

PORES, SHORTS, FLASHBACKS. OGLE! QUARENTINE IN SCHIEDAM

Dear M

Thank you for your microwave recipe. I have not baked banana bread during this quarantine. I already spend much of my day planning, cooking, and cleaning after my meals, so I am not particularly enticed by a new kitchen endeavor. Cooking just for yourself takes out all the fun. I will try it for sure, just for the sake of sending you a picture of my charred baking attempt. Although, I am surprised how despite our differences, in these situations humans ended up doing all the same things. We are all cooking, working out from home, having endless video chats for work or school, and watching movies. It makes me wonder if we were always this boring or if the secret of fun was that we had others to talk about before. In the end, we are social animals.

Still, I must admit I have welcomed laziness again in my life. Being free to nap after lunch has increased my quality of life. My work out routine is the minimum needed to avoid my body's total rusting. After a dark January looking at brawny men for my thesis, I ended with a strong feeling of tiredness, not only from the writing but also from watching guys always exercising, producing. So you can only imagine how horrified I was when I first saw, months after, the #10pushupchallenge. If this lockdown becomes the perfect time for all of us to have the long-desired six-pack, take me out of it. As Jorge Wagensberg says "between doing it or not doing it, it is better to not do it", and the reason is simple: Why? ("La pereza intrínseca de la materia | Sociedad | EL PAÍS," 1995, p.1) Even though pec dancing as a new global human skill sounds interesting, I cannot see this time as a moment to prove our success under limited conditions. There is not a prize after this, and summer is canceled anyways.

However, if we follow the question of "why?", we risk stumbling down a ladder of darkness. If we look closely at culture, it is easy to think that nothing makes sense, which inevitably ends up in the belief that there is no real reason to do anything, which is not true either. One of the biggest struggles during these days has been to connect with my real interests again. Am I working because I need to feel I am doing something, that I am productive, or because I am interested in it? It is a grapple I usually find

inresearch. Luckily, I am a basic man with simple likes. So no, I have not learned a new cooking recipe or improved my Dutch. Instead, I have joined the global collective of teenage girls who individually gather to scream in front of their laptops while watching the latest episodes of the hottest Boy Love tv dramas from Thailand.

To be honest, I cannot trace a path of how everything started. I remember I watched some episodes of a series last December that were ridiculous enough to be worth watching, but the jump from one casual series to eleven series in a month was only possible due to corona. I do not know if you are familiar with the genre, but nevertheless let me describe it to you before I get into more details. Most of the stories are focused on a main couple of two guys that start hating each other, to later discover that the arguments between them were the result of love rather than hate. There are, also, other side couples that may or may not follow this pattern, and sometimes they are more entertaining than the main couple, which has a tendency to go around the same plots for many episodes. The straight representation, moreover, is almost non-existent, and when it does exist, it is depicted in such a boring manner that it is almost pitiful.

The genre is mostly located in the student scene, with a preference for the initial year of university. However, consider yourself lucky if you see them having classes because most of the action happens during extracurricular activities such as sports or music groups, cheerleading, tutoring lessons, side jobs, or beauty contests. This is a world of P's and Nongs. P's are older students who are more advanced in their education. Nongs are new and younger students who are beginning with their programs. Then, P's are positioned higher in the hierarchy in relation to the Nongs, which means they have rights over them. This is the perfect recipe for bullying, or "teasing" as they see it, which according to the laws of Boy Love dramas is the initial stage of romantic love. If I had only known when I was in school. This follows the idea, however, of the seme/uke relationships in yaoi manga, the original source of Boy Love (BL) stories' cosmovision.

Yaoi stands for yama nashi ochi nashi imi nashi, or: no climax, no punch line, no meaning, which makes clear where you are heading. Trust me, more than once I have shut down my laptop at midnight, asking myself into which black hole the last couple of hours have gone. The term had an initial derogatory sense, and since its origin in Japan around the 80s, it is a woven of parody, pornography, and appropriation of male characters living in a homoerotic world. Written and drawn by women for a mostly women audience, yaoi can be understood now as an umbrella term that gather all types of manga,

fiction, tv programs, movies or anime, made by amateurs and professionals, with homoerotic nuances (Prasannam, 2019), and where two guys need 6 episodes to have their first kiss.

So, going back to the seme/uke trope, this is something I still don't fully understand. Seme could be translated as a taller and more masculine top, Uke could be seen as a more delicate bottom. Yet, considering the lack of sex screened, it is clear those roles translate into the whole character life. Therefore, the Uke has an overall submissive attitude, cooking more, wiping the body of the drunk Seme, or even carrying him on his back, while the Seme is more a possessive "teaser". Then, forget about consent. The incredible thing about BL tv Thai dramas is their ability to go from 0 to 100 in seconds. They can make a whole slow-motion scene about the seme touching the uke's shoulder, to later present a 10 minutes rape scene with the same characters. Or, for instance, show the seme saying "do not talk to me" to the uke, who then decides to touch and talk aloud to the seme while he is sleeping, reaching new levels of creepiness in tv history.

Although you must be wondering why did I, someone who does not believe in romantic love, become addicted to the sexless stories of eternally hungry men, fully deprived of any trace of emotional intelligence, plagued by shameless product placement, awkward silences, kisses with no lip movement, cheesy songs, where the characters conveniently appear in scenes breaking all space-time rules, talk aloud to themselves, barely know how to walk in the rain without slipping, do not care about the amount of plastic they use, and more importantly, cannot communicate their most basic feelings or thoughts. Well, I am hooked on them exactly because of all that. If I like BL, it is because it is not realistic. Because I see it as a theoretical space where a homoerotic dictatorship has been proclaimed, and no matter what, everybody must develop feelings for someone of the same gender as soon as possible, if they want to escape the boredom of heterosexuality. BL is a place where desire runs unruly.

This is something I did also find reading homoerotic fanfiction, better known as slash. While reading slash last summer, it was not strange to find myself slowly moving my hand, jaw dropped, to cover my chest like a Victorian-era lady totally flabbergasted. Slash authors are wild enough to make any Treasure Island Media porn video look modest (Florêncio, 2018), and it is owing to their willingness to let desire dictate the way. Besides, if you consider that all character portraits in those stories are appropriated from famous tv series or books, it is simple to tell how malleable narratives are, or how easy it is to project on them your personal views. In other words, desire

is as collective as it is personal, and we learn how to channel our desire, but we learn what is desirable too.

Then, here comes the embarrassing part. When I watched my first BL Thai drama, I got a glance at the actors and said: “No, I am sorry. I cannot relate with these idiots, they can barely build a sentence, and I do not find the protagonist even handsome”. I kept watching it because the characters were “stupid”. During my second show, I was already talking to the screen. On my third, I was fully convinced Thai boys are the humans who better know how to wear shorts -I still am. On my fourth, I was listening on repeat to the latest song released by the protagonist of the show on Spotify. On the fifth, I was considering having a skin-care routine and drinking more water. Now, I do not only feel poorly dressed, with large-pored skin, but also unloved as well. Truth is, concerning BL Thai tv dramas, we are dealing with a different topic than the amateur yaoi or slash fanfiction. It is not an unruly desire, but romantically selling us products. It is how to use romance as an excuse to make us watch advertising.

You, better than anyone, know how much I disdain Xavier Dolan movies (“Film review: Laurence Anyways, another overwrought and kinda boring film from Xavier Dolan,” n.d.) because I regard them as perfumeras, or like a long perfume tv spot. Well, here I am, collecting myself after a couple’s break up scene surrounded by bottles of a soft drink with aloe jelly inside. Nevertheless, if there is something I have learned in these two last years, it is that I need to control my telenovela self. Hence, I cannot have an identity crisis every time something is not as I initially thought it was. At the end of my thesis (Iglesias Gonzalez, 2020) I came to the conclusion that art is complicit in the production of bodies that can be commodified, which to some extent challenges my role as a maker. Then, I thought the best approach would be to produce things that cannot be co-opted. Nevertheless, after my BL Thai drama odyssey, and seeing first-hand how the consumerism machine absorbed the wild yaoi to make us desire products, I do believe to escape co-option is not a solution. It is, mostly, impossible.

The question is, then, how can I use the machine in my favor? or

how can I navigate within the machine for my own benefit?

Maybe I am still going through my nihilistic phase, but in this time where people are asking for big changes, I am not quite positive that they are coming. I can lose myself in big subjects that I do not understand, or focus on those that I know. I know the feelings resulting from my brainless adventures

in BL Thai dramas -and my latest obsession, kdramas- are real. That I have strongly hated and loved fictional characters. That I lack style, but do have emotional abilities. That reading fanfiction has improved my English as much as writing a thesis. That between the projections and reflections of the house of mirrors, I have learned about myself. And that life is surviving, which for some of us means to be honest and to flee domestication.

I do also know it is almost summer, guys are wearing shorts again, playing football in the park, shirtless under the sun, while I am reading in the shadows, next to the river in Schiedam, reaching a new level of creepiness in my own personal history.

I will finish this with a haiku made from fanfiction words

Please try to escape the straight boredom.

tot kijk

bites,

Daniel

DEVIANT SWOT
LARGER THAN LIFE
LIGHT THRUSTING AND SCISSORING
ON MUSKY BALLSACK
OGLE

Film review: Laurence Anyways, another overwrought and kinda boring film from Xavier Dolan. (n.d.). Retrieved June 3, 2020, from <https://thecinesexual.com/film-note-laurence-anyways/>

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