanced cognition about her situation and a sense of emotional balance.

In fact, after this pivotal moment, the club abandons its fantastical, dreamy aesthetic altogether and transforms itself into a de-hierarchised wasteland (fig. 13). Torched in bright lighting and signaling daylight, the ShF provides further access to Dustin's consciousness, perspective, and ordinary reality. This spatial relation becomes even more evident in the apartment of freshly befriended Lucie,<sup>21</sup> since this flat acts as an impartial sanctuary space where resilience, integrity, and agency reign. Being wrapped in calm natural tones, such

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<sup>21</sup> The scenes set in the apartment frame the second half of the ShF.

as cream and beige, and flooded by the soft, dusty, natural lighting from the outside, Dustin portrays herself still ordinarily observant but more openly conscious. In fact, compared to the rave club, it becomes a retreat from hyper-emotionality, confusion, and intoxication. The transition from the hectic, public club, where chaos and rebellion reign, via the literal transitional space of the street to the private space of the apartment, and thus the deepest level of intimacy, clarifies positions and subverts transgender representation. Dustin can finally a) mediate between herself and her environment, b) stand in for and take care of herself, and c) be cared for. Moreover, the very bland architecture of the apartment rooms refers to a kind of protection and privacy, simulating a blank silhouette of what could be full of impartiality, potential, and possibilities, as well as destabilized hegemonic structures.

This setting is usually not an option for a (fictional) trans character because it is common for trans characters to be represented (in fiction) as “objects” of fetishistic desire (cf. Vegas 2019). Therefore, their sexual and romantic relationships are usually linked to violence, morbidity, and exclusion (cf. *ibid.*). Obviously, though, trans characters are subjects who can feel and receive love and intimacy. Their representation in narratives has often been exclusively sexual (Serano, 2016). It is, therefore, usually a representation conditioned by a fetishistic and cis-male hetero gaze. However, Guiguet’s cinematic dialect (or “politic of aesthetics”) deconstructs this type of gaze with the help of positioning, moving, and establishing the camera pretty candidly. Indeed, the camera follows Dustin constantly, as if it was glued to her.

Moreover, despite the many close-ups, the gaze is never obsessed with her body. The distance of framing rarely breaks but rather enhances everyday perception, as we become “short-fused” (Binotto) and exposed to the sight of a face from such close proximity in moments of great closeness. Moreover, Guiguet’s dramatic cinematography of close-ups signals intimacy and emotionality between Dustin and her friends and between her and the audience. In addition, it reveals Dustin’s mental state because the viewer constantly transitions to her inner perspective, not forcing any identification but fostering the enlightening process of feeling empathy and sympathy. This is possible because close-ups tend to remove their subject from the spatio-temporal context of a film’s narrative and instead emphasise the micro-dramatics of human facial expressions (cf. Balázs 2001, 132).

Furthermore, the rich and intense color of Dustin's hair keeps the recipients focused and functions almost as a *Leitmotif* in most of the frames, which is another vital subverting characteristic of *Dustin*. While one should keep losing and winning visual contact with Dustin, it is due to her hair that one never loses sight of her. The ShF isolates the character by shifting the patriarchal gaze from the body to the hair, an impersonal object of a subject but a very personal object for a character that also functions as a sort of mysterious anchor without invading any personal space. In addition, Dustin is mainly not positioned face forward to the audience but with a clear view of her back and head, interweaving the POVs of Dustin and the audience. Exceptionally, however, in one of the more iconographic scenes Dustin is dancing face-frontal in the massive crowd (fig. 14). The frame is completely filled and any subject within it continuously disappears into the dark due to the lighting. However, the camera zooms in slowly while the crowd gets denser and denser, thicker and thicker. A sense of claustrophobia and unease builds up. Suddenly, one guy behind Dustin dances more and more aggressively. Tension rises more until one of the worst situations happens: physical harassment. Luckily though, Guiguet visually subverts the usually violent consequences in that nothing melodramatic happens. The camera does not even move in closer. Instead, Dustin yells at the guy and leaves.<sup>22</sup>

Another visible cinematographic and visual modus is the use of Dustin's silhouettes. As fig. 1, 4, 15 & 16 show, she is introduced and positioned mainly as a specter within the frames. By creating only a mere shadow or duplicate of Dustin, Guiguet evokes a sense of elusiveness. This filmic decision builds gravity around Dustin while elegantly making her the main focus in critical situations, like the moment within the crowd while dancing or any heated moment with Felix. At the same time, this cinematic dialect crystallises a visual portrait of a subverted transgender representation, resulting in heightened drama without being melodramatic but giving enough room to build tension and contemplate the transgender individual's feelings toward herself and the audience. In addition, firstly thought of as a misplacement, like a cut-out or someone who does not belong entirely, it eventually increases the powerful allusion to universality or unity within the viewer. The ambiguity of the deep and dark space of the silhouettes offers not only openness to projection but to unlimited versions of Dustin and, thus, of transgender representations. It fosters a more positive idea or representation of transgender individuals because it

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<sup>22</sup> Of course this is can also be read as rather sad because Dustin, not her aggressor, has to leave the space. However, Dustin's reaction is still active. She does not lose any sort of agency. It shows that within the club, as a seemingly open space, hegemonic and heteronormative structures still exist. It shows that trans women experience the same issues as other women, and that toxic masculinity and patriarchal ideologies are very much engrained in their lives.

romanticises or idealises without fetishising. Eventually, silhouettes as a form of fragmenting allude to Dustin's self-generating and -knowledge as well as auto-relation and -intertextuality. Therefore, Dustin becomes the subject of one's consciousness, meaning that as a member of the audience Dustin's consciousness intertwines with one's own consciousness, and eventually, (un-)consciously recalibrates one's internalised images or ideas and stereotypes of transgender individuals. The camera and, obviously, the composition automatically morph into one whole frank, honest and outspoken agent that keeps close, familiar, and informal in relation to the audience yet free from malice.

Consequently, Dustin's emotional dispositions and the tenor of her narrative concentrate on the visual and cinematographic ordinary or everyday. Guiguet's filmic dialect clarifies why Dustin is entirely unconcerned by "shock"-ing events or occasions, such as the make-out session or the moment of harassment. The filmmaker depicts her transgender protagonist in a manner that may be described as truthful in that she appears as a rounded, complex agent and, as the colours, camera, and lighting show, a frequently conflicted human being, far away from outdated toxic and hurtful representations. Thus, *Dustin's* cinematography and visuality carry the viewers into the reality of a more authentic idea of a human being. To use SOPHIE's words once more, its technique wants to reveal that "[t]here's a world inside [Dustin]" (). She, herself, wants us to "know what it feels like," she wants to "go there," maybe even "shine some light there / [...] / It won't be so hard / [...] / I want to know those parts of you" (SOPHIE 2021).

### **3.3. *Don't Need Anyone to Be Who I Want to Be: The Power of Dialogue & Desire***

Indeed, the ShF's cinematography and visuality interact contradictorily with the characters' experiences with their environments, as the characters' states of mind within the environments (club/apartment) oscillates between discomfort, comfort and esteem, revealing an invisible, intrapersonal state. Furthermore, in the second half of the short film, the group starts talking about issues of gender identities and transgender experiences. It is within this scene that Dustin explicitly and *finally* audibly expresses her desire for visibility and acceptance and additionally offers ideas of a post-gender world.

It is that one specific sequence that re-establishes Dustin's and Felix's relationship.<sup>23</sup> The zoomed-in camera follows Raya's gaze as she is turned to Felix and warily observes him closely. Meanwhile, he is aggressively flirting and non-consensually

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<sup>23</sup> 00:08:45-00:11:00.

touching Erwan. Raya's facial expression and movement (turning to Dustin) not only projects the audience's feeling for Dustin being mistreated, but also questions Felix's persona and motivations both cinematographically and choreographically because he purposely ignores Dustin's presence while harassing another human being.

However, Dustin silently observes how Erwan tells Felix repeatedly that he is "not into that" and to "take off [his] hand."<sup>24</sup> This misleading type of "suppressed gap" is important because Felix eventually turns out to negotiate heteronormative structures within the queer community allegorically.<sup>25</sup> However, even here, the ShF does not fall into melodramatic conflicts because Dustin's action is not once portrayed as a person conveyed by a puppy love. Moreover, the ShF's dialogue opens up to an ultimately unnerving question: "Are you chicks or guys?"<sup>26</sup> Rayas quick but annoyed response, "[o]h my god. Everything honey. We're queens[,] "<sup>27</sup> might seem somewhat settling but stays unheard because Felix, due to his internalised toxic masculinity, hijacks the conversation aggressively: "What's with the useless question?"<sup>28</sup> Clearly, it is a question not addressed to him (as a cis-man), but to Dustin and Raya. Ultimately, it is the forceful off-voice of Dustin that takes (back) charge of the conversation, "[i]t's good that he asked. He's right, actually."<sup>29</sup> It is a redeeming moment to Felix's internalised patriarchal mindset and miscommunication, mistreatment, and ignorance towards Dustin that only becomes clearer by his condescending question, "[y]ou complain about people asking, misgendering you, but now it's ok?"<sup>30</sup> Thereafter, Dustin acts with full agency, on the one hand, by correcting him right away, "[b]ecause it's usually insulting, but he's being nice[,] "<sup>31</sup> and on the other hand, by educating him (as well as the audience) that Erwan is actually "asking to talk right to [them]."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, it explains Dustin's passive behaviour as misinterpreted and active because her not-reacting equals a discipline and self-assurance that was not translated through the camera but, due to dialogue, becomes emancipatory and representative. The script's indication of her justification signals that she always had agency and that her most potent power lies in her observation. That is also why her words hold even more power

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<sup>24</sup> 00:09:21-00:09:26.

<sup>25</sup> Such as toxic masculinity.

<sup>26</sup> 00:09:46.

<sup>27</sup> 00:09:50.

<sup>28</sup> 00:09:53; his motives behind his behavior leave the audience wondering whether he really wants to stand up for his transgender friends or simply to get back at Erwan for declining sexual attempts.

<sup>29</sup> 00:10:07.

<sup>30</sup> 00:10:15.

<sup>31</sup> 00:10:20.

<sup>32</sup> 00:10:24.



when she decides to speak. Additionally, it educationally links to the audience and every film experience because one observes while watching films, whether active or passive.

Furthermore, the following dialogue excerpt explains straight-up, concisely, and clearly, without misunderstanding, that “it’s a good day when everyone calls [Dustin] Miss.”<sup>33</sup> The importance of “good day” and “Miss” is vital to a daily feeling/sense of being seen and being validated as a human being (in society). A desire everybody has: Everybody wants to feel acknowledged and accepted for who they are. Moreover, it shows that in the most simplistic and most ordinary, everyday action, such as a greeting, lies pure emancipation. As a consequence, Lucie, as a norm-conforming person, reveals a critical but very real moment when she romanticizes Dustin’s raw and real statement: “That was so beautiful. You should write it.”<sup>34</sup> For this reason, Raya laughs rather jadedly about it and calls her “cute”<sup>35</sup> because she does not grasp the fundamental social issue of it. The dialogue strategically summarises what transgender individuals (in fiction) have always been, namely two-dimensional vehicles or plot devices, rarely self-sufficient protagonists or agents.<sup>36</sup> Dustin, however, subverts this by her statements and she becomes an autonomous agent. This becomes even more evident visually when shortly after this dialogue, the camera’s focus—and thus, Dustin’s POV—is on Felix while the kitchen cabinet covers and therefore conceals Raya.<sup>37</sup> Dustin’s eavesdropping on the conversation between Raya and Felix finally clarifies interpersonal feelings of drifting apart and resentment towards her and them as a couple. The dialogue signals an intersectional issue when he says, “Dustin is changing so much. I’m gay, you know.” The ShF explains a substantial issue that goes beyond the heteronormative matrix, even within the LGBTQ+ community: there still exists hegemonic refusal of a post-gender world. Her being denied by Felix is also why she finds validation physically for who she is in Erwan,<sup>38</sup> but even there, she is refused afterward as a transgender individual, “It’s tough. [...] I really tripped. Cool. Thanks.”<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, the scene of silence and non-dialogue while Dustin covers Felix with a blanket speaks out an ambiguous reality because, on the one hand, the strong close-ups of Dustin’s sniffing and crying show the sad truth of her indifference.<sup>40</sup> Yet, on the other

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<sup>33</sup> 00:10:32.

<sup>34</sup> 00:10:46.

<sup>35</sup> 00:10:56.

<sup>36</sup> The article is aware that there are exceptions in recent years but it still is not enough.

<sup>37</sup> 00:13:05.

<sup>38</sup> 00:14:34-00:15:06.

<sup>39</sup> 00:15:32-00:15:37.

<sup>40</sup> 00:16:13-00:16:18.

hand, it shows the ordinary issue of unrequited love. Consequently, the short dialogue-less moment with the shop's cat adds a very soft moment of emotion.<sup>41</sup> Guiguet's dialogue, however, subverts the tragic tone and eventually liberates Dustin from a fatalistic world of gender binarity. When Dustin pays, she is too saddened to look up at the shop owner, and we recognise the invisibility forced on her due to what happened all night and morning long. However, within seconds and almost ordinarily overlooked, he calls her "Miss."<sup>42</sup> Dustin, as well as the audience, pause for a second. Due to a complete stranger's action in a simple, single world and within a retarding moment, Dustin becomes immediately seen, heard, welcomed, and accepted. Within this, the (filmic, fictional) world and the (outer-filmic, real) cosmos are seen as relational complexes in which embodiment and performance play a significant role, whereas concepts of conventional forms of cognition and knowledge are fundamentally questioned (cf. *ibid.*). This perspective ambiguously highlights Dustin's predicament as cultural and structural, as well as subvertings common representations and narratives about transgender individuals. It feeds the dialogue's desire for ordinary, vulnerability, and acceptance in a post-gender world.

Moreover, it makes it imaginable that four letters in a common conversation hold the potential to subvert negative hegemonic structures of gender constructs. When she walks assuredly and uplifted out of the shop, the camera follows her with a sense of strength and happiness without entering her private space.<sup>43</sup> We wait patiently for Dustin—as an agent—to come towards us, letting her decide what her next moves are going to be while walking against the crowd, and thus, the grain (fig. 17). Meanwhile, the camera's gaze still belongs to her since we do not lose sight of her. Moreover, it shows the ShFs pedagogical and emancipating potential because we can see her as the transgender individual and ordinary human being that she is. The ShF releases the audience into a hopeful and visible world filled with Dustin's happiness. Sooner or later, she does not need to find validation in hurtful romances to authenticate her identity because there will be movement at the end of the day (or morning). That is why the cinematography needs no music, just diegetic noises, and movement: it is pure reality. It is the final realisation that "[she] don't need / Don't need anyone to be who I want to be / I'm the only one / Now I'm not saying I don't want / What you're giving / But you couldn't give me that" (SOPHIE n.d.).

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<sup>41</sup> 00:16:19-00:16:27.

<sup>42</sup> 00:16:49.

<sup>43</sup> 00:16:53-00:17:33.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Naïla Guiguet's *Dustin* disclosed itself as an extremely appropriate subject to show how the depiction of the "Ordinary" and the representation of transgender individuals can shift ideologies positively. It even has the potential to become an appropriate and contemporary piece of art about transgender individuals because, as the following quote shows, both the director and lead actor were politically motivated to show and tell about the issues transgender people have to endure.

"[...] At the time, Dustin used to be assaulted, interrogated and criticized endlessly about their identity and their looks. What struck me was that the hostility didn't solely come from outside, and that Dustin themselves was struggling to live peacefully their non-binary gender identity, even within the LGBTQI community. It's at that moment that I realized how much trans people are ostracized, even where they are seemingly safe."

(Soesanto n.d.)

Ultimately, as the article demonstrated, ShFs in general, and *Dustin* with its narrative, cinematography, visuality, and dialogue of a single transgender person's daily life in particular, promotes the liberation and normalisation of transgender people by portraying a non-stereotypical, non-othered, and active trans woman. Moreover, by theorising and transforming the ShF as an intrinsic queer space, the article could make up for any absence of contemporary academic research and analyses about advocacy and scholars' theses against transphobia and neurosexism. However, there is an unlimited amount of possible scientific study topics, such as psychoanalytical or the topic of realism regarding the actors' names. Additionally, it would be interesting to look at the other characters more closely, such as Raya, whose friendship with Dustin seems like a promising subject to study, too.

Sadly, trans people are still instrumentalised to sensationalise stories and to pull in higher ratings so producers can make more money. Transphobic ideas are still enforced to viewers, who have no other knowledge of what it means to be transgender but from these outdated stereotypes. However, the ShF, as a queer space, takes on the responsibility to portray transgender characters honestly until the audience demands it of all audiovisual productions. Audiences are not responsible only for demanding that the media behave ethically. Audiences should also be held accountable for the knowledge they choose to take away from a show, movie, or news story. Therefore, ShFs are an excellent

opportunity for independent learning. Stereotypes and prejudices should not be acceptable when we see how they are reflected on us in the media. Fighting prejudice with knowledge is the first step in making the world more diverse and accepting of every group. Finally, as *Pose* producer and transgender individual Janet Mock said appropriately,

“You shatter stigma by empathically telling a story that enables people to understand those unlike them. And then you realize, through that unlikeness, you find the likeness.”

(Montpelier 2019)

## 5. Works Cited

### 5.1. Primary

Original Title:	<i>Dustin</i>
Length:	20min
Year of Production:	2020
Country of Production:	France
Actors:	Dustin Muchovitz, Felix Maritaud, Raya Martigny, Juan Corrales, Lucie Borleteau, and Erwan Fale
Director & Writer:	Naïla Guiguet
Cinematography:	Claire Mathon
Editing:	Nathan Jacquard and Vincent Tricon
Sound:	Jean-Charles Bastion, Antoine Martin, Victor Praud, and Hugo Rossi
Festivals:	AFI Fest, Blue Danube Film Festival, Cinema Jove - Valencia International Film Festival, Encounters International Film Festival, FEST New Directors/New Films Festival, Go Short International Short Film Festival Nijmegen, Jameson CineFest - Miskolc International Film Festival, Norwegian Short Film Festival, Palm Springs International ShortFest, San Sebastián International Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, Uppsala International Short Film Festival, Vila do Conde International Short Film Festival, Vilnius International Film Festival, Zagreb Film Festival

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### 5.3. Filmography

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*Orange is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, US 2013-19)

*Pose* (Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, Steven Canals, US 2018-21)

*Queer as Folk* (Stephen Dunn, US 2022)

*Tangerine* (Sean Baker, US 2015)

### 5.4. Discography

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