

Difficult Parity (An Essay of 2SLGBTQIA+ Cinema)

(By Toshio U.-P.)

In 2SLGBTQIA+ cinema (formerly called 'gay cinema'), same sex couples with romantic feelings for one another have relationships that are challenged and tested in a variety of ways. Through the exploration of four films ranging from the early 1990s to the late 2010s, we will show how such couples struggle in their immediate environments due to: the narrow scope of prevailing conventions and traditions, disruptions caused by a faulty state, pressures of conformity paired with vulnerability, and lack of family and social support leading to isolation and even institutionalization.

In The Cakemaker (1), we meet a baker from Berlin named Thomas who travels to Jerusalem after finding out his lover Oren may have died accidentally. Keeping his gay extra-marital affair a secret, Thomas befriends Oren's widow Anat and helps her rejuvenate her small café business when she hires him to work in her kitchen. Unable to tell Anat the truth behind Oren's business trips to Berlin before he died, Thomas later faces alienation as a gay foreigner after being lured into an ill-fated love triangle with Anat who eventually begins to suspect her late husband's infidelity through a paper trail of receipts and a series of voicemail messages that lead back to a bakery in Berlin.

In How to Win at Checkers (Every Time) (2), a twenty year old nicknamed Oat reminisces about his late brother Ek, who died soon after being drafted and stationed at a military checkpoint in war-torn Thailand. Oat recalls his childhood years, when Ek, his boyfriend Jai and their friend Kitty would all hang out together. Haunted by a recurring nightmare rooted in a bleak reality of drugs, prostitution and violence, Oat continues to grieve the loss of his brother whose gay relationship was also compromised through conscription when he ill-fatedly is selected through the nation's compulsory draft lottery.

In Philadelphia (3), we enter the competitive legal world of Andrew Beckett, a star attorney working for a prestigious Philadelphia law firm in the 1980s who chooses not to disclose to his conventional employers that he is gay. While working on an important case involving real estate developments, Andrew's health starts to fail mysteriously and his employer promptly find faults in his behaviour and overall performance to justify a harsh and abrupt dismissal. After learning from bloodwork that he has contracted HIV/AIDS, Andrew opts to challenge his former boss Charles Wheeler with the help of a hard-nosed underdog personal injury lawyer, by claiming that he was wrongfully dismissed on the grounds of homophobia and rampant HIV/AIDS paranoia.

In Tarnation (4), the viewer enters the unconventional and artistic world of indie digital documentary director Jonathan Caouette, as he chronicles his upbringing and gay coming of age through the use of experimental montages and kaleidoscopic flashbacks and memories. Composed and edited with an overall budget of just over 200 dollars with the use of a basic iMovie computer software, Caouette bravely shares how he found the world of film-making after being raised in Texas amid a whirlwind of abuse and institutionalization.

Through their struggles in an often harsh, discriminatory and unaccepting world, the gay characters in these four important films learn the importance of honesty in marriage, the pain of separation and loss, the triumph of love over illness and the value of art and self-expression in a gay love relationship. While external conflicts often arise threatening to curtail or prevent the same-sex relationships in these four films, resilience is found through integrity and remembrance following periods of unfair humiliation and even bouts of inevitable madness. These tests and ordeals are also beneficial for other 2SLGBTQIA+ members, helping their community to thrive and come together.

1. The Cakemaker (2017). Dir. Ofir Raul Graizer. Film Base Berlin. Israel and Germany. 104 min.
2. How to Win at Checkers (Every Time) (2015). Dir. Josh Kim. Wolfe Video. Thailand. 80 min.
3. Philadelphia (1993). Dir. Jonathan Demme. TriStar Pictures. USA. 126 min.
4. Tarnation (2004). Dir. Jonathan Caouette. Wellspring. USA. 91 min.