Cinémas
Revue d'études cinématographiques
Journal of Film Studies

Nostalgia, Ethics, and Reparative Reading: Some Further Thoughts on Jean-Marc Vallée's *C.R.A.Z.Y.*
Nostalgie, éthique et lecture réparatrice. Quelques nouvelles réflexions sur *C.R.A.Z.Y.* de Jean-Marc Vallée

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Volume 29, numéro 3, automne 2021

Le regard *queer* et l'image en mouvement

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1084573ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1084573ar

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Éditeur(s)

Cinémas

ISSN

1181-6945 (imprimé)
1705-6500 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Schwartzwald, R. (2021). Nostalgia, Ethics, and Reparative Reading: Some Further Thoughts on Jean-Marc Vallée's *C.R.A.Z.Y.*. *Cinémas*, *29*(3), 105–121. https://doi.org/10.7202/1084573ar

Résumé de l'article

Avec cet article, l'auteur poursuit sa réflexion sur le film *C.R.A.Z.Y.* de Jean-Marc Vallée (2005), en dialogue avec les questions et problèmes soulevés par les critiques de son livre publié en 2015 dans la collection Queer Film Classics. En particulier, l'article explore les questions de nostalgie et d'éthique dans le film : comment *C.R.A.Z.Y.* s'inscrit-il dans la vague du cinéma nostalgique au Québec des premières décennies du XXI^{e} siècle et, surtout, sa fréquente mise en scène de la réconciliation père-fils ? Face aux divergences de points de vue sur le « travail » accompli par l'épilogue du film, comment évaluer l'affirmation selon laquelle la réconciliation de Zac avec son père constitue un geste éthique ? Enfin, en réponse aux avis mitigés des critiques queers face au film et au cadrage parfois normatif de la question de savoir si le film de Vallée est réellement « queer », la valeur d'une stratégie de lecture réparatrice est explorée.

Nostalgia, Ethics, and Reparative Reading: Some Further Thoughts on Jean-Marc Vallée's *C.R.A.Z.Y.*

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ABSTRACT

This article is a further reflection by the author on Jean-Marc Vallée's 2005 film *C.R.A.Z.Y.,* in dialogue with questions and issues raised by reviewers of his 2015 book for the Queer Film Classics series. In particular, the article explores issues of nostalgia and ethics in the film: How does *C.R.A.Z.Y.* fit into the wave of nostalgic cinema in Quebec in the opening decades of the twenty-first century and especially its frequent mise en scène of father-son reconciliation? Looking at divergent views over the "work" performed by the film's epilogue, how should the claim that Zac's reconciliation with his father constitutes an ethical gesture be evaluated? Finally, in response to the mitigated responses of queer critics to the film and the sometimes normative framing of whether Vallée's film is actually "queer," the value of a reparative reading strategy is explored.

Is *C.R.A.Z.Y.* a queer film? Put this way, the question might seem impertinent, but in the critical readings of my book on the film that appeared in the Queer Film Classics series in 2015, it is front and centre. In his review essay for *Nouvelles vues*, Gabriel Laverdière reminds his readers that the series features controversial films by reputed filmmakers who are known for their marginal sexual identities—for example, Pasolini, Almodóvar, Visconti, Patricia Rozema, John Waters—as well as many others who are less well known outside the LGBTQ community. And yet, as Laverdière correctly points out, "le film *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, lui, n'est pas controversé, son réalisateur est hétérosexuel et sa sortie a été couronnée d'un rare succès pour le cinéma québécois. S'accorde-t-il avec la thématique de cette collection? S'agit-il, autrement dit, d'un film queer?" (2018)[1]

For Amy J. Ransom, it isn't so much a matter of the film's "eligibility" for the series, but of the protocols that guided how the films were to be discussed—what she calls "the formatting demands of the single-film study series focused in particular on a film's engagement with queer studies" (2017).[2] In fact, as Ransom suggests, the theoretical and disciplinary conventions of queer studies formed the "horizon of expectations" for each study. Had this been the decisive criterion for inclusion, however, Milena Santoro would have summarily shown the film the door: "The film's depictions and its protagonist are ultimately unsatisfactory from the perspective of queer theory, *eschewing fluidity or destabilizing elements*" (2017, my emphasis).[3]

Given that the Queer Film Classics series was at the time under the aegis of Arsenal Pulp, a Vancouver-based independent commercial press that for many years has distinguished itself by publishing edgy and provocative LGBTQ+ fiction, poetry, and non-fiction,[4] I assumed that my likely readership would be above all queer cinephiles and those with a specific interest in Quebec cinema, fellow academics and their students. It was imperative, therefore, that I address the axioms of queer studies, but I was determined to propose a reading that approaches them somewhat obliquely. As reviewer André Loiselle observed in the *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, I set out from a position "that [did] not simply assume the undisputable merit of its subject matter only because it happens to have been deemed worthy of inclusion in a 'classics' series" (2016).[5] On this question, Laverdière's approach captures well one of my own concerns as I embarked on this project: "En érigeant comme principes a priori une certaine compréhension de la fluidité et l'ouverture, la vision prétendument *queer* risque l'adoption d'un cadre lui-même rigide et normatif, voire conformiste." As he quite rightly observes, "le film *queer* a son esthétique antiparoxistique, frontale et désinhibée, où la fluidité identitaire et sexuelle remplace le présumé statisme de figures plus traditionnelles, auquel elle s'oppose. Quant à ce qui précède, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* loge à l'enseigne de la tradition."

Each of the four reviewers quoted above concludes in their own way that I "redeemed" *C.R.A.Z.Y.* by insisting upon its convincing evocation, for the queer viewer, of what I called the "'pre-political' phenomenology of same-sex desire" (Schwartzwald 2015, 141).

For Loiselle, "the destabilizing effect of Vallée's film thus emerges from the paradoxical pleasure of re-experiencing one's own struggle as a queer youth and positioning it against the hackneyed reconciliation of the film's epilogue." For Laverdière, my "intuition" confirms how "le récit et la construction filmiques offrent au spectateur l'expérience vécue d'un jeune homme pour qui la force vive du désir, certes retenue par des contraintes sociales et des blessures psychologiques, ne cesse de vouloir se déployer à la mesure de son imagination." Actually, Laverdière claims that by speaking up for the film's affective and emotional qualities, I even succeeded in redeeming the film from my own interpretation, especially in the third chapter, where I allow myself to be led astray by sociological and moralistic concerns. Here, Laverdière claims, I subordinated the film to "des principes qui n'en proviennent pas nécessairement."[6]

Indeed, many excellent questions have been raised by these four reviewers. Some address aspects of the film that I had to exclude from my analysis because of the series format,[7] while there are others that I simply did not think to take up, or took up only partially. In this article, I pursue my reflection about the film in dialogue with some of the most salient points they have raised. To begin, I will look at *C.R.A.Z.Y.* and *nostalgia,* or more specifically what Loiselle identifies as "the contextualization of *C.R.A.Z.Y.* within Quebec's current wave of nostalgic cinema." In Vallée's film, Loiselle sees "a perfect example of this nostalgic trend," characterized by "wistful narratives" and often by the trope "of an adult son who tries to find his true self by reconnecting with his past through a paternal figure."[8] Santoro, too, finds that the nostalgic element plays a large role in the film's "crossover" success, in other words, its ability to bring together those who love auteur or independent cinema and a broader public. Here, I will consider to what degree Vallée's film shares in this nostalgic trend, where it conforms or takes its distance, and to what effect.

Then, I will consider Laverdière's point of view on the film's epilogue. As I acknowledged in the book, the epilogue is probably the single greatest source of discontent among queer critics of the film. Loiselle, as we have seen, calls it "hackneyed," but more generally it is deplored as the sacrificial moment when Zac is offered up on the altar of social consensus in the interest of reinforcing

the hetero- and now homonormative criteria for inclusion in the national "family." Dissenting from this pervasive view, Laverdière insists that the adult Zac's acquiescence to his father's refusal to discuss or acknowledge his *sexual orientation*—the term is more appropriate here than "sexuality," I believe, because it conforms with how completely the latter has been evacuated at the film's end—is, in fact, an *ethical* gesture: "Par le compromis auquel il consent avec son père," we are told, "[Zac] accepte son père tel qu'il est […] et fait preuve d'une tolérance admirable." In Laverdière's view, Zac has "résolu son propre problème," and so he can extend this ethical gesture to his father, who remains pitifully "prostré dans la rigidité sociale, longuement mûrie, d'une autre époque." Laverdière's interpretation is folded into a broader humanistic reading of the film which I will also address, especially with regard to the nature of compromise and its limits, tolerance, and the supposed resolution of Zac's "problem."

Finally, Laverdière's useful reminder that "un film n'est pas un programme politique ni un essai, et qu'au surplus, il a droit à ses maladresses" has prompted me to revisit *C.R.A.Z.Y.* in light of the distinctions drawn by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick between "paranoid" and "reparative" reading practices. In *Touching Feeling* (2003), Sedgwick counts herself among the great number of LGBTQ critics who had frequent recourse to paranoid readings, anchored in what Paul Ricœur called "the hermeneutics of suspicion." As Sedgwick notes, "Queer studies in particular has had a distinctive history of intimacy with the paranoid imperative," given that "what is illuminated by an understanding of paranoia is not how homosexuality works, but how homophobia and heterosexism work" (126). Sedgwick acknowledges the value of paranoid reading practices for "anti-homophobic work," but she also insists that "to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity or enmity of oppression" (128). The arguments marshalled by Sedgwick in favour of *reparative reading practices* speak to some of the points of contention in *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s queer critical reception. In retrospect, I can see how my reading of the film shares much with the reparative strategy, even if, along the way, I had to constantly negotiate my relationship to paranoid readings—those of others, but also my own.

Nostalgia

That Loiselle situates *C.R.A.Z.Y.* within a contemporary nostalgic current of Quebec cinema interests me because it raises the question of the "work" that nostalgia performs in the film. Or, to put it another way: beyond its obvious contribution to making the film visually and musically attractive, I want to ask how nostalgia does so and towards what ends.

The nostalgic element in *C.R.A.Z.Y.* is central to what Laverdière calls Vallée's "surcroît d'écriture." In other words, what is at issue is not so much the meticulous reconstruction of period costume, decor and soundscape, but rather their wholly extravagant audiovisual mise en scène. Loiselle speaks of the "highly manipulative" insertion of "beloved 'oldies' and classic rock favourites on the soundtrack, deliberate references to the quaintness of 1960s Quebec, and unapologetic reliance on melodramatic clichés," all of which leads him to see in *C.R.A.Z.Y.* "a skilfully-crafted mainstream film that never aims to shock or disturb its audience."

Svetlana Boym reminds us how "nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals" (2001, loc. 113). It should be no surprise then, that if nostalgia is a popular subject for adepts of cultural studies, it generally arouses suspicion and distrust among these same critics. Boym wrote her study in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, but Michael Kammen's observation that "nostalgia […] is essentially history without guilt, […] an abdication of personal responsibility" and "a guilt-free homecoming" (in Boym 2001, loc. 113) rings all too true in our time of "Make America Great Again" and ascendant nativism around much of the world. This view of nostalgia is consistent with my own discussion of how *C.R.A.Z.Y.* constructs "the fantasy of a homogeneous community" (Schwartzwald 2015, 76) in order to create "a shared affective experience of a harmonious space and time" (99–100). For me, the exculpatory dimension of the film ("history without guilt") resides in the way the mise en scène scrupulously excises all signs of political upheaval, first and foremost over the "national question," from its depiction of the 1960s and '70s in Quebec. I will be more explicit on this question than I was in the book: by presenting the viewer with a "typically eccentric" (Schwartzwald 2015, 68) Québécois

family that evolves towards embracing tolerance and inclusion of "difference," the film invites viewers—especially those who came of age during the Quiet Revolution—into the story without requiring them to dwell upon their personal involvement in these events. For the many who supported Quebec independence, it offers a chance to go back in time without necessarily being reminded of how divisive the issue has been, nor of the collective—but also personal—failure to achieve this goal. The only visible sign of the period's high political stakes—a Parti Québécois placard leaning against the wall—tacitly allies the Beaulieu family with many other francophone working-class families at the time. In this sense, it is the trace that exemplifies nostalgia's effectiveness as an "intermediary between collective and individual memory" (Boym 2001, 53).

Boym also draws a useful distinction between two modes of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. If the former appeals to conservative, even reactionary impulses, the latter has a more critical edge:

> The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot […] Reflective nostalgia is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. Re-flection suggests new flexibility, not the re-establishment of stasis. The focus here is not on what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the mediation of history and the passage of time. (Boym 2001, 49)

At first glance, not only the hyper-authentic quality of sets and costumes, but especially the deployment of a set of stereotypical characters, could lead us to place *C.R.A.Z.Y.* firmly in the column of the restorative. As Laverdière astutely notes, however, "[à] la fois lieu commun et bien culturel, [le stéréotype] est un moyen d'expression, de communication et de signification, dont l'efficacité, entre des mains exercées, peut se révéler pleinement. Il n'est pas forcément péjoratif, mais constitue plutôt une base à partir de laquelle emprunter certaines voies narratives ou représentationnelles." In the case of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, the "voies narratives ou représentationnelles" certainly feature elements normally associated with restorative forms of nostalgia, but they do so in the service of what is essentially a reflective project. Crucially, the "past" upon which the film

turns its reflective gaze is not the "French-Canada" condemned by the reformers of the Quiet Revolution, and whose residual qualities are embodied in Zac's mother Laurianne's delightful syncretism of folk belief and Catholicism. As Santoro correctly reminds us, "in the Beaulieu family, emblematic of Quebec society more generally, modernity and urbanity are male principles, and emotiveness and tradition, particularly faith, are aligned with femininity," so it is striking that the most egregiously retrograde behaviour in the film is that of Gervais, and it is occasioned by his anxieties over his son's questionable masculinity—that Zac might be a *fif*. Gervais rationalizes his anxiety through a very anti-clerical and "modern" reading of traditional Catholic culture in French-Canada (priests, after all, are untrustworthy "men in skirts," he tells us, and have no lessons for boys when it comes to modelling real manliness). Obviously, the film does not suggest a return to "the way things were" before the Quiet Revolution, but it does challenge the view the Quiet Revolution had of itself as a *tabula rasa*, and therefore of how it drew sharp lines between past and present, faith and science. By validating Laurianne's telepathic, on occasion life-saving relation with her son, *C.R.A.Z.Y.* enlists another essential element of reflective nostalgia, wherein "longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection" (Boym 2001, 49).

Finally, I would like to consider Laverdière's view that *C.R.A.Z.Y.* neither shocks nor disturbs its viewers and that its mode of address is fundamentally "consensuel." It is certainly the case that the film proposes a narrative of evolving social mores and progress and deploys a series of interpolative strategies to elicit the viewer to climb on board. Zac's retrospective narrative voice, at once ironic and severe towards some of his own youthful behaviour, makes of him an important partner in creating this consensual élan. Yet, beyond the hurtful and blinkered remarks of a father who, admittedly, serves as a foil for suturing in the "enlightened" viewer, what does genuinely disturb and shock is the spectacle of a smart and beautiful young man *who repeatedly tries to do himself harm*. Zac's self-destructive acts are not the result of a "lack of discipline" or a failure of male socialization; nor are they even attributable to an insufficiently attentive paternal figure, all "causes" that Gervais is

willing to entertain at various moments. They derive instead from the normative expectations of his father and, to a lesser degree, of his brothers and his schoolmates (but *not*, interestingly, from the admonitions of priests, for whom Zac holds no particular regard in any case). *C.R.A.Z.Y.* burnishes its socially ameliorative posture as it implicitly asks its audience to reflect upon its own responsibility, or unwitting complicity, in such suffering. In other words, what the nostalgic mode of the film enables is a reflection upon the outmoded nature of the *recent* past.[9]

Ethics

Laverdière's contention that "par le compromis auquel il consent avec son père, Zac pose un geste éthique" merits most serious consideration, not least because if Laverdière characterizes the reconciliation between father and son in the film's epilogue as a "compromise," many queer critics have seen in it a *compromission*, or surrender, and ultimately a defeat for Zac. Laverdière agrees with my claim that it is Gervais, and not Zac, who is the principal beneficiary of this reconciliation, but for him this is not particularly problematic because Zac, having "résolu *son propre problème*" (my emphasis), is now able to accept his father "tel qu'il est." The suggestion is that under the circumstances, equanimity and mercy demand that we, like Zac, should also let Gervais be.

There are many ways to think about ethics, but for the purposes of reflecting upon the film's epilogue and Laverdière's response to it, I will draw upon the work of philosopher Avishai Margalit. In *The Ethics of Memory* (2002), Margalit proposes an important distinction between morals and ethics: "Morality is greatly concerned, for example, with respect and humiliation; these are attitudes that manifest themselves among those who have thin relations. Ethics, on the other hand, is greatly concerned with loyalty and betrayal, manifested among those who have thick relations" (loc. 89). If we accept this distinction, the mitigated queer critical responses to the film might be attributable to a perception of *moral* failure on the part of the filmmaker: the "compromise" imposed on Zac is seen as a form of humiliation or lack of respect by the filmmaker for the sexual self-determination that Zac has "earned." In its most extreme form, the accusation would be that "they"—the heterosexual director and

the commercial film industry—have wronged "us" (LGBTQ+ persons) by imposing such an extraneous ending. After all, the story itself concludes fifteen years earlier, so why not have the film end, say, with the close-up of Zac's eyes, full of surprise and confusion, as his father embraces him following Raymond's funeral? That would have given the film the rich ambiguity of other coming of age films, for example Benoît's gaze at the end of *Mon oncle Antoine*, or even the freeze frame that brings *Les quatre cent coups* to such a dramatic ending. In any case, in entertaining alternative endings, I would understand if readers felt that I am indulging in moral judgments that may even be spilling over into moralism, "the disposition to cast judgments of a moral kind on what is unsuitable to be so judged" (loc. 133). Indeed, Laverdière seems to be suggesting that I venture down this path when I refer to Gervais as a (hetero)normative figure, objecting that this characterization is "restrictive au regard du film dans son ensemble parce que celui-ci n'est pas réductible à une querelle sociologique." True, the film cannot—and should not—be reduced to a sociological quarrel, but that does not obviate how Gervais, as the paternal figure, embodies the heteronormative principle in the broader realm of "thin" social relations that largely circumscribe morality, or moral behaviour. Accordingly, many queer viewers may refuse the trade-off that Laverdière proposes: to set aside their disappointment at the nature of the final reconciliation and to express gratitude instead for how "le cinéaste a non seulement consacré son film à la figure de l'homosexualité, mais il s'en est servi pour incarner une proposition humaniste majeure."

Is this humanistic proposition validated through the purportedly ethical gesture that Zac extends to his father? As we have seen, for Margalit ethics are the domain of "thick" relations that would obviously include those of family (and very often, nation). These relations are characterized by *le souci* or caring, "a demanding attitude towards others" (2002, loc. 278). Therefore, it seems reasonable that we evaluate the claim that Zac has made an ethical gesture according to the test proposed by Margalit:

> What does caring care about? It cares about the well-being of meaningful others. It is concerned with their wants and needs. It is usually concerned with their rational wants and needs, but

> in the case of love (as a special form of caring) we are also tuned to the whims of the beloved […] It gives the other the feeling of being secure in having our attention and concern, irrespective of their achievements […] *It is a selfless attitude*. (Margalit 2002, loc. 305, my emphasis)

At first blush, there can be little argument that Zac fulfills several of Margalit's criteria for ethical behaviour by providing his father with care, attention and the feeling of security, and he does so in spite of his father's "whimsical"[10] prohibition of any discussion ever taking place between them over his adult son's sexual orientation, let alone his love life. Now, queer people are constantly confronted with such situations, and our not infrequent response is an acquiescence that seeks a *modus vivendi* of varying intensities with those close to us. In other words, certain questions are "let be" so as to not inflict what might be considerable pain on a parent, for example, or so as to not provoke a *rupture* that might be equally, or even more painful for ourselves. But it is legitimate to ask whether, and to what degree, such "compromises" (to use Laverdière's term) may impose an unjust or even harmful burden on a person who enters into one?

As I thought again about the epilogue, I was reminded of a famous tale from Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: "Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard. 'Stop!' cried the groaning old man at last. 'Stop! I did not drag my father beyond this tree'" (1946, 47). I wondered: did Zac drag *his* father far enough? Or had he been made to give up too quickly on Gervais? In other words, is Zac right to no longer insist, and if so, at what cost to himself? In one of the film's most dramatic scenes, Gervais proclaims his complete inability to endure it if his son were really and truly *comme ça*: "Si tu penses qu'y a rien à faire… je peux pas dealer avec ça, là. J'suis pas capable. J'peux pas." A viewer might feel anger or frustration in the face of such obstinacy, but they might just as easily feel pity for Gervais to the degree that he appears to be afflicted by a kind of pathetic helplessness. One way or the other, is Gervais's performance enough to justify Zac's apparent acquiescence as the necessary, ethical response born of care? Gervais's later breakdown after Raymond's funeral, where he sobs

and embraces Zac, might call into question the finality of his stubborn disposition.

I can anticipate how this question, too, might be considered impertinent, but I would argue that it is less a matter of deploring what is absent from the film than it is of observing the play of presences and absences, as well as their temporalities. First things first, however: what *is* absent? Sex. Not all sex, of course, but any with another boy that is enjoyable. As Laverdière points out, the story ends before Zac can enjoy sex—"l'histoire se termine avant que cela ne puisse arriver." As he grows from childhood into adolescence, Zac comes to understand that his same-sex desire is the cause of his estrangement from his father and, in Zac-the-narrator's words, of the "war" he had unknowingly "declared" on Gervais as a young boy.[11] Yet Zac is a reluctant warrior: over these years, the same-sex experiences that are alluded to, whether consummated or potential, are associated with deep anxiety and self-loathing. When does Zac begin to enjoy sex? Presumably in the fifteen-year hiatus between the story's end and the epilogue. In the epilogue, the Zac we see shows all the signs of being successful and "integrated"—stylishly groomed, well dressed, and out and about in a sporty car but, in apparent deference to his father, still mute about the "lifestyle"—for queerness, or gayness, seems in this moment to be reduced precisely to that—for which they are the trappings. Instead, the film concludes with Zac reliving those most joyous of moments from his childhood when he and his father sneaked off to the Roi de la Patate, the French-fry trailer in the countryside. Looking again at Zac's unclouded *jouissance* at returning to the *frites* stand, I find myself asking whether his gesture is as unambiguously ethical as Laverdière claims. To the degree that Zac's acquiescence is the condition for regaining his father's love, it cannot be said to be entirely disinterested.[12] Laverdière's reminder that "de tous les personnages, [Zac] est le seul à connaître une transformation narrative importante," may leave many a queer viewer *sur sa faim,* because the absences in the script suggest that a more self-determined and rounded presence for Zac has been sacrificed in the interests of filial peace. I, for one, found myself wondering whether Zac's gesture of care for his father could have been imagined as something other than entirely and unilaterally sacrificial. It leads me to revise my

earlier remarks and recognize that the epilogue is the one incontrovertible moment of restorative nostalgia in a film where I have argued the dominant vector is reflective.

Towards a Reparative Reading

If Laverdière's way of raising the question of ethics has led me to double down on my reservations about the epilogue, it remains the case that in the book I decided to de-dramatize and deny it a decisive role in my appreciation of the film:

> In one way it wouldn't be outlandish to speak of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s denouement as a "civilized" equivalent of the bad end to which gay and lesbian characters used to routinely come in Hollywood film… These "monsters" acted and spoke on behalf of those defined as outlaws by their sexual and gender dissonance and sometimes gave exhilarating shape to their revenge fantasies. It's a great ride until the end, but by virtue of their obvious adherence to convention, the endings pale in comparison to what precedes them. (Schwartzwald 2015, 140)

For me, *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s conclusion adheres to the conventions of *our* time: at the end of the film we find Zac subjected to "a civilized domestication instead of a brutal exclusion" (140). My aim was to propose a way of reading the film that flows *away* from the discourse of social tolerance by which the viewer is hailed. This is what led me to introduce the notion, or "intuition" (Laverdière), of how the film channels a "'pre-political' phenomenology of same-sex desire" (Schwartzwald 2015, 141). In other words, I invited the queer spectator to be attentive to the ways in which the film, on the affective level, stirred up "that moment when 'war is declared' […] that ineffable foreboding that signalled the difficult and sometimes terrifying road that lay ahead" (156). Returning here to this intuition, I would now say that it anticipates a reparative reading of *C.R.A.Z.Y.*

The notion of reparative reading, as I explained at the outset of this essay, comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reflections on LGBT and queer critical work, especially in literary studies. It begins by recognizing that for a person to take account of a "large and genuinely systemic oppression does not intrinsically or necessarily enjoin [that person] to any specific train of epistemological or

narrative consequences" (2003, 124). In Sedgwick's view, however, LGBTQ criticism has precisely tethered itself to what Paul Ricoeur named "the hermeneutics of suspicion" in which "the man of suspicion carries out in reverse the work of falsification of the man of guile" (in Sedgwick 2003, 125). As LGBTQ studies developed, strategies of unmasking and demystifying became "a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities."[13] In putting such a hermeneutic to work, the concept of paranoia has come to occupy centre stage. This may only be natural, Sedgwick concedes: "in a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious or complaisant" (125-26). And even if, during a decisive conjuncture for queer studies, "it may have been structurally inevitable that the reading practices that became most available and fruitful in anti-homophobic work would often in turn have been paranoid ones" (127), Sedgwick considers it to be a great loss "when paranoid enquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds" (126).

Even as I introduce the notion of an alternative reading practice, it is clear that I am replicating the structure of my book: nearing the end, I once again arrive at the moment where I must not only confront, but insist upon, the primacy of the film's affective force, especially in view of how many queer critics have resorted to the "infinitely do-able and teachable protocols of unveiling [that] have become the common currency of cultural and historicist studies" (Sedgwick 2003, 143). Perhaps it would have been desirable to explore even further how the insistent force of Zac's desire inspires throughout the film and makes us want to stick with him. For, as Laverdière says, "le désir n'est pas que l'heureux accomplissement de fantasmes ou la matérialisation de la volonté"—neither that of young Zac nor, I would add, that of the viewer—"il est surtout l'entrecroisement de l'aspiration et de l'impossible."

To garner a greater appreciation of this affective force, I find it instructive to turn to Sedgwick's treatment of camp, and more specifically to the differences she sees between a paranoid and a reparative reading of it. Sedgwick observes how a classically paranoid

reading sees camp as "uniquely appropriate to the projects of parody, denaturalization, demystification and mocking exposure of the elements and assumptions of a dominant culture" (2003, 149). On the other hand, an alternative reading would see in *camping* "the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of *reparative* practices […] a glue of surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment, unexplained upwellings of threat, and longing" (150, my emphasis). Sedgwick's terms are spot-on to account for *C.R.A.Z.Y.*'s affective power, and they lead me to turn one final time to some of the film's nostalgic features. If we look again at the extravagant attention to the authentic recreation of sets, costumes and festive scenes (the Christmas Eve *réveillon*, the midnight mass, Christian's wedding) but this time through a reparative lens, we can see how the excesses move the film well beyond realism, certainly, but without ever arriving at the *quétaine*, camp's often misrecognized cousin in Quebec. *C.R.A.Z.Y.* is no *Les belles-sœurs* or *Hosanna* (Michel Tremblay, 1968 and 1973) for example, where the dynamics of identification that were so central to the original theatrical performances arguably require an epistemological adjustment that acknowledges how the play's allegorical terms and *déclassé* situation are not necessarily of our time.[14] In Vallée's film, however, camp sensibility—as in Gervais's obligatory performances of Aznavour, or in Zac's Technicolor dream-coat "levitation" in the church against the sonic background of "Sympathy for the Devil," or, of course, in Laurianne's devotion to ironing her toast—serves to bond the viewer to the unfolding drama. Finally, a reparative reading could do no better than to focus on the memorable scene where Zac channels David Bowie's Major Tom. Here, Zac's own surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment (his clothing and painted face), unexplained upwellings of threat (foreshadowing the actual mockery to which his performance is subjected by his brother and the neighbours) and longing (to not be abandoned like Major Tom in orbit, to come in from the cold) remind viewers of their own moments of longing and perhaps even reignite them.

In the end, I fear this article will do nothing to counter the observation that I appear to be "déchiré entre [mon] amour intuitif pour le film et un certain sentiment d'outrage, motivés par des considérations intellectuelles ou morales" (Laverdière). I could plead

that this "déchirement" is a by-product of the Queer Film Classics series format where, as an academic critic, I am expected precisely to engage in "intellectual considerations" to which intuition would normally be subordinated. That would, of course, be too easy. I could also point out, for example, that even Laverdière engages in "intellectual considerations" when he insists upon how Zac represents "l'individu, le sujet, marqué non par une identification contraignante, mais par le désir de dépasser ce genre de carcans." But all of this is really quite secondary. More importantly, I am sympathetic to how Laverdière rallies to the defence of the film, and I think he too does so in a reparative way. And so, when he says of Zac that "sa quête est celle de la liberté," I appreciate that he is taking a risk, because the flourish with which he ends the sentence—a naked, unqualified "liberté"—could put him at the receiving end of some scepticism. As Sedgwick laments, "the vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or a culture has been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual or reactionary that it's no wonder few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives" (Sedgwick, 150). Laverdière *is* willing, and he succeeds admirably in avoiding Sedgwick's litany of potential pitfalls. As for me, in the end I am comfortable living within a critical "déchirement" that has not forsaken the paranoid, to be sure, but whose reparative impulse has sought to holistically renew a queer reading of this magnificent film.

NOTES

1. All further quotations of Laverdière are from this book review.
2. All further quotations of Ransom are from this book review.
3. All further quotations of Santoro are from this book review.
4. The series has since been taken over by McGill-Queen's University Press with series co-editors Thomas Waugh and Matthew Hays continuing in their roles.
5. All further quotations of Loiselle are from this book review.
6. That said, Laverdière is generous: after expressing this reservation, he immediately acknowledges how "les réflexions que nous avons préalablement menées […] sur le film de Vallée souffrent des mêmes difficultés, et d'autres encore. Nous n'échappons pas aux critiques formulées dans le présent texte."
7. The series editors provided contributors with a three-chapter template and, of course, a word limit.
8. Loiselle, too, is generous when he expresses regret that I did not take up the question of nostalgia in the book: "It would have been instructive to read Schwartzwald's take on this aspect of Vallée's work […] but of course, if he had spent too much

time discussing the general cinematic context of the production […] his analysis might have strayed too far from the parameters of the Queer Film Classics series."

9. For this observation I am instructed by Walter Benjamin: "These wish-fulfilling images manifest an emphatic striving for dissociation with the outmoded—which means, however, with the most recent past." Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Edited and with an introduction by Peter Demetz. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p. 148.
10. In the French translation of Margalit's book, *whim* is translated as *les désirs les plus irrationnels*, while *achievements* is translated as *mérites* (Avishai Margalit, *L'éthique du souvenir*, trans. Claude Chastagner. Paris: Climats, 2006, p. 45). I actually think these translations better convey the gist of Margalit's argument for my purposes.
11. The actual episode that triggers this declaration occurs when Gervais surprises his son, *en flagrant délit*, in his parents' bedroom wearing his mother's dressing gown and slippers: "Je me souviens encore de la neige qui fondait lentement sur son visage. Je venais d'avoir 7 ans et, sans le vouloir, de lui déclarer la guerre."
12. Significantly, Laurianne is out of the picture in the epilogue. While we do not know if she is alive or deceased, the absence serves to focus the end of the film squarely on the father-son relationship. On the one hand, it can reasonably be said to accentuate the seventy-seven-year-old Gervais's need for his son's *souci*, or care; on the other hand, it suggests that Zac's desire for paternal love may be all the more acute, now that he is "on his own."
13. Queer studies is not unique in this regard, especially as it draws on a range of critical approaches that achieved prominence in the American academy from the 1980s onward: "feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory, deconstruction, Marxist criticism or the New Historicism" (Sedgwick 2003, 127).
14. In many ways, Hosanna's performance conforms to those of the doomed queens in many of the "gay monster" films to which I referred earlier.

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ABSTRACT

Nostalgie, éthique et lecture réparatrice. Quelques nouvelles réflexions sur *C.R.A.Z.Y.* de Jean-Marc Vallée

Robert Schwartzwald

Avec cet article, l'auteur poursuit sa réflexion sur le film *C.R.A.Z.Y.* de Jean-Marc Vallée (2005), en dialogue avec les questions et problèmes soulevés par les critiques de son livre publié en 2015 dans la collection Queer Film Classics. En particulier, l'article explore les questions de nostalgie et d'éthique dans le film: comment *C.R.A.Z.Y.* s'inscrit-il dans la vague du cinéma nostalgique au Québec des premières décennies du XXIe siècle et, surtout, sa fréquente mise en scène de la réconciliation père-fils? Face aux divergences de points de vue sur le «travail» accompli par l'épilogue du film, comment évaluer l'affirmation selon laquelle la réconciliation de Zac avec son père constitue un geste éthique? Enfin, en réponse aux avis mitigés des critiques queers face au film et au cadrage parfois normatif de la question de savoir si le film de Vallée est réellement «queer», la valeur d'une stratégie de lecture réparatrice est explorée.