

# **She Male Snails**

by Pho Vu and Olivia Wissell  
ENGL383 Intimate Film Culture

## Filmmaker: Eli Levén

- Collaborated with director Ester Martin Bergsmark
- Directed *She Male Snails* (or Pojktanten in Swedish)

## About the Film: She Male Snails

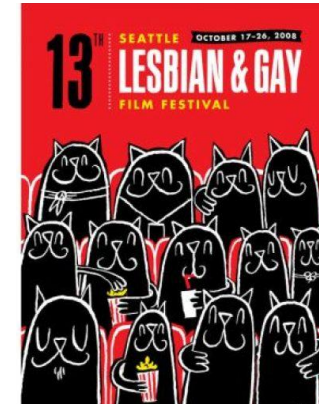
- 2012 (1hr15mins)
- Documentary
- Intended as a portrait of the author for Swedish television
- Features conversations between Bergsmark and Levén and a fictional story about a child that moves through different landscapes and often crosses binary boundaries.
- Part graceful dream, part psychodrama and part egocentrism



# Animal Iconography in queer film festival posters

“The animals in the ad- vertisements are thus not anthropomorphisms; they are instead refusals of the representational imperative in rights culture of the late twentieth century to assert the humanness of queers. In doing so, they obviate the question of categorical distinctions among humans and pose the nature of the dilemma for human rights discourse since the Second World War.” (115)

“Judith Butler has seen the after-the-fact revision of the human in human rights as unavoidable. She writes, “The necessity of keeping our notion of the ‘human’ open to a future articulation is essential to the project of international human rights discourse and politics.”<sup>60</sup> The instability of the category of the human, for her, is a sign of the necessarily contestatory quality of democratic discourse: “International human rights is always in the process of subjecting the human to redefinition and renegotiation. It mobilizes the human in the service of rights, but also rewrites the human, and rearticulates the human when it comes up against the cultural limits of its working conception of the human, as it does and must.”<sup>61</sup> Butler argues for keeping the question of the human in human rights a radically unsettled, relational, and immanently revisable category” (116)



# Scene 1 (1:11-1:50) and then... (1:05:47-1:07)



## Scene 2 (2:25 - 3:00)

- Baby in a natural landscape = “dualism”
- Intimacy presents socialization and belonging-ness in queer world.
- Conveys the message of beginning of genders' exploration upon his birth.



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- Conveys the message of beginning of genders' exploration upon his birth.
- Unfold into a gender-dissident landscape of rebellious and poetic, intimate otherness with non-human objects and landscapes at the urban peripheries, at the margins of normativity and productivity.
- Channels the characters’ self-discovery of their sexuality through natural substance
- Goes from “unnatural” into a possibility
- **Ecological aesthetics** makes this transformation fluid
- Minimizes any “unnatural” part to the lowest possible level



## Scene 3 (30:00 - 31:00)

- Continue to materialize nature with connectedness and hope for the livabilities of trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming bodies.



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- Mise-en-scène combines a camp aesthetic of colorful, plastic, excessively feminine consumer objects with a Nordic aesthetic of being in nature and the sensations of the nonhuman and sublime. Nature and culture are destabilized through a register that privileges sensual touch rather than one built on knowledge and visual mastery
- Throughout the film, elements of colorful material make their way into nature, whether as ribbons in primary colors, paint on the grass and trees, or elaborate dragged-out figures in the landscape.
- “Nicole Seymour understands queer nature through texts that “explicitly link the queer to the natural world through an empathetic, ethical imagination,” and *She Male Snails* stages empathy through constructions of cinematic intimacy and care. Moreover, Timothy Morton has argued that the concept of “nature” historically has been a way to establish nationalism, to enforce racial and sexual identities, and to justify violence against the nonhuman environment. *She Male Snails* subverts conventional nature discourse to conjure a radically genderqueer upsetting of this rhetoric.”
- Intimate otherness: inspired by philosopher/ political theorist Jane Bennett’s idea of “enchantment” (2002, 55)
- Rooted in the idea of an ethical engagement with the world, nature, and human and more-than-human diversity



# SCENE 2 + 3

- The border between cultural and natural becomes blurred
- Display of voyeurism

# Discussion Questions

1. What is everyone's opinion on animal iconography as a mode of queer representation, signification, and symbolism? Do you find it problematic or affirming?
2. Trans and non-binary representation needs space to express their existence and live that experience. What do you think about the kind of intimacy conveyed through the aesthetics of the natural landscape in *She Male Snails*? Do you think it is an effective register of belonging for the third gender?
3. How can we link previous discussions about haptic viscosity to this particular film and reading? Do you feel that haptic viscosity is employed within *She Male Snails* and what sort of impact does that have?

Thank you for listening.