



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Lay Summary of Thesis



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Name of student:	John Lynskey	UUN	S1580812
University email:	S1580812@sms.ed.ac.uk		
Degree sought:	PhD Film Studies	No. of words in the main text of thesis:	79,927
Title of thesis:	Late Night Double Feature: Queer Monstrosity and Cult Cinema		

Insert the lay summary text here - the space will expand as you type.

Cult films from the 1970s to present day are filled with images of transgressive monsters. These monsters often signify a queer identity, presenting a broad range of sexualities and identities that break the rules and boundaries of society. Queer monstrosity occurs when a queer subject resists conformity into mainstream culture and uses their monstrosity as a means of separation or disconnect from any negative queer representation. This queer monstrosity is signified in filmmaking through the physical cinematic body of the queer monster, and this body comes the manifestation of that which heteronormative culture rejects. The body of the queer monster is also frequently represented as grotesque and transgressive by embracing the stigma of queerness as abnormal. In cult cinema, where representations of the grotesque and transgressive often reside, queer monstrosity finds a haven and a place of embodiment.

This thesis argues that queer monstrosity is present in cult cinema and that this monstrosity is represented in grotesque and transgressive cinematic images of queer bodies in cult films. It considers such representations chronologically, beginning with the queer monster in the midnight movie phenomenon of the 1970s and ending with representations in the present day (2020). I show how this transgressive queer monstrosity has been represented in cult films and later more mainstream films. My analysis reveals that queer monstrosity reflects broader cultural understandings of queer identity and a resistance by the queer subject towards conformity (or assimilation) in mainstream society. In creating and viewing the queer monster, this produced (and continues to produce) a means for audiences and filmmakers to engage with transgression indirectly in order to reject any conformist, heteronormative practices in queer film representation.

Abstract of Thesis



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Name of student:	John Lynskey	UUN	S1580812
University email:	S1580812@sms.ed.ac.uk		
Degree sought:	PhD Film Studies	No. of words in the main text of thesis:	79,927
Title of thesis:	Late Night Double Feature: Queer Monstrosity and Cult Cinema		

Insert the abstract text here - the space will expand as you type.

Cult films from the 1970s to the present day are filled with images of monstrous transgression. These images of monsters frequently represent a transgressive queer sensibility and a spectrum of identities and sexualities that break the rules and boundaries of social order and cannot be characterized monolithically. Queer monstrosity arises when the queer subject resists assimilation into mainstream culture. This queer monstrosity develops as a form of separation or disconnection and restructures representation, but this representation also becomes embodied in corporeal form when the queer monster is signified through a physical cinematic body. The body becomes the corporeal depiction of that which is rejected by heteronormative patriarchy, the material form and substance: the monstrosity personified on film. This body, as queer monster, is grotesque. It becomes grotesque as it embraces the stigma of queerness as abnormal, or even gross, and it is transgressive because it violates the rules and boundaries of heteropatriarchal culture.

In cult cinema, where grotesquerie and transgression often reside, queer monstrosity finds a haven and a place of embodiment. This thesis argues that queer monstrosity is present in cult cinema and that this monstrosity is represented in grotesque and transgressive cinematic images of queer bodies in cult films. The thesis considers such representations chronologically, beginning with the queer monster in the midnight movie phenomenon of the 1970s and ending with representations up to the present day (2020). I show how this transgressive queer monstrosity has been represented in cult films and later more mainstream films. My analysis reveals that queer monstrosity reflects broader cultural perceptions surrounding queer identity and a resistance by the queer subject towards assimilation in heteronormative society. In creating and viewing the queer monster, this produced (and continues to produce) a means for audiences and filmmakers to engage with transgression by proxy as a way to reject assimilative, heteronormative practices in queer film representation.

Late Night Double Feature
Queer Monstrosity and Cult Cinema

John Lynskey

PhD Film Studies

The University of Edinburgh

2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
GLOSSARY.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE Historicising Queer Monstrosity: 1970s	14
CHAPTER TWO The Queer Monster in Cult Horror Cinema: 1980s	47
CHAPTER THREE Queer Nostalgia, Community, and Immersion: 1990s	80
CHAPTER FOUR The Queer Monster in the 21st Century: 2000-2010	112
CHAPTER FIVE Queer Horror and Transgression: 2000s	145
CHAPTER SIX The Enduring Queer Monster: 2010s	180
CONCLUSION The Future of Queer Monstrosity	207
FILMOGRAPHY	231
BIBLIOGRAPHY	235

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the valuable expert guidance of my principal supervisor, Dr David Sorfa, and my second supervisor, Dr Carole Jones. I wish to offer my utmost gratitude to both of you for your incredibly helpful comments, feedback, and advice throughout this process. I would also like to give special thanks to my long-time friends and former colleagues, Dr Steve Gronert Ellerhoff and Tiffany Hearsey, for your wonderful proofreading, suggestions, and unconditional support. Thank you for allowing me to see a way forward even in the toughest of times. Finally, warmest gratitude and love to my mother, Jeanne Lynskey, for always believing in me.

ABSTRACT

Cult cinema from the 1970s to the present day is filled with images of monstrous transgression. These images of monsters frequently represent a transgressive queer sensibility and a spectrum of identities and sexualities that break the rules and boundaries of social order and cannot be characterized monolithically. Queer monstrosity arises when the queer subject resists assimilation into mainstream culture. This queer monstrosity develops as a form of separation or disconnection and restructures representation, but this representation also becomes embodied in corporeal form when the queer monster is signified through a physical cinematic body. The body becomes the corporeal depiction of that which is rejected by heteronormative patriarchy, the material form and substance: the monstrosity personified on film. This body, as queer monster, is grotesque. It becomes grotesque as it embraces the stigma of queerness as abnormal, or even gross, and it is transgressive because it violates the rules and boundaries of heteropatriarchal culture.

In cult cinema, where grotesquerie and transgression often reside, queer monstrosity finds a haven and a place of embodiment. This thesis argues that queer monstrosity is present in cult cinema and that this monstrosity is represented in grotesque and transgressive cinematic images of queer bodies in cult films. The thesis considers such representations chronologically, beginning with the queer monster in the midnight movie phenomenon of the 1970s and ending with representations up to the present day (2020). I show how this transgressive queer monstrosity has been represented in cult films. My analysis reveals that queer monstrosity is reflective of broader cultural perceptions surrounding queer identity and a resistance by the queer subject towards assimilation in heteronormative society. In creating and viewing the queer monster, this produced (and continues to produce) a means for audiences and filmmakers to engage with transgression by proxy as a way to reject assimilative, heteronormative practices in queer film representation.

GLOSSARY

Author's Note: Given that many of the terms used in this thesis are contested or have multiple usages across academic scholarship, I have provided the following glossary to enhance these key terms and to present my own use.

<p>Abjection</p>	<p>The literal meaning of abjection is “the state of being cast off.” Drawing on an interest in the monstrous, Julia Kristeva explored the subject of abjection in her book <i>Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection</i>. Kristeva defines abjection as the feeling experienced by a subject of their own corporeal reality, the distinction between self and Other. It is that which is rejected by or disturbs social order, representing taboo elements of the self, separated by a liminal space. In her own words, Kristeva (1982) defines the abject as “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, position, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (p. 4). Queer monsters are often portrayed in cult cinema as abject, given that the monstrous body disturbs social reason by representing the taboo elements of self.</p>
<p>Affect</p>	<p>Affect is often defined in different ways based on the discipline in which it is being studied, resisting a single description. In psychology, affect refers to the underlying experience of feeling, emotion, or mood. In relation to the queer monster and the cult cinema audience, affect is linked to the emotions and bodily responses of the viewers in a collective environment through an experience of transgression. When viewing or engaging with queer monstrosity, the audience feels a certain negative or positive emotional response to the monster’s transgression.</p>
<p>Appropriation</p>	<p>The act of taking something for your own use, usually without permission. Cultural appropriation involves adopting one or more elements of a culture or identity by another culture or identity. Often, a more dominant culture appropriates from a less dominant minority culture; for example, white culture appropriating elements of black culture. In regard to queerness and cult cinema, appropriation involves mainstream heterosexual culture adopting elements of pre-existing queer culture as its own in a form of cultural appropriation. When a film is “queered” by an audience, this involves a re-appropriation by the queer audience, and by this process of reappropriation through affective reception, the queer audience is creating a culturally acceptable form of transgression or deviance.</p>

Carnavalesque	A literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of a dominant style or atmosphere through humour and chaos. “Carnival” as a literary term developed from Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in <i>Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics</i> and later developed in his work <i>Rabelais and His World</i> where he introduces the idea of “carnavalesque.” For Bakhtin (1965/2009), carnival is associated with collectivity and the breakdown of social order, marking “the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (p. 45). During carnival time, a free and familiar contact temporarily reigned amongst citizens, where normal established rules of order in society were broken down. Similar to the carnival setting, the engagement with a cult film in (and outside) the cinema space also consists of human relations, the experience of watching a film in a collective group in a familiar way with similar fans through shared participation.
Community	The term “community” is used in the context of this work to discuss the communal bond formed by audiences in engaging with cult cinema. Scholarly debates on cult cinema often consider the “collective” experience of cult viewing. Midnight movie screenings of <i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> , for instance, were a place of community, where people (from different walks of life) were drawn together by a particular and mutual appreciation. Communal viewing offers a sense of collective identity and the pleasure of engaging with narrative forms with like-minded enthusiasts.
Cult cinema	A term denoting an eclectic group of films that have acquired a cult following. Cult films are often associated with a dedicated and passionate fanbase. These fanbases form elaborate subcultures that engage in repeated viewings and audience participation. Usually commercially and/or critically unsuccessful after their initial release, cult films are often transgressive, breaking cultural taboos by displaying elements of excessive violence, sexuality, and other transgressive acts, and often lack an acceptance by the mainstream. Active participation with cult cinema began in the 1970s during the era of midnight movie screenings (see definition below) and still continues into present day with films such as <i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> (1975).
Cult Horror	As a subcategory of the horror genre, cult horror is considered a subdivision (subgenre) of horror, falling into a similar field with the slasher, supernatural or found footage subgenres, with its own subject matter, style, formula and iconography. In the context of queer monstrosity, cult horror films often depict subversive and transgressive portrayals of the queer monster visibly cutting down the bourgeois heterosexual. Different societal taboos in cult horror films (such as cannibalism, necrophilia, graphic splatter violence, rape and sexual assault), lead to an environment where transgression

	and monstrosity continue to thrive. Order is not restored and the monster continues being monstrous.
Grotesque	A representation of the body in literature, film, and other works of art that displays excess, exaggeration, and hyperbole. The grotesque body is one of profound ambivalence, with its positive meaning being linked to life and its negative meaning of death and decay. The queer monster is often represented as grotesque to embrace the stigma in which queerness has pervaded through history as abnormal, or even gross, and it is transgressive because it violates rules and boundaries of heteropatriarchal society, going beyond the limits imposed upon it.
Heteronormative	Denotes a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal and preferred sexual orientation and is often linked to heterosexism and homophobia. The queer monster often rejects heteronormativity as a means of transgression. As a response to a construction of meaning through heteropatriarchal and cisnormative ideology, one that subjugated the queer subject into a submissive, abhorrent Other, a visible and active movement began amongst the queer community to rearticulate and restructure these representations. Queer monstrosity arose out of this movement from an oppositional standpoint, a means to disidentify with the assimilative practices of heteronormative ideology. Essentially, queer monstrosity did not subscribe to ‘fitting in,’ but rather functioned to construct its own queer ideology of dissent, protest and disunity.
Immersion	Immersive cinema has developed as a recent topic of scholarly debate, namely when analysing cinema and audiences within the context of emerging technologies. With changes in cinematic apparatus, such as projection technology and the development of high-quality cinema architectural devices (stadium seating, wide screen, digital surround sound), some scholars hypothesize these technologies and advancements as linked to the immersion of the spectator. In many cases, forms of immersion for the queer cult audience take place through <i>performance</i> , or by engaging with specific modes of performance.
LGBTQ+	An initialism that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and all other non-heteronormative identities. Often still referred to as LGBT, this initialism is more inclusive and covers the broad range of non-heterosexual, non-cisgender identities that encompass spectrums of sexuality and gender.
Mainstream	Ideas, attitudes, and activities that are shared by society and regarded as normal or conventional. I use the term mainstream to signify Hollywood films seen outside the realm of cult cinema. The queer monster shows a transgression against mainstream representations of queerness, but also works to integrate these identifications of queer

	into mainstream culture and shows ways in which representations of queer identities challenge heteronormativity.
Midnight movies	Beginning in the 1950s as a way for television stations to air low-budget late night genre films, the midnight movie era came to fruition in the 1970s as cinemas in New York began midnight screenings of offbeat and transgressive films such as <i>Pink Flamingos</i> , <i>Eraserhead</i> , <i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> , <i>Night of the Living Dead</i> , and <i>El Topo</i> . The purpose of screening these films at the midnight hour was to garner a cult audience by encouraging repeated viewings and audience interaction in a countercultural setting. Images of queer monstrosity and their place in cult cinema seemingly originated in this countercultural setting. I consider this 1970s midnight movie period as a pivotal starting point (post-Stonewall) in which queer monstrosity became fully realised because of the incredibly vocal and visible gay-rights movement that pervaded during this time, with performances of queer monstrosity acting in response to outspoken vitriol from the heteronormative patriarchy.
Monster	Typically represented as a grotesque creature whose appearance frightens and whose powers of destruction threaten the world's social and moral order. Monsters blur the line between repulsion and attraction, taking on many distinctive visual representations and motivations, including the queer monster, whose purpose is to reject assimilation into heteronormative representations of queerness. Monsters can be read as metaphors for specific marginalised cultural bodies, including queer people. The construction of the monster often represents a catharsis, an embodiment of what we as a society cannot face within ourselves.
Nostalgia	A sentimentality for the past with which one has happy or positive personal associations. This particular definition works within the context of memory, the idealisation of an experienced (or unexperienced) past that translates into a yearning to recapture that nostalgic memory in the present. Yet, these definitions somewhat neglect the purpose (or use) of nostalgic imagery for minority groups, such as the queer community. These groups in particular might disregard any idealised past in favour of a created or constructed nostalgic past. A queer person may wish to construct new nostalgic interpretations of one's history that evoke a more preferred affective response to that past. In a way, queer audiences use nostalgia as a means of confronting the past.
Performance	Performance as a broader term involves an event presented to an audience usually in visual form. Performance modes, as they exist in cult cinema fandom, can be defined as types of performative actions from an audience in a cult cinema screening that characterise specific methods of subcultural, gender and queer identification. These

	<p>performance modes take on several forms depending on the action involved and the person performing the action. Performance is not to be confused with “performativity” in the theories of Judith Butler where the social construction of gender is seen through speech acts and non-verbal communication as performative. Performance involves the bounded act of the performer and the audience, as well as other combinations therein.</p>
Queer	<p>An umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender. Since the early 1990s, with the foundational work of scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Annamarie Jagose, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Diana Fuss, the term “queer” facilitates a reclaiming of the term for those who reject heteronormative gender identities and patriarchal concepts of sexuality, seeking a more ambiguous alternative to labels of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, et al. It refers to those whose gender or sexuality cannot be cast as a single piece, but one that expands, changes, evolves or rejects epistemological or linguistic categorisations. Queer theory seeks to trouble the ways in which heteronormativity pervades culture.</p>
Queer monstrosity	<p>Queer monstrosity is a means to exhibit transgression, an embodiment of how queerness disconnects from heteropatriarchal culture. In essence, being monstrously queer is not chosen by the queer subject. Rather, monstrosity has been imposed upon the queer people by heteropatriarchal society with intention. Queer monstrosity arises through a segregation of the queer subject and its opposition towards assimilation. It should be noted that queer monstrosity develops as a form of separation or disconnect, a way to restructure representation, but this also becomes embodied in physical form as the queer monster when represented by a subject in a physical body in cinema. The body, as being discussed here, becomes the corporeal depiction of that which is rejected by heteronormative patriarchy, the material form and substance—the monstrosity personified on film.</p> <p>As a response to this construction of meaning through heteropatriarchal and cisnormative ideology, one that subjugated the queer subject into a submissive, abhorrent Other, a visible and active movement began amongst the queer community to rearticulate and restructure these representations. Queer monstrosity arose out of this movement from an oppositional standpoint, a means to disidentify with the assimilative practices of heteronormative ideology. Essentially, queer monstrosity did not subscribe to fitting in, but rather functioned to construct its own queer ideology of dissent, protest and disunity: “What I desire is to transgress.”</p>

Transgression	<p>A type of behaviour or act that breaks rules or boundaries of society. However, transgression also reinforces the borders of what is considered transgressive in general. In other words, what is deemed transgressive is only “transgressive” because rules and “conventional” behaviours have been formed against it. It is not disorder but reminds us of the necessity of order. In regard to cult cinema, transgression is at the core of cult cinema receptions, leading to affective forms of response. Queer monstrosity in film representation involves an engagement with transgression to deconstruct the boundaries of what heteropatriarchal society deems acceptable, and particularly as a means to produce negative forms of affect in the sights of the oppressor. That which is grotesque, what causes repugnance and the destabilisation of borders, is <i>transgressive</i> because of this breaking of boundaries, but also <i>affective</i> through its negative response of disgust and abhorrence.</p>
----------------------	---

INTRODUCTION

QUEER MONSTROSITY AND CULT CINEMA

Queer monsters have long held a place in Hollywood filmmaking. Early motion pictures of the 1920s often depicted queer characters subverting traditional gender norms in the form of the “sissy” (feminine man) or “butch” (masculine woman) (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004, p. 6). While these characters became stereotypical clichés of queer representation in early cinema, they were never openly or admittedly queer, but rather something laughable, pitiful, or frightening. The rigid enforcement of the Motion Picture Code (or Hays Code) beginning in 1927 prohibited motion pictures from any explicit representation of “sex perversion” (MPPDA, Inc., 1927, no. 3-2402), meaning that filmmakers could only present representations of queerness through veiled subtext. As such, the appearance of a gender-bending queer character often signified negativity or evil, a cold-blooded villain who caused the downfall or threatened the well-being of a heterosexual hero or heroine. This is particularly true of suspense thrillers and horror films, such as *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935), *Dracula’s Daughter* (Hillyer, 1936), *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940), *Laura* (Preminger, 1944), *The Uninvited* (Allen, 1944), and *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948), where the queer monster is most evident through obscure and indirect insinuation.

Subsequently, the post-war era of the 1950s was an even darker time for Hollywood queer representation. As Harry Benshoff (1997) writes in *Monsters in the Closet*, the 1950s “might be thought of as the darkest decade of the twentieth century both for monsters and for homosexuals, as well as for anyone else who might have considered him/herself somehow outside the hegemonic construction of normality” (p. 122). A dichotomy of Self/Other seemingly pervaded the era, a type of political and sexual paranoia surrounding “difference,” which added “to a socially oppressive atmosphere” that fuelled “a greater social persecution

of homosexuals” (p. 122). Horror films of the 1950s echoed this Self/Other dichotomy, representing a fear of communist invasion, and showing inhuman monsters often with scaly, tentacled, reptilian characteristics that invaded small-town American life. There also existed a teenage monster movie trend that warned of homosexual depravity, where older male figures (teachers, doctors, scientists) attempt to turn young, virile men into monsters. Closer readings of these films, such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Arnold, 1954), *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Fowler, 1957), *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (Strock, 1957), and *How to Make a Monster* (Strock, 1958) reveal a monstrous queer subtext as a threat to a heteronormative mode of living.

In the 1960s, at a time of great cultural upheaval and sexual revolution, the Production Code Administration made changes to their onscreen prohibitions, allowing representations of homosexuality in films “done with ‘care, discretion, and restraint”” (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004, p. 8) This occurred a year after the release of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), which presented a psychologically disturbed Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) cross-dressing and murdering as his dead mother. These changes to the Hays Code brought radical shifts in queer monstrous representation, one which still posited the monster “as a threat to the moral order of society” and another which saw the monster “becoming increasingly domesticated” (Benshoff, 1997, p. 173). By the late 60s, the Hays Code had been abolished and replaced with the MPA rating system, which rated a film’s suitability for certain audiences based on its content.

The Stonewall riots of June 1969, often said to be the start of the modern gay and lesbian civil rights movement (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004, p. 4), led to the formation of the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance, which urged members of the queer community to engage in radical action and celebrate queer pride. This time of queer liberation, along with the nullification of the Hays Code, allowed the queer monster to emerge

from subtext and be situated more openly at the foreground of film representation. In response to these changes, filmmakers began to restructure representations of queer monstrosity and to present a spectrum of identities and sexualities that broke the rules and boundaries of social normativity. These representations were often openly transgressive, used as a means of resisting assimilation into a mainstream Hollywood that historically represented queer characters as contaminated and polluted Others. This resistance towards assimilation and the representation of transgression were more reflective of an authentic queer experience, one in which order was not restored and the monster continued being monstrous.

The Queer Experience

Before moving to a more in-depth discussion of queer monstrosity, I will explain my use of the term “queer” and situate my argument in queer theory and queer audiences. Originally intended to mean “strange” or “peculiar,” the pejorative (or derogatory) use of the term “queer” would most commonly be used to describe homosexual desires or same sex relationships. Since the early 1990s, with the foundational work of scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Annamarie Jagose, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Diana Fuss, the term “queer” facilitates a reclaiming of the term for those who reject heteronormative gender identities and patriarchal concepts of sexuality, seeking a more ambiguous alternative to labels of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, et al. Jagose (1996), in her book *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, constitutes the definition of queer as resisting a model of stability, focusing on “mismatches between sex, gender and desire” and exploiting the “incoherencies” in those three areas (p. 3). For Sedgwick (1994), “queer” refers to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or

can't be made) to signify monolithically” (p. 8). In other words, “queer” refers to those whose gender or sexuality cannot be cast as a single piece, but one that expands, changes, evolves or rejects epistemological or linguistic categorisations. However, Sedgwick (1994) also commends understandings of queer “that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all,” along with other “identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses” (p. 9). With these discourses of queer that are not incorporated into ideas of gender and sexuality, the definition of queer “deepens and shifts.” Therefore, queer theory itself works not only to integrate these identifications of queer into mainstream culture, but also to note the ways in which representations of queer identities challenge heteronormativity.

More recently, Darren Elliott-Smith (2016) notes that queer theory “seeks to investigate, and therefore trouble, the ways in which the structures of heteronormativity pervade culture” and “focuses on the stigmatisation of non-normative sexualities” (pp. 3-4). Queer theory also seeks to include and “integrate” these non-normative sexualities into the mainstream “as a process of cultural normalisation or assimilation” (p. 4).

However, this process of assimilation could be challenged when considering Jack Halberstam (2005) and his discussion of “the queer way of life” which encompasses “subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these wilfully eccentric modes of being” (p. 1). Essentially, queer in this cases detaches from sexual identity and is instead considered through “queer time,” or the ways in which one disengages in opposition from bourgeois frames of “family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” as well as “longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (p. 6). It is also considered through “queer space” and the “place making practices” of embodiment through which queer people engage (p. 6). Here, queer identity is not working towards assimilation, but rather creating its own *separate* place of transgression, one that detaches from assimilation and situates queerness outside of heterosexual cultural

practice. In this way, queer monstrosity and the representation of queer monstrosity are a means of embodying this transgression. By reappropriating certain queer representations of the monstrous through affective reception, the queer audience creates an acceptable form of transgressive behaviour and expresses an open desire to transgress. The ideal sanctuary or place of embodiment for this transgressive queer monstrosity is the cult film, where radical and transgressive representation is celebrated by its progressive and devoted audience.

Cult Cinema Audiences

Scholarly debates on cult cinema often focus on a collective experience of cult audiences and a consumption element, a consumption which “relies on continuous, intense participation and persistence, on the commitment of an active audience [...]” (Mathijs & Mendik, 2008, p. 4). Fans who are quite visible and cult-like show a particular devotion to a film (or set of films) by actively participating in the space of a cult film screening. In many cases, these participations are developed through receptions of cult films that are “affective,” relating to moods, feelings and attitudes surrounding film content and transgression.

There is no single definition of affect. From a critical theory perspective, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) utilises affect to define the connection between feeling, learning, and action, using Silvan Tomkins’s psychological analysis of primary affects (namely shame) as foundation (p. 97). Lauren Berlant (2011) analyses the affective structure of the experience of “cruel optimism,” the individual’s creation of attachment toward a “good life fantasy” as an obstacle to one’s “flourishing” (pp. 1-2). From a film perspective, Carl Plantinga (2009) analyses the notion of affect in cinema on the part of the viewer or audience, the experience of emotion as “one of the principle motivations for the viewing of movies,” and these filmic emotions as both “intrinsic” (the enjoyable emotions experienced by viewing) and “extrinsic” (meta-emotions or social communications that develop from viewing) (p. 5). I situate my

definition of affect closer to Plantinga. Affect, in relation to the cult cinema audience, is linked to the emotions and bodily responses of the viewers in a collective environment through an experience of transgression.

Using the term “affective communities,” Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton (2011) describe the ways in which cult fans are active agents in collective experience that focuses on “the other.” The Other in this context involves one who is outside the norm, and celebrates that which is subversive, taboo, or transgressive. In particular, perceptions and experiences of transgression “lie at the heart of a particular range of cult receptions, namely *affective receptions*” (p. 97). These affective receptions are responses by the cult audience that “negotiate *negative* forms of affect such as disgust, revulsion and aversion.” Effectively, the audience that engages in affective receptions can become equally transgressive and subversive, but also “recuperative” (p. 100).

Barry K. Grant (2008) contends that, while transgression manifests itself in several ways (through subject matter, attitude, and even the “tacky”), what makes films “cultish” is their capability of being “at once transgressive *and* recuperative, in other words, to reclaim that which they seem to violate” (p. 78). This concept of duality between transgression and recuperation is achieved “through a particular inflection of the figure of the Other,” which then gives the viewer “the double satisfaction of both rejecting dominant cultural values and remaining safely inscribed within them” (p. 78). This ability of cult films to prescribe to a dual ideology of both sameness and difference speaks to a wider connection between the film and the cult viewer. J.P. Telotte (1991) suggests the notion of a cult film as “supertext,” which works to place audiences within the definition of what a cult film actually *is*, but also helps to explain difficulties in defining “the appearance or popularity of the cult film” (p. 10).

In highlighting this importance of defining the cult film according to its loving and devoted audience, as well as the ways in which cult audiences work simultaneously through

transgression and recuperation, I argue that queer viewers reappropriate cult films to highlight their *own* transgression and thereby reclaim that which has been appropriated by heterosexual culture. Appropriation, in regard to queerness and cult cinema, involves mainstream heterosexual culture adopting elements of pre-existing queer culture as its own in a form of cultural appropriation. With cult cinema, it is often theorised that queer viewers appropriate cult films by wilfully reinterpreting them, or by a process of “queering” the films. However, this theorisation becomes problematic when pre-existing queer texts are appropriated or played with by heterosexual culture, given that this queering is not a reinterpretation but instead a reappropriation or reclaiming.

Mathijs and Sexton (2008) have previously pinpointed aspects of cult viewership and its relationship to the gay or queer audience, which they term “queering”:

The concept of queering relies on the pun involved in merging the terms “queer” (gay) and “query” (investigation). It refers to the audience activity of reading against the grain, of wilfully reinterpreting films by looking for performances of non-normative sexuality even against the intentions of the filmmakers [...] While largely playful and seldom attempting to effectively alter the course of a film’s reception, queering has nevertheless impacted on the status of resolutely mainstream films, up to the point where it has ignited, rather than extended, cult status. (pp. 115-116)

In this way, the “queering” of a film involves a re-appropriation by the queer audience, and by this process of reappropriation through affective reception, the queer audience is creating a culturally acceptable form of transgression or deviance. The transgressive nature of this re-appropriation lies within the deviant nature of these cult films, or what has been termed deviant by society. What makes the re-appropriation of these films by the queer audience a culturally acceptable form of transgression is the carnivalesque nature of the cult film screening.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1965/2009) introduces the idea of the “carnavalesque,” or carnival. For Bakhtin, carnival is associated with collectivity and the breakdown of social order: “One might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from

the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was a true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed” (p. 45). However, carnival time was also temporary and, once finished, social order was restored.

In a sense, the space of the cult cinema screening becomes a carnivalesque space, one in which the rules of order normally established in cinema spaces and theatres are temporarily broken down. Of the carnival, Bakhtin (1965/2009) writes:

Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. [...] Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed and essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. (p. 45-46)

Similar to the carnival setting, the engagement with a cult film in (and outside) the cinema space also consists of human relations, the experience of watching a film in a collective group in a familiar way with similar fans through shared participation. It is also a space for the Other, one who may be cast as deviant by heteropatriarchal society, to openly transgress. The carnivalesque space of the cult cinema screening is also inspired, in part, by the diegetic performances of the queer monsters on screen, particularly their transgressions. Through the representation of these transgressions, the queer monster inspires the audience to openly transgress themselves, thereby breaking the barriers of social order normally followed in cinema spaces. I address these diegetic representations of transgression and their impact on the audience in Chapter 1 with an analysis of the midnight movie phenomenon of the 1970s. For instance, Divine in John Waters’s cult exploitation comedy *Pink Flamingos* (1972), engages in abject, grotesque, and transgressive behaviour that ultimately inspires the film’s raucous audience engagement in the screening space. Divine acts an example of an identifier

for a queer cult audience, a figure that can be manipulated, impersonated or imitated for the audience to situate (or not situate) themselves within a particular cultural discourse. This identification on the part of a queer audience, the ability for Divine to be considered a queer monster, lies within his star persona and the relationship of star to audience, as well as his open and honest transgression.

However, it is important to address that not all cult films inspire this carnivalesque transgressive behaviour, nor do all queer monsters on screen inspire transgression. As will be discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, queer monsters in films of recent decades (2000-present) are often witnessed in a more mainstream context. These films are not cult as such, but yet have cult characteristics, cult appeal, or the tendency to *become* cult through these representations of monstrosity and transgression by the queer monster. This is also illustrated by a mainstreaming of cult film culture in the 21st century, where films are often marketed or repackaged as cult for a wider audience, or where cult fandom is no longer restricted to arthouse, independent, or underground film circuits through word of mouth.

The contemporary digital age and the accessibility of cult materials on the internet have changed the landscape of *cult* significantly, effectively democratising any idea of cult subculture and blurring any lines between cult and mainstream. Bob Batchelor (2012) writes that the widespread use of the term ‘cult’ obscures its meaning: “One finds that anything, anyone, or any group that is slightly off kilter is dubbed a cult, just as is an item in these categories that gains a quick or unexplained popularity.” (p. xii) To avoid such generalisation in regard to cult cinema and the mainstream, I argue that the films analysed in later chapters herald or *indicate* potential cult status based on their depictions of queer monstrosity, transgression and recuperation. This indication of potential cult status also illustrates how understandings of cult, and indeed representations of queer monstrosity, change over time across various cultural landscapes. In other words, what designated films as cult in the 1970s

is no longer what designates them as cult in present day. However, a sense of cohesion and linkage remains among these films across these cultural divides through the enduring figure of the queer monster.

Queer Monstrosity

In his chapter “Monster Culture: Seven Theses,” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) presents seven hypotheses to understanding culture through monstrosity. Relevant to the arguments in this thesis are four of these seven: “Thesis I: The Monster’s Body is a Cultural Body,” “Thesis IV: The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference,” “Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible,” and “Thesis VI: Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire” (pp. 4-20). Although much has developed in monster theory since Cohen’s work was published, his theses provide a useful framework in understanding the construction of queer monstrosity, as well as understanding the monster in culture more generally. In regard to the monstrous body in Thesis I, Cohen writes that “The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic and incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture” (p. 4). If the monster reflects the fears, desires, and anxieties within culture itself, the queer monster reflects these anxieties of those more marginalised.

I define queer monstrosity as a means to exhibit transgression, an embodiment of how queerness disconnects and separates from heteropatriarchal culture. In essence, being monstrously queer is not chosen by the queer subject. Rather, monstrosity has been imposed upon the queer people by heteropatriarchal society with intention. Before the Stonewall riots in the late 1960s, homosexuality was viewed by the American Psychiatric Association as a “sociopathic personality disturbance” and, in a majority of the States, homosexuality was still illegal under sodomy laws (CNN Library, n.p.). It was only after the Stonewall riots in 1969

that psychologist George Weinberg (1973) coined the term “homophobia” (p. 2) and homosexuality was removed from the list of mental disorders (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, p. 146). Given this societal understanding and adverse judgment towards homosexuality, the idea that queerness was viewed as a “disorder,” and the ability of these aversions to be dismantled, the queer subject remained in a marginal or in-between state, unable to occupy a secure subject position in culture. While recent decades have seen more widespread acceptance of the queer subject through decriminalisation, gay marriage legislation, and further outspoken approval of queer lifestyles, anti-LGBT rhetoric and homophobia still remain quite rampant from various conservative religious and political groups, particularly in the United States.¹

Cohen’s (1996) fourth thesis, “The monster dwells at the gates of difference,” gives further explanation to the marginalisation of the queer subject: “The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond” (p. 7). Queer monstrosity arises through a segregation of the queer subject and its opposition towards assimilation. It should be noted that queer monstrosity develops as a form of separation or disconnect, a way to restructure representation, but this also becomes embodied in physical form as the queer monster when represented by a subject in a cinematic physical body. The body, as being discussed here, becomes the corporeal depiction of that which is rejected by heteronormative patriarchy, the material form and substance—the monstrosity personified on film. This body, as queer monster, is *grotesque*. It becomes grotesque to embrace the stigma in which queerness has pervaded through history as abnormal, or even gross, and it is

¹ For example, the Westboro Baptist Church and their “God Hates Fags” and “Fear God Not Fags” slogans, as well as the recent ban of transgender people serving in the United States Military and the Trump administration’s efforts to define gender as unchangeable (Brouwer & Hess, 2007, p. 70).

transgressive because it violates rules and boundaries of heteropatriarchal society, going beyond the limits imposed upon it.

This leads us to Cohen's (1996) fifth thesis, "The monster polices the borders of the possible," as it transgresses these heteropatriarchal boundaries "interdicting through its grotesque body some behaviors and actions, envaluing others [...] the monster is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed" (pp. 13, 16). In cult cinema, where grotesquerie and transgression often reside, queer monstrosity finds a haven, or a place of embodiment. This thesis argues for the presence of queer monstrosity in cult cinema by how this monstrosity is represented in the grotesque and transgressive cinematic images of queer bodies in cult films. This will be argued from different vantage points in each of the six chapters, which all advance chronologically. Over time and now into the 21st century, the queer monster on screen is not always represented as grotesque or transgressive as it was in the 1970-80s, as societal understandings of queer identity alter and transform. As will be analysed in the latter chapters of this thesis, these grotesque and transgressive representations take on varying levels of acceptability and classification when seen in more contemporary and mainstream contexts. Films representing queer monstrosity in more recent decades reframe and critique considerations of the monstrous in contemporary society, while simultaneously showing the horrors encountered by queer protagonists in the modern world. In effect, these films represent queer persons as monstrous but, in many cases, show how the heteropatriarchal world in which they live constructs and treats them as monstrous.

As a starting point, Chapter One analyses queer monstrosity in cult midnight movies of the 1970s and performances of grotesquerie, transgression and the abject, demonstrating how these representations influence appropriation and affective reception by the queer audience. Chapter Two studies queer monstrosity in cult horror films through grotesque and

transgressive physical images of queer bodies in conjunction with the demonization of gay men in the 1980s at the beginning and height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Chapter Three provides an analysis of contemporary cult audiences and their engagement with nostalgia, community, and immersion in viewing cult films and the ways in which queer monstrosity influences these engagements.

Chapter Four is a study of queer monstrosity in the new millennium examining how representations of queer monstrosity shifted through more mainstream depictions in the first decade of the 21st century (2000-2010) outside the realm of cult cinema. Chapter Five explores queer monstrosity and transgression in horror films from 2000-2010, providing an examination of queer monstrosity in the same decade of the new millennium, where representations of queer monsters persisted despite the rather cleansed and sanitised representations of their mainstream counterparts. Chapter Six investigates the endurance of the queer monster in critically successful films released between 2010-2020 and the ways in which these monsters reframe and critique considerations of the monstrous in contemporary society.

Finally, there is a concluding chapter which, aside from reiterating key arguments, analyses the future of queer monstrosity in the digital age—early 2000s to present—discussing the continual presence of queer monstrosity in a time of digital downloads, online streaming and growing technology. Once seen and witnessed in underground spaces, the queer monster is now visible and accessible to the wider world. This chapter, while rooted in theoretical argument, will be largely conjectural (given its engagement with the futural) but will also attempt to carry onward future arguments and scholarly engagements with queer monstrosity.

It is important to note that the films used for analysis here occasionally draw on an international filmography, given that the queer monster transgresses and endures across

multiple cultural landscapes. It is malleable and ever-shifting, a presence that can be adapted and shaped to suit the needs and desires of various filmmakers to represent transgression, one that is not bound strictly by any particular country or culture. Drawing on this international filmography, namely with films such as *High Tension* (2003), *Otto; or Up with Dead People* (2008), *Let the Right One In* (2008), and *Stranger by the Lake* (2013), I will demonstrate the adaptability of queer monstrosity as an effective tool for representational transgression in multiple cultural contexts.

With each chapter, I illustrate this presence of queer monstrosity by showing how this monstrosity has been represented in films with transgression in each decade and how these representations adapt and change over time. Through this enduring presence of the queer monster, we are led to Cohen's (1996) sixth thesis: "Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire." What frightens us against the monster is simultaneously linked to a desire for the monster and its transgressions. Cohen writes:

The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices, in order to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. [...] The simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster's composition accounts greatly for its continued cultural popularity, for the fact that the monster seldom can be contained in a simple, binary dialectic. [...] When contained by geographic, generic, or epistemic marginalization, the monster can function as an alter ego, as an alluring projection of (an Other) self. (pp. 16-17)

This projection of the monster as an alter ego, or the "Other" part of ourselves, the one we generally cannot face, is the core of queer monstrosity. The analysis in each of these chapters focuses in part on the cultural milieu surrounding queer identity in each of these time periods, the ways in which queerness was viewed by heteropatriarchal society and how queer monstrosity acted as a response to these environments: the simultaneous repulsion and attraction to the Other. I consider the 1970s a pivotal starting point (post-Stonewall) in which queer monstrosity became fully realised because of the incredibly vocal and visible gay-

rights movement that pervaded during this time, with performances of queer monstrosity acting in response to outspoken vitriol from the heteronormative patriarchy.

This outspoken rejection of queerness, namely that of homosexuality, involved a distinct type of representation through language, what Stuart Hall (1997) refers to as “intentional” approach to representation (p. 25). With the intentional approach, the speaker (in this case the oppressor) intends a certain meaning in how they represent queer identity and “imposes his or her own unique meaning” (p. 25) on the queer subject. As a response to this construction of meaning through heteropatriarchal and cisnormative ideology, one that subjugated the queer subject into a submissive, abhorrent Other, a visible and active movement began amongst the queer community to rearticulate and restructure these representations. Queer monstrosity arose out of this movement from an oppositional standpoint, a means to disidentify with the assimilative practices of heteronormative ideology. Essentially, queer monstrosity did not subscribe to belonging, but rather functioned to construct its own queer ideology of dissent, protest and disunity: *What I desire is to transgress.*

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICISING QUEER MONSTROSITY: 1970s

This chapter will analyse how representations of transgression (through grotesquerie and the abject) influence appropriation and affective reception by the queer audience.

Namely, I analyse these representations in John Waters's transgressive black comedy *Pink Flamingos* (1972), Albert and David Maysles' 1976 documentary *Grey Gardens*, and Jim Sharman's 1975 cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. This will involve exploring the films through textual analysis, indicating how elements of these films might influence queer audiences to appropriate or engage with them.

Through audience participation, and constructed forms of interaction around these cult films in the 70s, the queer audience developed perceptions of transgression that counteracted hegemonic boundaries of cultural acceptability. These perceptions of transgression signified the parameters that society placed against queerness as non-normative, or the restrictions around what patriarchal, bourgeois society defined as "queer."

By the queer audience engaging with films that contained elements of the grotesque, transgression, and the abject, they were simultaneously creating cultural acceptance, disaffecting, through concepts of abnormality and taboo, and appropriating these elements as part of a queer construct. I draw a theoretical argument of the grotesque through a study by Justin D. Edwards and Rune Grauland (2013) which uses concepts of excess, caricature and transgression to define grotesque, formulated by original concepts of grotesque realism by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin (1965/2009), in his study of the grotesque body, notes that exaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness are considered "the fundamental attributes of the grotesque style." (p. 303) The films being analysed here contain these elements of the grotesque, whether intentional or not; with *Pink Flamingos*, the

grotesque comes through these representations of grotesque excess, caricature and transgression in the actions of the characters and the image of the feminine body with the main character, Divine. With *Grey Gardens*, the grotesque is seen in the representation of the feminine body as diverse and aging (the opposite of a patriarchal idealisation of the “classical” body) and the exposure of this body as spectacle. In *Rocky Horror*, the grotesque is represented through excess and the ways in which characters’ exhibit exaggeration and transgression through aesthetic appearance and behaviour. The advantage of executing these particular analyses will be to re-establish a contemporary understanding of queer audiences and queer monstrosity in early cult cinema.

The Cult of *Pink Flamingos*

Midnight movie screenings in the United States can be traced back as far as the 1930s, with distributors and exhibitors running midnight programmes of exploitation films, such as Elmer Clifton’s *Gambling with Souls* (1936). Later, Hammer Films presented a set of midnight presentations of Terence Fisher’s *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957. The first original midnight movie, in the vein of the well-known 1970s presentations, is uncertain. The Elgin Theatre in New York City, which would later become a famous midnight movie venue, screened Kenneth Anger’s short film *Invocation of My Demon Brother* in 1969. The film, starring Anton LaVey (founder of the Church of Satan) and Bobby Beausoleil (famous murderer and associate of the Manson family), depicts intercuts of various occult symbology superimposed with images of a Rolling Stones concert. The film is often thought to be an inauguration of the midnight movie cult that began in the early 1970s (Lachman, 2001, p. 305).

However, the film that ignited the popularity of midnight movies is Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *El Topo* (1970), a gory acid Western film about a violent gunfighter on a quest

for enlightenment. It depicts excessive violent carnage, including images of limbs being shot off, self-immolation, and a rape scene, which Jodorowsky claims was an actual rape in the name of authenticity (O'Hara, 2017, n.p.). With the success of the midnight screenings of *El Topo*, several other theatres in New York began their own midnight movie screenings, including the Waverly, which screened George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and the Bijou, which screened Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932).

In 1973, the Elgin began screening John Waters's exploitation black comedy *Pink Flamingos*. The film was soon celebrated because of its transgressive content, which one critic referred to as "a human degradation" (Wolff, 1975, n.p.) with scenes of cannibalism, coprophagia (the consumption of faeces), rape, murder, incest, voyeurism, castration, defecation, as well as "a magnificent foot fetish sequence...and a party entertainer who has a dancing asshole" (Samuels, 1983, p. 113). Audience members who attended frequent screenings of the film would memorize lines of dialogue and recite them as the film played on screen, cheering as the characters engaged in these transgressive acts. It was a social gathering, a place for the youth culture of the community to be outrageous and engage with like-minded people. According to Stuart Samuels (1983), watching "the outrage on screen gave you the incentive to be more outrageous in the audience—shouting obscenities, mouthing lines, dressing in drag, issuing forth simulated barfs and real farts" (p. 123). Screenings of the film were also a place for recreational drug use. John Waters, in a documentary on midnight movies, states: "In the theatres they smoked marijuana, I mean it was a very different time [...] Everyone was high, one hundred percent of the audience was high every night for *Pink Flamingos*. I was high when I wrote it...I was *not* high when I made it" (Samuels, 2005, n.p.). The use of drugs during these screenings speaks quite clearly to the film's transgressive nature and the influence of this transgression on the audience.

While this midnight movie circuit dissipated in the 1980s, there still remain contemporary underground film groups that celebrate Waters's films, particularly *Pink Flamingos*. The Amy Grimehouse, a London based collective that describes itself as "a cinema/arts club night that celebrates trashy, camp, cult and transgressive film, art and books," presented the "12 Hour John Waters Filth Festival" in March 2014. The festival included twelve straight hours of John Waters's film screenings in the Islington Metal Works venue, along with a tea-bagging (placing scrotum in another's mouth) booth, a film studio to recreate your favourite John Waters's film moments, and a competition to find "The Filthiest Person in London." At the screening of *Pink Flamingos*, audience members recited lines of dialogue with the film (a common trend), while a devoted fan dressed as Divine passed pieces of chocolate to the other audience members to recreate the film's infamous final scene where Divine consumes real dog excrement.

This celebration of "filth" and transgression constructed by the John Waters cult audience is based around the content and subject matter of his films. Deemed by his fans as "The Pope of Trash" (Musto, 2015, n.p.), Waters's earlier films, such as *Mondo Trasho* (1969), *Multiple Maniacs* (1970), *Pink Flamingos* (1972), *Female Trouble* (1974), and *Desperate Living* (1977), are commonly meant to shock a mainstream audience, embracing queerness and celebrating the Other. But what are the elements of *Pink Flamingos*, in particular, that have made it celebrated (or supported) by a queer cult audience? This *Pink Flamingos* queer cult audience is not representative of *all* queer audiences, but rather a particular type of queer audience that identifies with the aesthetics, ideals, or subjects that *Pink Flamingos* personifies.

To briefly summarise, *Pink Flamingos* centres on the character of Babs Johnson (Divine, Figure 1), who has been hiding away in an off-the-grid pink caravan to escape her fame and notoriety after being declared by national tabloids as "The Filthiest Person Alive."

In the trailer and nearby shed live her psychopathic son, Crackers (Danny Mills), her egg-obsessed and crib-bound mother Edie (Edith Massey), and her traveling companion, Cotton (Mary Vivian Pearce). Her rivals, Connie and Raymond Marbles (Mink Stole and David Lochary) run an “adoption clinic,” in which they kidnap young girls, have them impregnated by their gay manservant (Channing Wilroy), and then sell the babies to lesbian couples. When Divine discovers the Marbles’ plan to steal her title as “The Filthiest Person Alive,” she goes on a rampage, attempting to get revenge and maintain her “filthy” reputation.



Figure 1. Promotional photo of Divine in *Pink Flamingos*. “Style in John Waters’ *Pink Flamingos*.” Dazed Digital, 26 Aug 2015.

Throughout the film, we see distinct

representations of the *grotesque* and *abject* associated with Divine and the others through their (1) actions, (2) visual and physical representations, and (3) verbal affirmations of transgression. Justin D. Edwards and Rune Grauland (2013) discuss *grotesque* figures as having “discombobulating juxtapositions and bizarre combinations.” Essentially, grotesque bodies “can reveal how the boundaries between the ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are fluid, not fixed, and [...] can lead to an erasure of common distinctions” (p. 9). The grotesque can also be defined through exaggeration, or by exaggerating something beyond its normal physical proportions, either through individual body parts or the whole body (p. 67). This is associated with the characters’ physicalities in *Pink Flamingos*, particularly Divine and the ways in which bodies are represented in the film through grotesque exaggeration.

This grotesque exaggeration allows for the archetypal normality of the female body to be disengaged through the viewer's perspective. Essentially, the viewer is not seeing an image of femininity that has been formulated by heteropatriarchal culture, but a femininity developed through the grotesque that ridicules a mainstream, bourgeois idea of the feminine. First, let us look at Divine's physical appearance and how it is represented as "grotesque," collapsing boundaries of femininity through gross exaggeration. In Figure 1, we see an iconic image of Divine from the film used in most promotional material and cover art: she is dressed head to toe in a tight red dress that accentuates a feminine figure with large breasts and wide hips. Her hair is bright orange, pulled to the back of her head with dark painted roots and her makeup is excessively prominent, with large curved painted eyebrows. Her hand is planted firmly on her waist in a gesture of confidence and strength, while the other hand points a gun off camera in a gesture of power and aggression. The distinction here between what is grotesque and not grotesque lies in the performance of Divine as an exaggerated female. She could not be classified as what Halberstam refers to as "the androgyne," which represents "a different form of gender variance than the masculine woman" and involves "some form of gender mixing" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 57). I base this assertion solely on Divine's physical representation—her appearance is not androgynous but exaggeratedly and pointedly female.

Divine is grotesque for the very reason that her femininity is so embellished, acting as a form of *caricature* of the female and the female body. Edwards and Grauland (2013) argue that caricature, as a form of the grotesque, often "exaggerates a single body part [...] exceeding the limits of harmony and transgressing the aesthetic principles of realism. Yet caricature also relies on a metonymic relationship to its subject" (p. 67). In this case, Divine's exaggerated female body is not making a caricature of one singular body part but symbolising "the character, the core or totality, of the person being depicted" (p. 67).

Aside from exaggeration, there is also the element of *excess* as grotesque that actually signifies transgression. Excess is “to overflow, to invade, [...] to exceed limits” (p. 74) and when something is faced with excess, or something larger than itself, “it expands outward” (p. 75). Transgression involves going against an established code of conduct or to go beyond “the bounds of an aesthetic, ethical or established form of behaviour,” (p. 66) but it also reinforces the borders of what is considered transgressive in general. In other words, what is deemed transgressive is only “transgressive” because rules and “conventional” behaviours have been formed against it. According to Chris Jenks (2003), transgression is a conduct which “breaks rules or exceeds boundaries” (p. 3). However, he is also quick to note that transgressive behaviour does not deny these boundaries, “rather it exceeds them and thus completes them” (p. 7). Transgression is not disorder, but instead reminds us of “the necessity of order.” In a way, *Pink Flamingos* contains such elements of transgression to an extent that we are reminded of order and boundaries because it purposefully surpasses them and allows us to recognise them. This could be the reason why the queer cult audience celebrates *Pink Flamingos*—in a society where transgressive behaviour is outside the boundaries of “normal” and “established” behaviour, a queer audience that welcomes (or adopts) transgression as part of an aesthetic or social behaviour recognises the film’s intention to be a model for transgression.

While this transgression occurs throughout the film, there are several key scenes where it is most relevant and identifiable. Several of these scenes also contain elements of abjection, and the grotesque body, which link themselves to the characters’ transgressive behaviour. Firstly, the chicken scene. Divine’s son, Crackers, brings a woman named Cookie back to his shed and has sex with her, all while killing a chicken that he crushes between their bodies. John Waters (2005) has confirmed that they did in fact kill a live chicken while filming:

Before you run off to report me to the ASPCA [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals], let me inform you that the cast cooked *and* ate this same chicken immediately after the filming, therefore making it, well, morally ethical, if you like. [...] I got this chicken at a ‘freshly killed poultry’ store, so actually I gave it a reprieve from death row. Not only did the chicken get ‘fucked,’ so to speak, it also got famous in a movie to boot. We actually made this chicken’s life better. (p. 10)

This scene is where transgression and abjection are amalgamated or merged, but it does not merely centre on the killing of the chicken. This amalgamation involves the subjects of the film coming in contact with death, or the corpse and the bodily fluids associated with it.

With the killing of the chicken comes blood, and with sex comes the exposure of bodily orifices expelling fluid. According to Julia Kristeva (1982), abjection involves rejecting our excretory bodies, and the fluids that expel from these orifices, because they are signs of disorder, encroaching upon the body’s ambiguous limits. Essentially, abjection is what separates us from what is self and what is the Other (p. 4). Abjection is also “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (p. 4). Thus, the characters in this scene are abject because they defy the boundaries of systematic order.

The second image of transgression features cannibalism and a prolapsed anus. Divine has a large birthday celebration, where she is given multiple gifts including lice shampoo, a pig’s head and an axe. As entertainment for the party, a contortionist performs, flexing his prolapsed anus to the tune of “Surfin’ Bird.” The Marbles, who are spying on the party from the woods nearby, call the police. When the police arrive, Divine murders them with her new axe and, along with her party guests, eats their bodies.

Aside from the blatant elements of transgression in this scene (the murder and cannibalism), there is also an element of “freakery” or the freakish body represented by the contortionist with the prolapsed anus. David Church (2011) discusses cult cinema’s emphasis on what he calls “corporeal difference,” or variances in physical or bodily form, as represented on screen. This emphasis on corporeal difference “encourages ambivalent

pleasures (leaving viewers ‘simultaneously repulsed, attracted and fascinated’), but the ‘partiality’ of spectacle visually reinscribes non-normative bodies as deviant others” (p. 11). In this case, the freakish body or the image of freakery may seemingly “abject the borders between self/other and normal/abnormal” (p. 11).

The third image of transgression is *coprophagia*. In the film’s infamous final scene, we hear a voiceover from the narrator (Waters himself): “The filthiest people alive? Well, you think you know somebody filthier? Watch as Divine proves that she is not only the filthiest person in the world, she is also the filthiest *actress* in the world. What you are about to see is *the real thing*.” This narration plays as Crackers, Cotton, and Divine walk down the street and spot a dog with its owner. After the dog defecates on the sidewalk, Divine kneels down and eats the dog’s faeces. She gags twice, grins, and the screen goes to black.

As with the chicken scene discussed above, Waters publicly acknowledged that Divine did actually eat dog faeces while filming this scene in the Steve Yeager biopic *Divine Trash* (1998). Here, in terms of the abject, the border that signifies the body’s separation from death and decay has been broken: “These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, against death” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). Essentially, Divine has ingested the very fluid or defilement that the body rejects. Mary Douglas (2002) discusses the external boundaries of filth and bodily fluids as a form of gratification, as well as the power and place of “dirt.” External boundaries and internal lines separate fluids within the body, but the danger of bodily fluids exists in the societal idea of “margins,” and the orifices of the body symbolise the most vulnerable points of this margin (p. 120). Therefore, Divine acts as a visual representation of these margins being breached or violated, and is disturbing what Kristeva (1982) would call “borders, positions [or] rules” (p. 4). Divine consuming real dog excrement while filming this scene provides a double layered signification, where any boundaries between artistic representation and reality are also

collapsed and violated. The audience, while viewing this real consumption of filth, enters a liminal space at the boundary between genuine transgression and the representation of this transgression in a fictional narrative. It is exactly this liminality, the blurring of boundaries between the normal and the abnormal, that leads to the film's transgressive cult following.

We have seen from these scenes that *Pink Flamingos* exhibits distinct representations of grotesque and transgressive behaviour, as well as elements of the abject. These representations give us an understanding of the queer monstrosity and why this film has developed a queer cult following. The film itself contains queer elements (alternative modes of being, non-heteronormative sexuality, a rejection of hegemonic modes of normalcy), and because aspects of queerness already exist in the film, it is appropriated by the queer audience to engage in transgression. In other words, if the queer audience makes a recognisable and deliberate engagement with a film such as *Pink Flamingos*, they are simultaneously constructing a culturally acceptable transgression. The elements of the film that are grotesque, abject and transgressive represent a rejection of heteronormativity and a mainstream understanding of normality, both of which construct the boundaries of transgression.

'The Filthiest Person Alive': Divine as Queer Monster

In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) discusses the queer performance and its way of "disidentification": "Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture" (p. 95). In other words, queer bodies can manipulate what they see on the screen and situate themselves within and against various discourses through which they are called to identify. Divine (Harris Glen Milstead) acts an example of an identifier for a queer cult audience, a figure that can be manipulated,

impersonated or imitated for the audience to situate (or not situate) themselves within a particular cultural discourse.

This identification on the part of a queer audience, the ability for Divine to be considered a queer monster, lies within her star persona and the relationship of star to audience. According to Richard Dyer (1987), stars act as a representation of being human in contemporary society and “they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the ‘individual’” (p. 8). As a queer monster, one acts as a *direct* or an *indirect* representation of queerness, but also represents how society perceives the “person” as a distinct entity. The star expresses this notion of the individual “complexly” and “variously,” but not as a “straightforward affirmation of individualism” (p. 8). In many instances, the queer monster will express a subcultural identity that rejects heteronormativity, just as stars “articulate both the promise and difficulty that the notion of individuality presents” (p. 8). Furthermore, the queer monster will typically not adapt or integrate themselves into a normative or mainstream idea of the conventional. Divine as a queer monster rejects this conformity, expresses her subcultural identity and stands as an identifiable star persona, particularly in *Pink Flamingos*.

There are several instances in the film when Divine exhibits this queer identifiability, this star persona that nominates her as a queer monster through expressions of transgression through both subcultural ideology and representations of camp. In one scene, when interviewed by a group of news reporters, Divine (as Babs) openly expresses her sexual fetishes and “political beliefs” as they ask her questions:

MAT HINLIN. Divine, are you a lesbian?

DIVINE. Yes. I have done *everything*.

RON VESPO. Does blood turn you on?

DIVINE. It does *more* than turn me on, Mr. Vespo, it makes me *cum*! And more than the sight of it, I love the taste of it, the taste of hot freshly killed blood.

MOREY ROBERTS. Could you give us some of your political beliefs?

DIVINE. Kill everyone now! Condone first-degree murder! Advocate cannibalism! Eat shit! Filth are my politics, filth is my life! [Posing wildly] Take whatever you like! [She puts hands on crotch and mugs hideously to the cameramen] How’s *this* for a centre spread? (Waters, 1988, pp. 77-78)

This is not to suggest that Divine's politics of condoning murder, cannibalism and filth are identifiable as part of queer monstrosity, but rather as a representation of anti-heteronormativity and anti-homonormativity, and most certainly as a representation of Divine's monstrosity. First, when asked if she is a lesbian, Divine's answer is that she has done "everything," implying a sexual openness and fluidity. Her identity is not constructed by boundaries or restrictions in regard to sexual orientation. Second, when asked "Does blood turn you on?", she expresses her desire and fetish for blood—it does more than turn her on, it makes her "cum." This fetish for blood exhibits a subcultural ideology that Divine, and most of the main characters of the film, commend and demonstrate throughout.

Gina Marchetti (2008) defines the concept of subculture as "any identifiable and cohesive group which is outside the dominant culture and its ideological norms because of differences of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle or outlook [...] Although subcultures share many common characteristics with the larger cultural formations of which they are a part, they have their own patterns of thought and behavior which are obscure, if not completely incomprehensible, to outsiders" (p. 406). Based on Marchetti's definition, subcultures exist outside the ideological norms of dominant culture and, while they share commonalities with this dominant culture, also share distinct, alternative behaviours only understood within their subcultural framework. Dick Hebdige, on the other hand, argues that subculture is a subversion to normalcy, or a common resistance. Through the use of style and the subversion of common objects, subcultures symbolically separate themselves from the dominant societal standard:

Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process or 'normalization.' As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. Our task becomes [...] to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces

of style, to trace them out as ‘maps of meaning’ which obscurely re-present the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal. (Hebdige, 1979, p. 18)

Hebdige’s statements on subculture as interrupting a process of normalization, and a challenge to principles of unity in society, is particularly true of Divine’s subcultural ideology. In the case of *Pink Flamingos*, the subcultural is defined by differences in normativity as distinguished by the dominant culture in which it exists and this subversion of normalcy. Essentially, Divine being “turned on” by the sight and taste of blood is not an ideological norm of heteropatriarchal culture, but expresses subcultural ideology and a fetish, or inclination, towards subversion and the abject.

Aside from her apparent subcultural ideologies, and the subversive manner in which she rejects the “normative,” Divine also acts as a monster through her depiction or representation of “camp.” It is necessary to note that camp, while commonly associated with queer culture, should not always be connected to the queer community. Susan Sontag (1999) notes that, while gay men and homosexuality have been the “vanguard” for camp, camp taste is not always “homosexual taste” (p. 64). Jack Babuscio (1999) discusses camp as “subversive of commonly received standards: it challenges the status quo” (p. 120). Divine, therefore, is not a queer monster through traditional ideas of “camp” and homosexuality, but because her camp performance and aesthetic is one of complex queer individuality. The individual, as a separate and coherent being, holds an “irreducible core of being” and is “the entity that is perceived within the roles and actions, the entity upon which social forces act” (Dyer, 1987, p. 8). This core of being contains certain unique qualities that “remain constant and give sense to the person’s actions and reactions” (p. 8). The core being of Divine’s persona (her complex individuality) may explain the reason why she is so intentionally and theatrically camp.

Harris Glenn Milstead (Divine) is playing a role and through this role is engaging in *theatricality*, which Esther Newton (1979) defines as one of the properties of camp (p. 106).

According to Newton, camp is theatrical in three interconnecting ways: as style, as camp in its dramatic form, and as “suffused with the perception of ‘being as playing a role’” (p. 107). In terms of style, Divine is constructed, or “created by adornment or stylization of a well-defined thing or symbol” (p. 107). The well-defined symbol in this case is the feminine persona, with Divine exhibiting incredibly stylized femininity and various adornment (excessive makeup, extravagant dress, fake breasts) that makes her more theatrical, thus leading to camp. Theatricality as camp in its dramatic form “involves a performer or performers and an audience” (p. 107). In the film, Divine is infamous because she has been named “the filthiest person alive” by her followers and the general public. She is a public figure because of her exposure in national tabloids and thus has an audience, one which is not specifically seen but still acknowledged. In the film’s final scene where she consumes the dog faeces, Divine breaks the fourth wall and acknowledges the audience by looking into the camera and grinning. Here, the structure of performer and audience is “clearly defined” (p. 107). Finally, Divine’s camp is “suffused with the perception of ‘being as playing a role’” which Newton is basing on one of Sontag’s statements of camp. Newton believes that this is the point in which “drag and camp merge and augment each other” (p. 107). The camp which Divine performs is a persona and the persona is obvious to the audience—she is only Divine when playing the role of Milstead’s drag persona. Thus, Divine is a queer monster through camp performativity, or through a performative and theatrical star persona.

Such acts of camp that articulate Divine’s individual star persona, her “irreducible core of being” as a drag performer (Dyer, 1979, p. 8) are what Judith Butler would define as gender performativity. Much like this “irreducible core” that Dyer identifies in the star persona, Butler (1990) discusses the performativity that comes with words, acts, gestures and desire that produce the effect of an “internal core or substance.” (p. 185) However, this internal core or substance is produced “*on the surface* of the body, through the play of

signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause.” (p. 185) Divine and her representation of gender are performative because these acts that express her identity are “fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.” (p. 185) However, it is important to note that these corporeal fabrications are not only represented through drag performance but also through authentic non-fictional representations of gender performance, as is the case with *Grey Gardens*.

The Queer Monsters of *Grey Gardens*

Albert and David Maysles did not set out to make a queer film with their 1975 documentary *Grey Gardens*. In fact, the film was not even originally intended to focus on the reclusive mother and daughter, “Big Edie” and “Little Edie” Bouvier Beale living in their derelict, dilapidated mansion in East Hampton, New York. The film had been commissioned by their cousin, Lee Radziwill (sister of former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis) to be a documentary about her childhood and the nostalgia of her hometown (Norwich, 2009, n.p.). According to the film’s co-director and editor, Ellen Hovde, once the filmmakers met the Beales, they decided to focus entirely on the mother and daughter, “two women who were very flamboyant, very theatrical, very funny...in the midst of a crisis” (Rosenthal, 1978, n.p.). What followed was a film shot entirely as direct cinema (a style very similar to cinéma vérité that is strictly observational), allowing the women to tell their own stories.

After the film’s release, many critics found the film and its portrayal of the two women “exploitative.” Walter Goodman (1976), a New York Times film critic, wrote that “the sagging flesh, the ludicrous poses, the prized and private recollections strewn about among the tins of cat food—everything is grist for that merciless camera. The sadness for mother and daughter turns to disgust at the brothers” (n.p.). Shortly after this now infamous

review was published, Little Edie Beale (1976) wrote Goodman a scathing rebuttal, which the New York Times refused to publish:

You use so many unkind words about us—I don't know where to begin. "Grotesque", "sagging flesh", "sideshow", "wackiness". My dear, it appears you don't want to be faced with people past a certain age doing much of anything. You don't want to see an older person singing or having a personality. [...] I'm a marvelous specimen and so is my mother. We live on practically nothing. We love each other and is that so hard to take? So we don't live conventionally; so what? [...] The Maysles are film pioneers and because of that they will be criticized. But to my mother and I, "Grey Gardens" is a breakthrough into the very beautiful and precious thing called life. We're proud of it and couldn't be more pleased. It's us! And we're hardly (as you wrote) "a circus sideshow." (n.p.)

Goodman's discussion of "sagging flesh," the "exploitative" nature of the film and Little Edie's proud rebuttal of her and her mother's unconventionality are important factors when realising the queer cult following behind Grey Gardens. Its direct cinema style and its intrinsic (and also very exoteric) depiction of the Beales allowed for an appropriation and queer cult following, typically claimed by gay men.

In the "The Cult of Grey Gardens," David Colman (2009) discusses the attraction to the film from a gay male perspective: "Little Edie's famous, madcap approach to wardrobe; her equally hilarious flair for conversation, in which, like her clothing, she melds the utterly practical and sublimely absurd; and the fact that she was Jackie Kennedy's first cousin. What gay man wouldn't identify with someone who wore outlandish outfits, starred in her own movie, and was related to (and prettier than) Jackie?" (n.p.) From Colman's point of view, it would seem as though gay men appropriate this film because of Little Edie and her aesthetic manifestation and outspoken persona. However, by making this assertion, Colman is unintentionally subjugating a queer perception in favour of a gay male perspective. Aside from a gay male cult following, there is the questionable existence of a queer cult following with Grey Gardens that is developed through a series of "queer identifications." These identifications occur through characteristics of the two women that "step away from the norm,"

(Carlo, 2015, n.p.) with the women (Little Edie in particular) acting as representatives of nonconformity. They also represent what Muñoz might refer to as “disidentifactory identity performances” which are actually “identities-in-difference [that] emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 7).

In a similar way to *Pink Flamingos*, it has been appropriated by a queer audience through these recognisable elements of the non-normative or transgressive. However, with appropriation comes this idea of queer identification or “disidentification,” the ways in which the women are interpellated into a subject position, trapped within a cultural ideology that sometimes frames them as Others. Therefore, I will frame the latter part of my analysis of *Grey Gardens* on this queer identification, and the ways in which Little Edie is represented as a queer monster in the film. This will not only add further explanation to the film’s queer cult appropriation, but also detail how the film can be used to subvert societal ideas of identity.

The Grotesque and Transgressive in *Grey Gardens*

As an appropriated queer film, the depiction of the abject and grotesque in *Grey Gardens* is inherent and intrinsic, not fabricated and composed. This is partly because of its direct cinema approach, which allows for an honest and open portrayal of the Beales as they undertake their daily routines. Their bodies and the nature of their environment are exposed and that which is abject or grotesque already exists for the camera.

In this case, the grotesque is situated within the bodies of the two women, the images of “sagging flesh” that Goodman discusses in his *New York Times* review. The first scene is near the beginning of the film where the women are standing on their deck enjoying the sun. Big Edie sits in a chair and sunbathes with her swimsuit lowered down to the top of her breasts. Little Edie comments, “Mother, you don’t have enough clothes on,” to which Big Edie responds, “Well, I’m going to get naked in just a minute, so you better watch out [...] I don’t

have any warts on me!” “But the movie, the movie,” Little Edie says. After a few more moments of bickering, Little Edie says, “Mother has certain ideas about clothes...” In another scene, we see a shot of Big Edie lying in bed, stretching her arms in the air, presumably naked. The camera only focuses on her naked body from the chest upwards. Near the end of the film, Big Edie grows upset when Little Edie sings a song off-key. She grows irritated and stands up to leave, but her bathing suit falls down and exposes her breasts. “I hope my bathing suit falls off,” Big Edie says, “I hope it does. Something fell off just then.”

The repulsion towards the “sagging flesh” of a woman is based in the amalgamation of both the abject and grotesque (or abject grotesque). According to Edwards and Grauland (2013), if the body of a woman is the object of a male gaze, and the perfect female body is a product of this gaze and its dynamics of power, then the display of a diverse body (with different dimensions, shapes and sizes) has the power to “subvert patriarchal gender codes related to corporeality” (p. 32). With grotesque bodies, the patriarchal, objectifying gaze cannot absorb the body that it seeks to contain, but the grotesque body resists the absorption (p. 32). With the exposure of Big Edie’s “sagging flesh,” we see a body that has the diverse abilities of subverting patriarchal normative ideas of corporeal structure.

In the first scene, when the women are on the deck sunbathing, the dialogue they have is essential in illustrating their own engagement with the grotesque. Big Edie and the open exposure of her body are “open, dynamic, boundless,” contrary to the male idealisation of the female body which is “static, closed, contained” (Grauland, 2013, p. 14). Little Edie is apprehensive about her mother exposing her bare flesh on camera (“Mother, you don’t have enough clothes on,” “But the *movie*, the *movie*...”), yet Big Edie is satisfied and open with her body (“Well, I’m going to get naked in a minute, so you better watch out.”), in a sense embracing her grotesquerie.

This lack of boundaries, or boundlessness, recalls Mary Russo's theories of the female grotesque and woman as spectacle. Russo (1994) evokes the phrase "She is making a spectacle out of herself," which works as a "specifically feminine danger," with spectacle signifying "a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries," women as the possessors of "large, aging, and dimpled thighs [...] of overly rouged cheeks, of a voice shrill in laughter, or of a sliding bra strap..." as blameworthy (p. 53). Discussing the female grotesque in reference to Bakhtin's theories of carnival, Russo suggests "an ambivalent redeployment of taboos around the female body as grotesque (the pregnant body, the aging body, the irregular body), and as unruly when set loose in the public sphere" (p. 54). In a sense, Little Edie's comments on her mother not wearing enough clothes signifies the taboo of the female grotesque, its openness and boundlessness; her sagging flesh or aging body in front of the camera is working as spectacle.

Russo also makes mention of Bakhtin's (1965/2009) "senile pregnant hags" in the Kerch terracotta figurines he discusses in *Rabelais and His World*. The hags symbolise the grotesque because they amalgamate the "senile, decaying and deformed flesh" of the old with the "flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed" (p. 26). Big Edie is not representative of the senile, pregnant hags because she does not symbolise new life, but because her grotesque body is "not a closed, completed unit." Rather, it is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (p. 26). For Russo (1994), a feminist reading of Bakhtin's senile, pregnant hags brings the connotation of "fear and loathing around the biological processes of reproduction and aging" (p. 55). If Big Edie represents the grotesque body, it is because her maternal body (that which produced Little Edie and her other children) no longer fits into the paradigms of the classical body, which is "transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek" (p. 8). The reason that Little Edie could be conscious of her mother covering up is because the camera, and the film itself, will exhibit Big Edie's grotesque body,

a body that does not identify with the “normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie” (p. 8) to the hegemonic society.

This is not to say that Little Edie conforms to these “normalizing aspirations” of bourgeois society, but rather that she is aware of these aspirations, and thus becomes more cognisant of the grotesque or abject that her mother represents. Indeed, this may speak to the poignancy of her words in her response to Walter Goodman’s review, as quoted above. She is angered by the words Goodman uses to describe them such as “grotesque,” “sagging flesh,” “sideshow,” and “wackiness” and then goes on to say she and her mother are both “marvelous specimen.” She also acknowledges that they do not live conventionally and rejects the negative connotations of this (“So what?”) By saying “It’s us!” she is acknowledging their non-conformity and Otherness. However, her rejection of being considered “grotesque” has the inclination of Little Edie wanting to assimilate herself into the public sphere. We can quickly refute this by analysing Little Edie as a queer monster, discussing how she achieves Muñoz’s (1999) concept of “disidentifactory identity performance” and thus rejects this assimilation.

Little Edie and Queer (Dis)identification

In order to understand the queer cult audience of *Grey Gardens*, one must understand the ways in which identity works to formulate this queer appropriation. The film and its main subjects (the Beales) allow the queer audience to appropriate through discernible queer acts of identification. These acts of identification involve recognition on the part of the queer audience of performances, or representations, that might relate to queer identity. Thus, while Little Edie works as a queer identifier, the queer audience uses her to disidentify with the dominant public sphere, a way of “recycling and rethinking encoded meanings” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31) of queer. According to Muñoz, disidentification “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and

exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (p. 31). If the practice of disidentification is contributing to “the function of a counterpublic sphere” (p. 7), then Little Edie is unconsciously (or subconsciously) acting as a disidentifactory identity by refuting a patriarchal idea of conventionality.

It is important to note, however, that this disidentification in *Grey Gardens* comes from a place of privilege, not one of a sexual or racial minority that Muñoz identifies. Rather, the disidentification Little Edie performs is one of a white, cisgender and heterosexual female, which some might argue cannot be associated with definitions of queer identity. I do not argue that Little Edie and her practice of disidentification equal “queers of color” and their disidentifactory practices, but rather that her queer identifications refute patriarchal ideals of normality within the dominant public sphere. Thus, she is performing disidentification because she is *disassociating* herself from being normative, not as a sexual, gender or racial minority.

Instead, Little Edie works as a queer monster through a star persona, one that relates to the audience through emotional affinity, self-identification, imitation and projection (Dyer, 1979, p. 20). On one hand, Little Edie is not a “star” when *Grey Gardens* is being shot, but the audience later recognises her star persona through these individual categories of the star/audience relationship. The queer audience in particular might identify with Little Edie through emotional affinity, relating to aspects of her identity that are potentially queer, or feeling a sense of involvement in her life through the film’s direct cinema technique. Even more, the queer audience could self-identify with Little Edie through her queer acts of identification, placing themselves in her position. There are several ways in which Little Edie works as a queer monster: through her constructed appearance, through her social expression, and through her disidentification with the public sphere.

Firstly, Little Edie disassociates herself from conventional ideas of fashion in her temporal environment and instead asserts herself with her own progressive and alternative approach to clothing, which also works to construct her inimitable identity. In a scene near the start of the film, Little Edie greets the Maysles in the front garden of the estate and, after commenting on what the Maysles are wearing, begins to talk about her own clothing design:

This is the best thing to wear for today, you understand, because I don't like women in skirts and the best thing is to wear pantyhose or some pants under a short skirt, I think, then you have the pants under the skirt and then you can pull the stockings up over the pants underneath the skirt, and you can always take off the skirt and use it as a cape. So I think this is the best costume for today... I have to make these things up, you know. Mother wanted me to come out in a kimono so we had quite a fight... (*Grey Gardens*, 1975, n.p.)



Figure 2. Little Edie's costume for the day. Still from *Grey Gardens* (Maysles, 1975).

In defending her costume, Little Edie is acknowledging her differences, but also attempting to explain the rationality of her choices or “acknowledging the fact that she might seem a little odd, but determined, just the same, to win us over to the sensibleness of the costume, its logic, despite whatever its superficial oddities may lead us to think of it” (Rhodes, 2006, p. 93). Later,

she speaks to the gardener, Brooks, about creating a vegetable garden. When he walks away, she tells the Maysles: “Do you think my costume looked alright for Brooks, I think he was a little amazed. [...] This is the revolutionary costume, I never wear this in East Hampton. [...] You can’t be too careful, you know what I mean?”

Little Edie’s creation of her own daily costume is reflective of her disidentifactory identity practice and her association with queerness. She believes the “costume” she has constructed for herself is “revolutionary,” perhaps unconventional or progressive, and she is aware of her disidentification compared to the dominant, bourgeois and patriarchal culture of East Hampton. In the opening scene of the film, after Big Edie points out a hole in the ceiling that raccoons have dug out, there is a voiceover of Little Edie discussing the conventional standards of the village: “We’ll be raided again. We’ll be raided again by the village of East Hampton. You know; they can get you in East Hampton for wearing red shoes on a Thursday and all that sort of thing. I don’t know whether you know that. I mean, do you know that? They can get you for almost anything” (*Grey Gardens*, 1975, n.p.). Aware of the dominant culture that governs the small village of East Hampton, Little Edie projects her disidentification by refuting the ideals of what she terms as “a mean, nasty Republican town.” In fact, the Maysles had filmed Little Edie on more than one occasion making comments on politics, and her exclusion from the conservative Republican views of the East Hampton area, but David Maysles wanted the scenes cut from the final version. Ellen Hovde (Rosenthal, 1978) discusses one scene in particular, a shot of Little Edie shouting down from a window in the house to the Maysles in the garden below that was cut from the final version, but one which speaks to Little Edie’s identity: “She was shouting down, talking about politics in general and Republican politics in particular [...] But the real reason why we wanted it was that it showed Edie in a moment that was not narcissistic...she was showing that she did read, that she was aware of public events, that she thought about them and that she had very strong opinions about them.

We felt that it was a very strong card to play in presenting her character, because she does come off so easily as a completely narcissistic and dependent person who is unaware of anything outside her mirror. She is *not* like that..." (p. 13)

Furthermore, Little Edie works through disidentification as a survival strategy, against both the dominant public sphere of East Hampton and also with her relatives, who reject her and perhaps classify her as non-normative. In one scene, Little Edie comes outside to meet the Maysles. David comments on her outfit: "You're dressed for battle, Edie." She tells them that Big Edie has been telling her friend Marjorie, a friend of the family, how "spoiled" and "terrible" she is. "But, you see, in dealing with me...the relatives didn't know...that they were dealing with a staunch character. And I tell you, if there's anything worse than a staunch woman--S-T-A-U-N-C-H. There's nothing worse, I'm telling you. They don't weaken...no matter what." By asserting herself as "staunch," Little Edie practices disidentification to negotiate her surroundings and defend herself against the public sphere. Muñoz (1999) explains that disidentification is descriptive of "the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (p. 2). If Little Edie is working to negotiate the "phobic majoritarian public sphere" through disidentification, this makes her a model for queer identity and accessible to a queer audience for appropriation as a queer figure. In a way, she is being omitted, left out and rebuked because of her non-normative identity, and by disidentifying, she becomes a figure of queer identity akin to any other.

From a queer audience perspective, Little Edie works as a disidentifier for queer identity through her disengagement with conventional society and acting as a representative of non-conformity. The queer cult audience seeks performances that relate to queer identity, which Little Edie personifies. By “queering” the film, it becomes a tool for the queer audience to reconstruct an alternative, less idealistic perception of queer identity. More recently, in the 21st century, Little Edie and her image have experienced a resurgence in both queer culture and popular culture. This resurgence not only highlights Little Edie’s enduring status as a cultural icon, but also works to reemphasise her otherness.

Drag queen Jinkx Monsoon performed as Little Edie for a weekly challenge on the reality competition series *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in 2013 (Figure 3), where she effectively re-introduced Edie to a more contemporary queer audience. Some of the other drag queens in the competition were ignorant towards who Little Edie was, secretly and openly chastising Monsoon for her choice. Michael Broder (2013) explains these reactions and this unknowing



Figure 3. Jinkx Monsoon as Little Edie Beale. Still from *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (2013).

on the part of the other drag queens as an example of a “cultural divide,” given their minority status as Black and Latino:

Everything about Little Edie's gay icon status points to white (gay) culture, from the Kennedy connection to the East Hampton connection to the Broadway connection to the Drew Barrymore connection to the list of designers and fashion icons who claim Little Edie as their inspiration. Though there is nothing inherently racist in the original *Grey Gardens* documentary that brought the Beales to national attention, it is also the case that there are no non-white characters in the film, and it probably received little notice among non-white audiences in 1975. (n.p.)

Broder's comments reflect my earlier statement on Little Edie's "disidentification" as deriving from a place of privilege, one of a white, cisgender and heterosexual female.

Someone from a minority background may not be fully aware of Little Edie and her status as a gay icon, nor would they relate to her as a queer identifier. It is important to re-emphasise, then, that Little Edie is performing disidentification because she is disassociating herself from being normative, not as a sexual, gender or racial minority.

Outside of queer culture, a more mainstream biographical drama film called *Grey Gardens* (2009) was produced by HBO starring Drew Barrymore and Jessica Lange as Little Edie and Big Edie, respectively. The film flashes backwards and forwards from Little Edie as a young debutante in 1936 to living with her mother in the dilapidated Grey Gardens estate in the 1970s. The film was nominated for numerous Emmy and Golden Globe awards and brought the Beale's story even further into mainstream recognition. This endurance of Little Edie and *Grey Gardens* in the 21st century signals a shift in the acceptability of queer otherness by the mainstream, as well as a more enhanced knowledge of queer identity and its many incongruities.

Queer Monstrosity in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

According to Stuart Samuels (1983), audiences at some of the first midnight screenings of *Rocky Horror* at the Waverly Theatre in New York were "largely gay, but they quickly became broad-based—all ages, all sexual proclivities, all sexes" (pp. 134-135). The screenings were a place of community, where people (from different walks of life) were

drawn together by a particular and mutual appreciation. The audience could participate on many levels, including singing along, dressing up, and miming characters' actions in front of the screen. In particular, and now more often in contemporary interactive screenings of *Rocky Horror*, one of the most visible participation groups around this film is that of the queer audience. In the space of the film screening, queer cult audiences of *Rocky Horror* often use costuming of the opposite sex as a temporary form of gender performance. When midnight movie screenings of *Rocky Horror* first began at the Waverly, it was against the law in New York to impersonate the opposite sex because of an antiquated 19th century law (Desk, 2015, n.p.), as well as many other parts of the United States. By breaking these boundaries and laws of society, these audiences were engaging in transgressive behaviour to subvert established codes of conduct around public gender presentation. Present day screenings of *Rocky Horror* continue to feature these elements of male/female gender performance as the audience continues to participate in a once-outlawed spectacle.

In her analysis of queer viewers and *Rocky Horror* spectacle, Nicole Seymour (2008) writes that screenings of *Rocky Horror* constitute a queer experience, one that “inheres in a set of transgressive acts both encouraged and allowed for by the spectacle” (p. 124). These acts include, for instance, inscribing oneself onto a film text through non-diegetic audience commentary and “purging internalized norms of film-watching” (p. 124). In this way, while elements of the film itself represent transgression, the queer cult audience of *Rocky Horror* participates transgressively in order to subvert traditional gender norms.

In comparison to *Pink Flamingos* and *Grey Gardens*, and the respective queer cult audience formulated around images of the abject, the grotesque and transgression, *Rocky Horror* falls somewhere midway. Elements of these behaviours in *Rocky Horror* are not as blatant or pertinent as in *Pink Flamingos*, but both films provide similar representations of the queer monster. Similarly, *Grey Gardens* and *Rocky Horror* share similar connections

through queer (dis)identification as well as representations of the body as abject and grotesque. The following analysis will focus on *Rocky Horror* as a representation of abject, grotesque and transgressive behaviour, and how Dr. Frank-N-Furter (the film's foremost queer character) represents aspects of a queer monster. Yet, more importantly, it will also provide an analysis of the film that will further define why its cult audience, in particular its *queer* cult audience, has remained so active and visible.

Based upon a stage musical, Jim Sharman's 1975 cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* centres around the characters of Brad (Barry Bostwick) and Janet (Susan Sarandon), a young couple who find themselves stranded with a flat tyre on a cold, rainy night. They seek refuge at the castle of Dr. Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry), a self-proclaimed "sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania" who is holding a convention to celebrate the "birth" of his creation, a muscle man creature named Rocky (Peter Hinwood). He is assisted by his servants, Riff Raff (Richard O'Brien), Magenta (Patricia Quinn), and a groupie named Columbia (Nell Campbell). Both Brad and Janet find themselves seduced by Dr. Frank, and the evening soon spirals into madness.

On the surface, the film stands as a musical comedy horror parody of early science fiction and B-horror movies with an exaggeratedly camp aesthetic. However, elements of abject, grotesque and transgressive behaviour in the film are still blatant beneath its upbeat and playful construction, and many times become harmonious with its parodic framework. The features of grotesque in the film are represented, in part, through the grotesque in the form of monstrosity (or the monstrous grotesque), the grotesque through excess, and the queerly grotesque. These representations allow for divisions in the aesthetics of the grotesque and highlight the film's elements of caricature and exaggeration, those which "exceed the limits of harmony" and transgress the "aesthetic principles of realism" (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 67).

The grotesque as a form of monstrosity is represented through two characters: Frank-N-Furter's creation, the muscle man creature Rocky and Frank's ex-lover, Eddie, a partial brain donor to Rocky. Superficially, Rocky has been created by Frank as the epitome of the masculine form, yet his character acts as a signifier (and parody) for Frankenstein's monster, assembled from a variety of body parts from other humans. His body, albeit muscular with Frank's "seal of approval," is grotesque in its own creation, "a horrific contrast between the beautiful and the vile" (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 53). In a sense, the physical beauty of Rocky is made monstrous by its hybridity and works against its intended purpose. Also, similar to Frankenstein's monster, Rocky cannot be "controlled by his creator [...] Nor can the doctor fully comprehend his creation" (p. 53). Upon his "birth," Rocky is unwrapped from his bandages and proceeds to stumble uncontrollably around the lab in a musical number ("The Sword of Damocles"), while Frank attempts to catch him, and later has a sexual encounter with Janet in his own "birth tank."

In contrast, although not a constructed monster of parts, Eddie represents the monstrous body more explicitly in physical form. With a larger frame and visible scarring from the brain removal, he stands as physical monstrosity but also as monstrous in his abnormal, somewhat deviant behaviour. According to Edwards and Grauland (2013), while physical abnormalities primarily signify grotesque monstrosity, "deviant behaviour can serve to emphasize or exaggerate monstrosity" (p. 47). After Rocky's 'birth,' Eddie emerges from a deep freeze chamber on a motorcycle and begins seducing Columbia and entertaining the other party guests ('Hot Patootie—Bless My Soul'). When Frank witnesses Rocky dancing and enjoying Eddie's performance, he proceeds to chase Eddie back into the freeze chamber and murder him with a pickaxe. After the murder, Frank states: "One from the vaults... Don't be upset. It was a mercy killing. He had a certain naive charm, but no muscle" (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 1975). In the context of this scene, Frank destroys the very monstrosity

he has created because of its physical form, but also because of its uncontainable, transgressive behaviour.

However, this transgression through deviance is not only represented by Eddie, but also by Frank-N-Furter himself through exaggeration, extravagance, and excess, which according to Edwards and Grauland (2013) are “three vital components of disharmony and transgression in grotesque forms” (p. 66). Exaggeration, as a form of grotesque, works to “enlarge or alter something beyond its normal or due proportions” and “expands upon that which is already present” (p. 67). In this case, the definition of exaggeration refers to the bodily form, the exaggeration or caricature of a single body part or an entire body. Yet, Frank’s physicality is not exaggerated as such—he is not physically disproportionate nor does his body exceed the boundaries of what is “normal.” The exaggeration here is seen in Frank’s ambiguous gender representation—the bustier, garter belts, and fishnet stockings with which he adorns his body exaggerate femininity through extravagance, but glimpses of a very apparent crotch bulge exaggerate masculinity in the same vein.

Extravagance, in and of itself, is to be excessive, “to transgress the norm” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 71). Frank refers to himself as a “sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania,” which in and of itself implies gender ambiguity, but the extravagance arises through his double sexual signification. Chris Straayer (1996), in her book *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, refers to male cross-dressing’s potential for intense double signification of sexuality, which is represented in what she terms the “She-man.” The “She-man,” according to Straayer, refers to “the appropriation of female coding by a male performer as a straightforward empowering device” (p. 80). The “transgressive” figure of the she-man in cinema is “glaringly bi-sexed rather than obscurely androgynous or merely bisexual. Rather than undergoing a downward gender mobility, he has enlarged himself with feminine gender and female sexuality” (p. 80). In other words, the “She-man” uses the enlargement of both

sexes as a form of dominance, with the double representation of gender working to strengthen his “staying power.” His extravagance lies in the apparent exaggeration of both his masculinity and femininity, as the power of the She-man is “emphatically sexual” (p. 81).

This extravagance through exaggeration could also be a form of “masquerade” or “parade,” which Elliott-Smith (2016) says, “exaggerates the culturally determined gender traits that would seemingly confirm a biologically determined gender” (p. 41). The masquerade, however, involves exaggerated femininity by the female subject (masquerading her social constructed gender), whereas the male subject “parades” his socially constructed gender (masculinity). In contrast, while the *gay* male subject parades an exaggerated masculinity, he “idealises what he both worships and aspires to be (an impenetrable, masculine ideal) and yet, conversely, disidentifies with what he is *not* as symbolically deemed by the patriarchal (heterosexual) hegemony” (p. 41). I suggest that Frank N. Furter, through the exaggeration of both masculine and feminine, is simultaneously “masquerading” and “parading” as both sexes as a form of grotesque extravagance, but also as a form of transgression. We have already seen from the previous discussion on *Pink Flamingos*, that transgression is defined as “conduct which breaks rules or exceeds boundaries” (Jenks, 2003, p. 3). While Frank’s excess and extravagance in terms of gender does not “break rules” as such, it undoubtedly exceeds the boundaries that society has placed against gender representation.

Conclusion

It was not my intention in this chapter to subvert established concepts and theoretical arguments about queer identity. Rather, I have attempted to establish a distinct understanding of queer monstrosity, when queer identity is placed within the context of cult cinema audiences. Definitions of “queer” can shift significantly in different cultural and social

contexts, and in the case of cult cinema, the shift comes through the appropriation of cult films when this appropriation is used by the queer audience to reconstruct problematic and idealistic perceptions of queer identity. In recalling Sedgwick's (1994) definition of queer, we are reminded of the "open mesh of possibilities," the "gaps" and "overlaps," and "excesses of meaning" when one's gender and sexuality is not made to signify societal uniformity or consistency.

In the context of queer cult cinema audiences, queerness never stops (and never has stopped) working through gender and sexuality. Rather, it takes an alternative direction when engaged with cult cinema and becomes a discourse that expands and modifies. The established, patriarchal idea of the "normative" is fractured when someone rejects these ideas of normality and practices alternative engagement with cult cinema. This engagement involves gender and sexuality when the audience identifies as queer and then appropriates the cult film as part of a queer transgression.

The three films I have discussed here show representations of queer monstrosity: Divine and his subcultural rejection of normativity, Little Edie as a disidentifactory identity who refutes ideas of conventionality, and Frank N. Furter who rejects heteronormativity through double sexual coding. These representations become queerly monstrous through their non-normative identities that "challenge" the dominant patriarchal culture. Furthermore, these films show representations of the grotesque in different ways, each of which reject patriarchal constructs of the feminine, classical body that the audience can appropriate as queer. With *Pink Flamingos*, the grotesque lies in the exaggerated feminine body and the caricature and excess that is associated with it. With the excess comes many of the transgressive aspects of the film, the behaviour that subverts established rules and boundaries. The film also features elements of the abject as defined by Kristeva because of its engagement with the excretory body, "these body fluids, this defilement, this shit" that life

withstands. In *Grey Gardens*, the grotesque is inherent in the aging body of Big Edie, and the “open, dynamic, boundless” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 14) nature of her body working as female spectacle.

Most importantly, as is the case with cult cinema, these films have developed “cult” status because of their fans and the people that celebrate them. While the queer audience did not necessarily *create* the cult following, the queer appropriation of these films has allowed for a deeper understanding of how cult cinema can be appropriated transgressively. Since these films are used for purposes of reconstructing perceptions of queer identity, they also act as a model for the engaged spectatorship and performance that links cult cinema with gender and queer performativity more generally.

CHAPTER TWO

THE QUEER MONSTER IN CULT HORROR CINEMA

Cult Horror and Queer Monstrosity

The presence of queer monstrosity is particularly obvious in horror films, a place where “normality is threatened by the monster” (Wood, 2018, p. 83). Yet, what illustrates a *cult horror* film? The concept of cult horror often leads to a complicated landscape of terminology, with various classifications of ‘cult’ and ‘horror’ becoming almost synonymous. Cult films are often defined through their engagement with deviance, transgression, and badness (Mathijs & Mendik, 2008, p. 2), with an element of active consumption and participation on the part of the audience. The horror film genre also engages deviance and transgression but, more specifically, involves a “confrontation with uncertainty, with the ‘unnatural’” (Prince, 2004, p. 2). Not surprisingly, this type of unnatural confrontation also predicates the cult film genre and its audiences. Characters in cult films often confront uncertainty, that which opposes the established boundaries of patriarchal order through transgressive behaviour.² So where does the separation between cult and horror lie?

Cult film scholars have attempted to distinguish the two by considering cult horror through several different perspectives. For Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton (2011), cult horror can be approached from different angles, one being “cult horror as a subcategory within the horror genre” (p. 194). As a subcategory of the horror genre, cult horror would be considered a subdivision (subgenre) of horror, falling into a similar field with the slasher, supernatural or found footage subgenres, with its own subject matter, style, formula and iconography. In the horror film genre in general, monsters are considered “threats to the

² See Chapter One, Brad and Janet in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

cultural order” (p. 194) and the protagonist struggles throughout the film to destroy the monster. Cult horror films, according to Mathijs and Sexton, “add subversions, ambiguities, and contradictions so that it becomes unclear whether or not restoration of the order is a good thing, or the ends justify the means” (p. 195). In other words, different societal taboos in cult horror films (such as cannibalism, necrophilia, extreme violence, rape and sexual assault), lead to an environment where transgression and monstrosity continue to thrive. Order is not restored and the monster continues being monstrous.

Welch Everman (1993) believes that cult horror films are a particular entity constructed of vulgarity and depravity, in effect “bad horror films” (p. 1). Everman acknowledges this as an aesthetic judgement that derives from assessing the low production values and diminutive budgets of horror films that become cult, and he also acknowledges some cult horror films as being “so bad they’re good” (p. 1). Everman’s argument represents a common stereotype between high culture and superior quality (good) and low culture and inferior quality (bad). As a result of this distinction and the common value judgement of cult horror films being bad, queer monstrosity represented in cult horror films automatically becomes associated with badness and poor taste. This forced inferiority associated with badness causes the embodied queer monster to reject, transgress and separate from that which victimises it. In cult horror films, which through their composition depict the breakdown of the social order and its boundaries, queer monstrosity effectively flourishes and finds a place of embodiment in this area of low culture.

In Chapter One, I discussed the presence of queer monstrosity as embodied in the cult film through representations of the grotesque, transgression and the abject as a way to challenge heteropatriarchal perceptions of queer identity. Cult horror films effectively do the same, but from a more horrific angle—they depict these subversive and transgressive

portrayals of the queer monster visibly cutting down the bourgeois heterosexual. To set context, let us look more closely at the monster and its presence in horror films in general.

Thematically, horror films depict three core interrelated variables, as chiefly defined by Robin Wood (1986): normality (defined by the heterosexual patriarchy), the monster (depicted as a representation of *The Other*), and the relationship between the two (pp. 73-74). The monsters themselves, according to Harry Benshoff (1997), can often be considered “as racial, ethnic, and/or political/ideological Others, while more frequently they are constructed primarily as sexual Others (women, bisexuals, and homosexuals)” (p. 4). These monsters (and their stories) frequently represent the “eruption” of queer sexuality into the heterosexual environment and through this eruption threaten the normality of the bourgeois patriarchy.

For some theorists, the monster is an embodiment of what society cannot confront within itself, the total abjection of that which disrupts the boundaries of social order. Sorcha Ní Fhlainn (2009), in her study of monstrosity, observes that the construction of the monster involves a catharsis within ourselves: “The monster, for most of us, is a cathartic construct—it embodies what we cannot face, purge, fight, accept or acknowledge; in effect, it is the very core of the ‘other’/’Not I’—acting out our worst imaginings so we may safely divorce monstrosity from ourselves” (p. 3). In this way, the monster is ultimate abject figure, what Kristeva (1982) believes “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (p. 4). The monster embodies all that society rejects inside itself and what the patriarchal subject classifies as abhorrent. The rejection of the *Other* (the monster) by the subject (self) also suggests a recognisable similarity between the two. For Margrit Shildrick (2002), the monster is “not just abhorrent, it is also enticing, a figure that calls to us, that invites recognition. Simultaneously threat and promise, the monster, as with the feminine, comes to embody those things which an ordered and limited life must try, and finally fail, to abject” (p. 5).

This chapter will argue for the presence of queer monstrosity in cult horror films and how this monstrosity is represented through the grotesque and transgressive physical images of bodies in these films. While transgression in the 1970s is signified by the queer audience and their engagement with cult films, these perceptions around transgression and queer monstrosity shift alongside the cultural milieu of the time period. I use cult horror films of the 1980s as a grounding point for analysis in this chapter, a decade which saw the demonization (or monsterization) of gay men at the beginning and height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The widely held belief that HIV/AIDS was a disease that primarily affected gay men developed into a moral panic and hysteria that led to increased Othering of the gay community. This Othering, combined with the panic of Satanic Ritual Abuse, also known as Satanic Panic (Janisse & Corupe, 2015, p. 16), led to an environment of fear over transgressive behaviour in society at large. Queer monstrosity in cult horror films of the 1980s potentially developed out of this societal rhetoric around gay disease and the threat of this rhetoric to the sustainability and preservation of queer identity. By instilling fear in the cinematic audience through violence towards heterosexual cisgender victims, queer monstrosity was able to rearticulate and restructure representations of the queer subject. However, I also theorise that queer monstrosity in these films is very often represented through victimisation, or rather the manner in which the oppressor—that is, the horror movie antagonist or killer and occasionally other cisgender and heterosexual characters—harass, torment and persecute the queer subject, making them appear monstrous. This will frequently lead to negative responses from the queer subject, yet this victimisation is at times never overcome and the oppressor is free to continue their oppressive deeds.

The cult horror films chosen for this analysis all depict a particular representation of queer monstrosity, either grotesque, transgressive, or a combination of both. The first, which depicts *grotesque* representation, is *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, the

1985 follow-up to Wes Craven's popular and critically successful slasher film (1984). Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund), the monstrous antagonist of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, uses the character of Jesse (Mark Patton) and his seemingly repressed bisexuality as a violent double, frequently trying to "enter" or penetrate Jesse in order to kill. This frequent attempt and eventual success at penetrating Jesse's body causes Jesse to appear grotesque, through both a form of *uncanny* grotesque and *bodily* grotesque. In this case, Freddy stands as the heteropatriarchal oppressor, forcing Jesse to kill when confronted with the threat of his own potentially bisexual desires.

The second case study, which depicts *transgressive* representation, is Robert Hiltzik's slasher film *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) about a group of teenagers and their counsellors being killed off at a summer camp. In the film's final moments, the killer, who has been killing the other campers for mocking and bullying her, is revealed to be Angela (Felissa Rose), a child assigned male at birth and raised by her aunt as female. The shock ending in which Angela's male genitalia is revealed, as well as the violence she inflicts on those who oppress her, speaks to an apparent horror surrounding queerness and gender dysphoria during this period of the 1980s. Angela, the queer monster, cuts down her oppressors through transgressive acts of violence not only as a matter of preserving her queer identity, but also as a means of dominance to overcome her gender repression.

It is important to note that I have also chosen these particular films for analysis because of a resurgence in their popularity since the 1980s. While both films achieved moderately positive to negative reviews from critics upon their initial release, the cult status of these films has reignited a popularity among fans. This shift in both films' success is reflective of socio-political changes that have occurred in the 21st century regarding the acceptance of queer identity and how these changes influence audience viewing and participation. Analysing these cult horror films and their representations of queer monstrosity

will further situate the queer monster in cult cinema of the 1980s. Yet, it will also further illustrate how cultural perceptions of queer identity at given spans of time influence filmic representations of queerness and the manner in which queer monstrosity adapts and transforms to that effect.

The Queer Monster on Elm Street

The year 1985 was a high point for fear of contracting HIV/AIDS. It was the year, most notably, that actor and sex symbol Rock Hudson died of AIDS-related illness, and the first time President Ronald Reagan mentioned the pandemic publicly in a letter to the US Congress. At this point, at least one case of HIV diagnosis was reported from every region of the world.³ Given this heightened fear of contracting the virus, and the anxiety towards and within the gay community, some dominating features of horror cinema released in 1985 involve fear of disease and threat to the human body: contagion or creatures that spread contagion (George A. Romero's *Day of the Dead*, Dan O'Bannon's *Return of the Living Dead*, Dan Attias's *Silver Bullet*, Larry Cohen's *The Stuff*, Hal Barwood's *Warning Sign*) and resurrection, preservation, and bodily mutation (Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator*, Tobe Hooper's *Lifeforce*, Ronald W. Moore's *Future-Kill*, Luca Bercovici's *Ghoulies*). This year also saw a slew of sequels to popular horror films, such as *Friday the 13th: A New Beginning*, *Howling II: Your Sister is a Werewolf*, *The Hills Have Eyes Part II*, and for analysis here, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*.

Firstly, an important feature to note on many of these films is their foundation in parody, and their irreverent display of the horrific from a comedic standpoint. Parody is often a particular characteristic of cult cinema (see Chapter One with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*), a feature that “operates by spoofing the most clichéd examples of generic formulae”

³ HIV.gov, <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline>

(Mathijs & Sexton, 2011, p. 226). To avoid misinterpretation of definitions, parody is distinct from what is considered pastiche because parody mocks, rather than celebrates, the work it imitates (Dyer, 2007, p. 40). Parody relies upon the viewer being aware of the conventions in which particular genres function and produces its affective response based on this pre-existing knowledge. Many of the horror films mentioned above are greatly aware of their predecessors, using the most popular tropes these earlier films developed with the aim of formulating their own interpretations. These films are not celebrating these tropes, but rather subverting them through parody. In the case of queer monstrosity, the rather heteronormative ideologies represented in these films are satirised, mocked and ridiculed. One could argue that such parody of known horror tropes at the height of the HIV pandemic operates as a discourse on sustainability in the face of real-life horror, a way of assuaging fear through humour, but also a means of deconstructing and rearticulating queer representation in horror cinema.

This type of parody, when used in conjunction with the grotesque and acts of transgression, becomes a catalyst for queer monstrosity to emerge. At the height of a pandemic primarily affecting gay men, queer monstrosity could no longer be hidden where it sometimes existed previously in subtext. Instead, queer monsters “refused to stay buried in the (sub)text” (Benshoff, 1997, p. 250), and representations of homosexuality, particularly in horror films, became more apparent and merged with the monstrous. A convergence between the monstrous and homosexuality speaks to a wider crisis of representation, one that developed from cultural understandings of disease and the homosexual body during this phase of the 1980s. In his book *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media*, Simon Watney (1987) theorises that understandings or conceptions of ourselves and others are conceived “in relation to the circulation of available images in any given society” (p. 8). Writing this at the height of the AIDS crisis, Watney notes the importance of knowledge

around the “forces and values” mobilising in relation to AIDS: “AIDS is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure” (p. 9). Could this crisis of representation—how the media and heteropatriarchal society understood, illustrated and signified the diseased body during this period—lead to an emergence of queer monstrosity that worked to alter these representations?

I maintain, in this following section of the chapter, that given the widespread fear surrounding contracting HIV/AIDS, and the hostility towards those afflicted by the disease during this time of the 1980s, queer monstrosity began to emerge thematically in horror films more openly as a means of challenging existing queer representations. Essentially, this acted as a way to combat homophobic discourse around AIDS, what Judith Butler (1993b) refers to as “the increasing theatricalization of political rage,” a form of “public resistance to that interpellation of shame” in relation to AIDS (p. 23). Queer monstrosity achieves this through three forms of subversive representation that alter existing representations, and these three forms often appear as problematic representations. The oppressor(s) will frequently impose or force these representations onto the queer subject, which the queer monster often then reverses and adopts to construct its own portrayal.

In relation to queer monstrosity, the usage of grotesque in this chapter is *to make* something grotesque, which also involves parody or caricature. The oppressor in these films will often make the queer subject appear grotesque, to make them more marginal, while causing them to appear monstrous by being distorted, unnatural, or ugly. Effectively, the oppressor (often the film’s killer) causes the queer subject to appear grotesque by giving the subject a grotesque form or appearance. In relation to this, parody is often linked to the grotesque through laughter, yet this laughter frequently exists as *mockery*, which is not “inclusive or communal” but instead “isolates the mocked individual from the group”

(Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 100). For instance, one who oppresses a queer individual might make the individual's sexual orientation appear grotesque or unnatural through homophobia, using this to mock the individual and then isolate them from society. Queer monstrosity, when presented within cult horror cinema, is often represented in the queer subject as being a victim of this grotesque when the oppressor imposes a grotesque appearance upon them. When the queer subject overcomes this grotesquerie by killing or defeating the oppressor, they effectively rid themselves of the oppressor, often temporarily.

As we have already seen in Chapter One, transgression “break rules or exceeds boundaries,” (Jenks, 2003, p. 3) and reminds us of “the necessity of order” (p. 7). In regard to cult cinema, transgression is at the core of cult cinema receptions, leading to affective forms of response (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011, p. 97). Queer monstrosity in film representation involves an engagement with transgression to deconstruct the boundaries of what heteropatriarchal society deems acceptable, and particularly as a means to produce negative forms of affect in the sights of the oppressor. The grotesque is often linked to transgression through “exaggeration, extravagance and excess” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 66), which was explored previously in Chapter One, but transgression can also be linked to affect because of its relationship to the *abject*. The process of abjection, according to Julia Kristeva (1984), is similar to transgression in “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (p. 4). This process causes a negative affect response, mainly of disgust or revulsion, as “a form of expulsion and rejection of the Other” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 33). That which is grotesque, what causes repugnance and the destabilisation of borders, is *transgressive* because of this breaking of boundaries, but also *affective* through its negative response of disgust and abhorrence.

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, queer monstrosity rejects assimilation when one chooses to subvert rather than adhere to societal standards of heteronormativity.

Resistance through queer monstrosity in these actions of the grotesque and transgression is not to rid queerness of oppression, but instead to rearticulate and resist the oppressive voice through different forms of representation. Many times, these forms of representation are often taken on or engaged with by the queer monster in a reversed way when already imposed upon them by the oppressor. For instance, when queerness is depicted as grotesque, the queer monster will often embrace the grotesque in order to reclaim its meaning or context. This reclaiming is often achieved through parody or comic style. In regard to cult cinema, the main function of parody is for “socially progressive” purposes (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011, p. 225), but when this parody is reoriented by queer monstrosity to resist or impede societal oppression, it takes on a considerably new progressive purpose, one that functions to rearticulate public discourse on queer identity. Essentially, the queer person being mocked or disparaged reverses this and becomes the one mocking the oppressor.

The oppressor referenced here is what can be defined as the heteropatriarchal oppressor, the embodiment of a homophobic, heteronormative society suppressing a marginalised group or individual. The oppressor can assume many different forms, but in the case of these horror films the oppressor is most often represented through both the primary antagonist (the killer) and the heteronormative environment the queer monster inhabits in the diegetic world of the film.

To further illustrate the queer monster, and how the monster resists discursive oppression through the grotesque and transgression, I will first analyse *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) and its representation of the grotesque. Recalling the earlier statement about queer monstrosity and its inability to “stay buried in subtext”, this film is an example of this latent subtext beginning to emerge. I argue how queer monstrosity is embodied in Jesse (the main character of the film) as a result of his oppression by Freddy Krueger (the film’s antagonist), who represents the heteropatriarchal oppressor. Jesse,

depicted in the film as having repressed bisexual desire, struggles against Krueger wanting to invade his body (or penetrate him), which causes representations from Jesse in different forms of the grotesque—namely, the *uncanny* grotesque and the *bodily* grotesque. As oppressor, Krueger inflicts the grotesque upon Jesse through this bodily invasion because Krueger himself is grotesque. When he penetrates Jesse's body, Jesse becomes forcibly grotesque, but ultimately fails to resist this grotesque representation in a struggle against his oppressor.

To support this argument, I begin by analysing Freddy Krueger as a visual representation of the heteropatriarchal oppressor through his monstrosity, examining how the monster works as a repressive force in opposition towards the resistive qualities of queer monstrosity. This further identifies how the monstrous qualities of the oppressor influence the emergence of queer monstrosity and how this structures representation caused by this oppression. I then analyse how Jesse becomes queerly monstrous as a victim of these representations through the grotesque in two forms: the uncanny and the bodily.

A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge (henceforth *NES2*), a blatantly homoerotic follow up to Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), depicts the return of Freddy Krueger, a severely disfigured killer who murders his victims in their dreams (and subsequently in real life). In the first film, it is revealed that Freddy became disfigured when a group of angry parents (whose children he had murdered) attempted to burn him alive when he was released by police on a technicality. Essentially, while his body has died, his spirit and monstrosity live on in the dreams of his victims as a kind of supernatural being. Linda Badley (1995) refers to Krueger as becoming "mythically resonant as a postmodern incarnation of the Sandman, the mythical trickster who sprinkled sand in the eyes of children who refused to go to sleep" (p. 49).

Before discussing how this film represents queer monstrosity, we should first understand how Krueger is monstrous in more specific terms as the oppressor. By definition, Krueger is not queerly monstrous for the very reason that his monstrosity, while transgressive, is not to rearticulate queer representation or a response to oppression. Krueger's monstrosity comes foremost through his desire to victimise, his need to destruct the social and moral order of society by killing young teenagers in their dreams. In these films, he is the heteropatriarchal oppressor. By invading dreams, Krueger is effectively penetrating the unresolved tensions of his victims and oppressing them by using these tensions to his advantage. He uses the dream space, where the repressed desires of the subject can be expressed, to unleash the fear, affect, and transgression that results from breaking these repressed borders. For Robin Wood (1986), dreams in the horror film are "the embodiment of repressed desires, tensions, fears that our conscious mind rejects" (p. 70). We cannot access repressed desires in our conscious minds except if "one can penetrate their disguises, in dreams" (p. 64).

Krueger penetrates these dreams and uses the repressed bisexual desires of the main character, Jesse, in a way that forces Jesse into his own form of monstrous representation and solidifies Krueger as the oppressor. Jesse Walsh (played by gay actor Mark Patton) moves to a new town with his family, coincidentally into the same house where Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp), the Final Girl of the original *Nightmare* film, once encountered Freddy Krueger. He is a repressed outcast, the new kid in town, suffering nightmares of Krueger and waking up panting in his tight underwear, with sweat glistening off his bare chest. Harry Benshoff (1997) notes at least one author who suggests the imagery here of "AIDS-related night sweats" (p. 246). The nightmares involve Krueger wanting to "get inside of" Jesse (Chaskin, 1985, n.p.), or wanting to use Jesse's body for manifestation to cross the boundary between his non-human monstrous state into full-bodied human. There is also, of

course, the blatant double entendre here with Krueger trying to “get inside of” or enter Jesse as sexual penetration.

Initially, aside from the blatant homoeroticism, the most obvious underlying theme in this film is the concept of repression, or repressed desire. Robin Wood (1986), in his introduction to the American horror film, notes two types of repression: “basic repression” and “surplus repression” (p. 63). Basic repression, Wood states, is “universal” and is bound up in “our capacity for self-control, and of our recognition of and consideration for other people” (p. 63). This is the most obvious form of repression, but repression and its association with the monster comes through surplus repression. Wood defines this type of repression as “specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture” (p. 63-64). When surplus repression fails, it leads to the repressed Other, that which patriarchal society deems incapable of assimilation. Monsters are themselves a threat to normality (p. 71) and monsters in horror films are constructed primarily as “sexual Others” (Benshoff, 1997, p. 4). Surplus repression can be used by the oppressor, the one in control, “to keep all ‘Others’ subjugated to the dominant order” (p. 8).

In this case, Jesse could be deemed a victim of surplus repression. He has been predetermined to take on the role of heterosexual alpha male by his overbearing and disparaging father, but internally feels bisexual desire that cannot be assimilated into this role. Because of Krueger’s frequent attempts (and eventual success) at penetrating or entering his body, Jesse works to resist Krueger’s *oppression* through queer monstrosity. Repression, according to Wood (1986), might be defined as “fully internalized oppression” (p. 64) and that which escapes repression “has to be dealt with by oppression” (p. 64). For Jesse, when this surplus *repression* has failed (that which has kept him from embracing his true sexual identity), Krueger, who has succeeded in penetrating the repressed desires in Jesse’s dreams,

oppresses Jesse to assert dominance over him. This occurs when Krueger inflicts the grotesque by invading Jesse's body, merging grotesque form with Jesse's repressed queer desires.



Figure 4. Jesse screams in terror. Still from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Sholder, 1985).

There is one particular scene in the film where Jesse is represented as grotesque as a result of this oppression by Krueger. His gym coach, Coach Schneider, “hangs around queer S&M⁴ joints downtown” and “likes pretty boys like [Jesse]” (Chaskin, 1985, n.p.). Coach Schneider is the most obvious or out gay character in the film and consequently becomes the first victim. Jesse finds himself seeking solace from Freddy invading his dreams, wandering in the rain and stumbling upon the S&M club that Schneider is known to frequent. Schneider is there donned in leather S&M attire and decides to punish Jesse by taking him back to the

⁴ Sadomasochism—the derivation of sexual gratification from the infliction of physical pain or humiliation either on another person or on oneself

school to run laps around the gym. After he tells Jesse to “hit the showers,” the attack begins. By some unseen force, different types of sports balls (consider the imagery of testicles) fly from shelves hitting Schneider in the face and body, jump-ropes tie around his wrists, and he is dragged into the shower, bound to the shower pipes above. His clothes are torn off and gym towels whip at his bare buttocks until they bleed. Jesse, now possessed by Freddy, takes his claw glove and slashes at Schneider, who screams in agony. Finally, the shower heads rapidly eject blood in what no doubt represents an ejaculation or climax. Schneider is dead, tortured and killed with the very kind of sadomasochism he enjoyed and practiced, and Jesse screams in revulsion, realising what he’s done (Figure 4).

To analyse this more closely, we should look at how the grotesque functions here in more specific detail. Firstly, the *grotesque* aspect of queer monstrosity comes through the element of the *uncanny* grotesque, a type of grotesque form that does not exist as strictly unfamiliar (or alien) or entirely normal, but one that exists as transitional, or occupying a position at both sides of a boundary between both. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) identify a particular form of grotesque that develops as a “boundary phenomenon of hybridization or inmixing, in which the self and Other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone” (p. 193). This association or “mixing” of what is familiar (the self) and what is unfamiliar (the Other) becomes grotesque both through physical grotesque form (the incomplete or deformed) and through the experience of the *uncanny*.

The uncanny, as defined and developed by Sigmund Freud (1919/2003), involves “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (p. 124). Freud derives the uncanny from the German word *unheimlich*, which in English translates to “uncanny” or “eerie,” but with the direct etymology corresponding to “unhomely.” The feeling of uncanny, to experience something unknown, yet familiar causes

feelings of discomfort or alienation. The uncanny, when it converges with grotesque, produces a feeling of unease towards both the physical grotesque, such as the living corpse or “the return of the dead” (p. 154) and also through the “juxtaposition of opposites” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 7). Essentially, when combined with the uncanny, the grotesque becomes a transgressive integration of self and the Other, a strange familiarity that causes dangerous conflict between the two.

When Jesse is penetrated or invaded by Freddy Krueger, he is represented through the uncanny grotesque—the familiarity of his own body meshed dangerously with the unknown Other, many times physically altered through incongruities or grotesque bodily “discombobulating juxtapositions and bizarre combinations” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 3). When Krueger penetrates Jesse’s body, it is often visually represented as the bodily grotesque. In Figure 1 above, we see an image of Jesse screaming after realising he killed Schneider, his hand now disfigured and covered in Krueger’s bladed glove. His hand is no longer his own, but the grotesque unfamiliar hand of his oppressor.

There are distinct connections between this uncanny grotesque and representations of queer monstrosity in more general terms. As Paulina Palmer (2012) writes, “the uncanny is queer and the queer is uncanny” (p. 1). As queer subjects inhabit space in heteronormative society, this bodily inhabitation often takes on characteristics of the uncanny, as articulated by Sara Ahmed (2006) in her work on queer phenomenology: “The work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar” (p. 7). This negotiation also involves the efforts the queer individual makes to resist “being kept in line, almost by force” (p. 83). The uncertainty of queer sexual identity Jesse experiences is situated in the uncanny, with its ambiguities and forms of ambivalence, but also in the juxtaposition between the familiarity of these desires and the unfamiliarity of this grotesque representation.

The bodily grotesque exhibited begins with Krueger trying to penetrate Jesse's body, but the bodily grotesque comes, more specifically, when the penetration is successful. We have already seen an example of this bodily grotesque in analysing Coach Schneider's death scene, when Jesse realises his hand is now Krueger's hand, but there are two instances in which the bodily grotesque is particularly excessive and exaggerated, both elements of the bodily grotesque.



Figure 5. Jesse's tongue becomes grotesquely elongated. Still from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Sholder, 1985)

Following Coach Schneider's death, Jesse is invited to a pool party thrown by Lisa, a girl who is romantically interested in him. Lisa finds Jesse in the cabana, where Jesse tells Lisa he wants to leave the party; he feels like he's "losing his mind" and doesn't want Lisa to watch him "fall apart" (Chaskin, 1985, p. n.p.). Lisa assures Jesse that she "won't let anything happen to him" and they begin making out. As the kissing intensifies, Jesse's sexual desires take over and he begins unbuttoning Lisa's blouse, making his way across her bare skin with his mouth. As if at the moment of complete sexual arousal, his tongue becomes grotesquely engorged and elongated (Figure 5), unbeknownst to Lisa lying back with her

eyes closed. The tongue retracts into his mouth and Jesse flees the cabana, leaving Lisa alone and confused.

This scene represents Jesse's queer monstrosity through the *bodily* grotesque, namely the exaggerated and excessive means in which Krueger, as the oppressor, distorts Jesse's body. Forms of exaggeration classified as grotesque involve the altering or enlargement of certain body parts, namely those which intake and expel, such as the mouth, nose, ears or anus. When depicted exaggeratedly, this grotesque becomes transgressive "by challenging the limits of conventional aesthetics" (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 66). More often than not, this exaggeration develops through caricature and when a particular body part (such as the tongue) is grotesquely exaggerated, this can "produce a caricature that will be far more grotesque than the person being represented" (p. 68). When Krueger alters Jesse's tongue to be exaggeratedly distorted, he is producing a caricature of Jesse as grotesque, but also forcing him into a position as a monstrously hybrid figure.

There are instances from the film in which this exaggerated grotesque takes on a different element of excess, one that develops into a type of grotesque body horror. Body horror precisely deals with "the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and relates to it" (Brophy, 1986, p. 9). Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell (2012) define body horror as "a contemporary variant of the horror film with a particular focus on human bodies that are subject to torture, mutilation, mutation, decay, degeneration, and transformation, usually shown in graphic detail via the use of special effects" (p. 39). Through excessive grotesquerie, one that mutilates and mutates Jesse's body through a type of body horror, Krueger is able to construct Jesse into a monstrous form.

In one scene, directly following the cabana scene above, Jesse flees to the home of his friend, Grady, a jock with whom Jesse has a homosocial/homoerotic relationship. Jesse asks Grady if he can spend the night. "I'm scared, Grady," Jesse says, "Something is trying to get

inside my body” to which Grady responds, “Yeah and she’s female and she’s waiting for you in the cabana, and you want to sleep with me” (Chaskin, 1985, n.p.). After Grady eventually relents and agrees to let Jesse spend the night, Krueger begins to invade Jesse’s body. The sharp razor blades from Krueger’s glove emerge from Jesse’s fingertips and his skin begins to rip open. Krueger is inside of him, attempting to fully emerge. He rips open Jesse’s stomach and exits his body (Figure 6). Grady pounds at his bedroom door, trying to flee but the door has been locked by Krueger’s supernatural force. He violently kills Grady and the next shot shows Jesse, no longer ripped open but intact, with Krueger standing in his mirror reflection across the room, laughing maniacally.



Figure 6. Freddy exits Jesse's body. Still from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Sholder, 1985)

The grotesquerie of this scene is represented in the excess of violence and the body horror that occurs when Jesse’s body is mutated and transformed. He is no longer human, but monster. Krueger has completely taken control of his body and Jesse is no longer able to resist the dominating force of his oppressor. Following this, Krueger takes complete control of Jesse’s body so that, in physical form, his body no longer exists. Lisa, in a final confrontation with this hybrid figure of Krueger and Jesse, tells Jesse she “loves him” which inspires him to destroy their hybrid form and defeat Krueger (for now). The shell of Krueger,

his burned skin and flesh, literally flakes off Jesse. The final scene of the film shows Jesse, Lisa and her friend Kerry riding on a school bus, and Jesse begins to see similarities to his earlier nightmares of Krueger taking over the bus and driving them into hell. Suddenly, Krueger's clawed hand bursts through Kerry's chest (Figure 7) and the bus drives off into a field as Jesse and Lisa scream in horror.



Figure 7. Freddy's clawed hand bursts through Kerry's chest. Still from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Sholder, 1985)

This ending scene perfectly exemplifies the parodical form in which this film operates. Horror film endings, particularly those in the slasher genre, frequently depict the death of the main antagonist only for them to come alive or reappear in sequels to continue their reign of bloodshed. Even after Freddy Krueger has seemingly been defeated, and Jesse has rid himself of his oppressor, this traditional horror iteration of the returning killer will lead to this oppression being continued repeatedly in subsequent sequels. Ultimately, Jesse's fate is left ambiguous and his struggle to overcome his oppressor has failed. There is a satirisation of the slasher genre and its generic conventions occurring here that might

simultaneously be read as a metaphor of the continual and enduring presence of oppression. To expand on this requires further definition of parody and its creation for imitative purposes.

As previously mentioned, parody mocks the very clichéd examples of generic formulae, those characteristics that define and distinguish a genre or subgenre. It also relies on the audience being aware of the ways in which these genres function and produces its affect response based on this pre-existing knowledge. *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* is significantly aware of its predecessor, Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and how it carried forward various slasher genre tropes that originated in films such as John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978). There is often a morality play in these films that punishes teenage sexual promiscuity and carries on a tradition of the virginal Final Girl, a sole survivor who is given the privilege of this survival often because of her implied moral superiority. *NES2* does not carry on this tradition of the Final Girl, but rather subverts and mocks this tradition with a depiction of Jesse as Final Boy. Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp), the Final Girl of the first *Nightmare* film, is described by Carol Clover (1992) as the "grittiest" of the Final Girls:

Aware in advance that the killer will be paying her a visit, she plans an elaborate defense. When he enters the house, she dares him to come at her, then charges him in direct attack. As they struggle, he springs the contraptions she has set so that he is stunned by a swinging sledge hammer, jolted and half-incinerated by an electrical charge, and so on. When he rises yet again, she chases him around the house, bashing him with a chair. (p. 38)

Jesse, in comparison, never quite reaches this form of power in his struggle against Freddy Krueger. While the Final Girl becomes masculinised through a "symbolic phallicization" (Clover, 1992, p. 60) in her fight against the killer, Jesse becomes increasingly and parodically feminised almost in direct imitation of Nancy. James Francis Jr. (2013) clearly illustrates this in his analysis of horror sequels and remakes in the *Nightmare* franchise:

In a reversal of gender roles, Jesse wakes from his nightmares screaming in a high-pitched voice, his clothing is feminized (tight jeans, colourful shirts, ornate accessories), and his would-be girlfriend (Lisa) plays the supportive and strong

boyfriend role. He dances to cutesy pop music and visits his male best friend (a fit, muscular guy clad only in tight briefs) in the dead of night with the request that he watch over him while he sleeps—in the same manner Nancy petitioned Glen in the original film. Jesse takes Nancy's role as the final "girl," and the script befits a female protagonist. (p. 63)

Francis's description of Jesse and this subversion of the Final Girl trope relates to this pre-mentioned form of parody that satirises heteronormative ideologies masculinity, femininity and sexuality. The depiction in this film of Jesse and his queer monstrosity effectively parodies the Final Girl trope, where the feminine is masculinised to become powerful, and subverts it through a feminisation of the queer subject and through uncanny and bodily representations of the grotesque. These subversive representations of grotesque are situated within parody that occurs through mockery, and how Jesse's body is defamiliarized by the juxtapositions, hybridities and exaggerations that Krueger imposes upon him. By defeating Krueger, Jesse is ridding himself of his oppressor, literally shedding its skin. However, when Krueger emerges again, we become fully aware that the cycle of oppression will continue and endure, and Jesse has failed at liberating himself from his monstrosity.

It is worth noting the possible disadvantages of representing queer monstrosity in a film such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*, namely the possibility of a negative impact on the actors involved. The film received moderately positive to negative reviews upon its initial release but has undergone a resurgence in cult popularity in recent years. Mark Patton, who played the lead character of Jesse, was the subject of a documentary film in 2019 entitled *Scream, Queen! My Nightmare on Elm Street*. In the documentary, Patton, who is openly gay, claims *NES2* ended his career and forced him into seclusion because of the negative connotations associated with the film's queer representation. The creators of an earlier documentary, *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy* had hired a private investigator to track Patton down for an interview. Once Patton realised the film's fanfare, and the fact that he could make an impact by discussing his experience, he emerged from seclusion to speak

openly at various fan conventions. He now donates his appearance fees from these fan conventions to HIV treatment groups and charities benefiting LGBT+ youth. This resurgence in popularity and Mark Patton's late career recognition speak to a socio-political shift in the acceptance of queer identity in the realm of audience viewing and participation. Once considered an object of ridicule by the mainstream, the film has now become a cult classic as the audience engages with its homoerotic subtext.

The film's screenwriter David Chaskin admits to an intentional subtext in the script, but that the subtext was meant to be "homophobic rather than homoerotic" (Jensen & Chimienti, 2019, n.p.). Chaskin hints at blaming Patton for the film's homoeroticism, saying "There were certain choices that were made like casting that pushed the subtext to a higher level and stripped away whatever subtlety there may have been." Chaskin's statement effectively facilitates the oppressive nature of queerphobia, namely that any queer monstrosity present in the film should be blamed on the flamboyantly gay lead actor. In a way, the very nature of Chaskin's statement is oppressive to queer identity, an insinuation that Patton read as queer on film and thus facilitated its queer representation. The documentary also acknowledges societal viewpoints on queerness in the 1980s, namely that being queer was associated with being "a diseased pariah" as a consequence of the HIV/AIDS crisis. This societal judgment, combined with the film's recognisable homoeroticism, ultimately enabled an image of queer monstrosity that is both damaging and oppressive. This imagery of oppression surrounding queer monstrosity also occurs through transgressive transgender representation in earlier 1980s slashers, as seen in the following analysis of *Sleepaway Camp*.

Transgression and Queer Monstrosity in *Sleepaway Camp*

Robert Hiltzik's slasher film *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) is a unique case for a representation of queer monstrosity, namely because this monstrosity cannot be fully realised until the final moments of the film. The film depicts a young character named Angela (Felissa Rose) who with her cousin (Jonathan Tiersten) is sent to a summer camp by her eccentric Aunt Martha (Desiree Gould), who has been raising her since her father died in a tragic boating accident. Once Angela and her cousin arrive at the camp, a series of grisly murders begin among the campers and counsellors. In the last few moments of the film, it is revealed that Angela is the killer and that she was assigned male at birth, having been raised by her aunt as female. She is discovered on the beach by two camp counsellors covered in blood, with full male genitalia, making guttural, animalistic noises.

This shock ending has contributed significantly to the cult appeal of this film, yet the transgressive acts Angela carries out on those who oppress her (namely her fellow campers) and the way in which Angela's true gender is revealed, speaks to an apparent horror surrounding transgender identity and a reinforcement of cisnormative ideology during this period of the 1980s. Lucy J. Miller (2017) analyses *Sleepaway Camp* as a "transgender horror film" created by a cisgender author for a cisgender audience, which ultimately leads to the film "being constructed narratively and visually in line with a cisnormative ideology" (p. 40). The image of the transgender subject is often the object of fear in these films, the one killing or causing the violence, "knife raised high, ready to plunge it into the unsuspecting body of a victim" (p. 40). Transgender horror films with a similar image, according to Miller, include Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* (1980).

The construction of the image of the transgender subject in horror films that Miller analyses here is also one of queer monstrosity, that which develops from homophobic and heteronormative ideology and leads to a reconstruction of queer representation. Angela is the

queer monster of this film who commits transgressive acts of violence on her oppressors (the fellow campers and counsellors) as a means of dominance to overcome her oppression. She is victimised by these oppressors, but effectively vanquishes this victimisation by executing the oppressors who victimise her. The exception to this revenge lies with Aunt Martha, who is ultimately the true source of Angela's monstrosity, the person who has forced this gender performance upon her. In this way, Angela was not allowed agency in her own gender choice and therefore becomes monstrous through this involuntary gender confusion and victimisation. Yet, Angela is never seen killing Aunt Martha in revenge, which exemplifies an element of cisnormative control prevalent in this film. I will analyse specific scenes and incidents throughout that represent Angela's queer monstrosity and the cisnormative constraints that dictate her transgressive acts.

Angela is depicted from the start of the film as having a very introverted nature, not speaking, eating, or engaging with others, which causes particular ridicule and bullying from her bunkmate, Judy (Karen Fields), and her assigned camp counsellor, Meg (Katherine Kamhi), who both attempt to isolate her. Two other camp counsellors, Susie (Susan Glaze) and Ronnie (Paul DeAngelo), remain sympathetic towards Angela and endeavour to make her feel at home. Immediately, we see an increased Othering that develops around Angela when she is directly signified as being different. At one point, Judy states to her in a mocking voice, "Hey Angela, how come you never take showers when the rest of us do? Are you queer or somethin'?" (Hiltzik, 1983, n.p.)

On the first night, after Angela refuses to eat, Ronnie takes her into the kitchen so that the cook, Artie (Owen Hughes), can find her something in the pantry she might like. Artie is an outspoken paedophile, who makes it obvious what he intends to do with the female campers as he watches them: "Look at all that fresh chicken. Where I come from we call 'em 'baldies.' Makes your mouth water, don't it?" (Hiltzik, 1983, n.p.) Artie attempts to molest

Angela in the pantry, but Angela's cousin Ricky catches them and they both flee. A short time later, Angela returns to get revenge on the cook by unloading an industrial size pot of boiling water on top of him, scalding him beyond recognition (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The aftermath of Angela's attack on Artie. Still from *Sleepaway Camp* (Hiltzik, 1983).

On this scene, Miller (2017) writes that “the targets of violence in transgender horror films, like the cook, are the repressive agents of cisnormativity” and that Artie “tried to force Angela to conform to his beliefs about gender by sexually assaulting her” (p. 44). This statement is rather problematic in its assumed connection between paedophilia and cisnormativity, yet Angela's violent attack on Artie exemplifies the murderous pattern in this film towards those who oppress her. By attempting to molest Angela, Artie has attempted to victimise her through a paedophilic sexual assault. She responds in turn by burning the very body and hands (as seen above) that have committed these transgressive actions.

In fact, each victim in this film in some way initially victimises Angela before she kills them. While at a social gathering in the mess hall, campers Kenny and Mike try and get Angela to join them and some of the other boys for a swim. When Angela sits mute without

answering them, the boys grow angry and Kenny says, “I told you Angela was playing with half a deck. Angela’s a nutcake. Ain’t that right, Angela? Ain’t you looney tunes? How come you’re so fucked up? What’s your problem?” (Hiltzik, 1983, n.p.) Despite his comedic overuse of jargon and slang vernacular, the words Kenny expresses here negatively associate Angela and her introverted behaviour with mental illness, further situating her as other. Later, Angela drowns Kenny while is out swimming in the lake and when his body is found, his death is ruled an accident.

Judy and Meg, Angela’s fellow camper and counsellor, meet similar fates after harassing and bullying Angela. When asking if Angela is queer, Judy doubles down on insulting her: “Oh, I know what it is! You haven’t reached puberty yet. Is that it? I bet you don’t even have your period. She takes showers when no one can see she has no hair down below. She’s a real carpenter’s dream—flat as a board and needs a screw.” Susie, the camp counsellor who defends Angela and treats her with kindness, slaps Judy and makes her stop. Angela later gets revenge on Judy by shoving a curling iron into her vagina and smothering her with a pillow, a majority of which happens off camera (Figure 9). Meg, on the other hand, is stabbed to death in the shower quite visibly (Figure 10). Once again, we witness punishment fitting the crime. After bullying Angela and making comments about her genitalia and apparent womanhood (which could ultimately reveal Angela’s true transgender identity), she kills Judy vaginally and orally by burning her genitals.

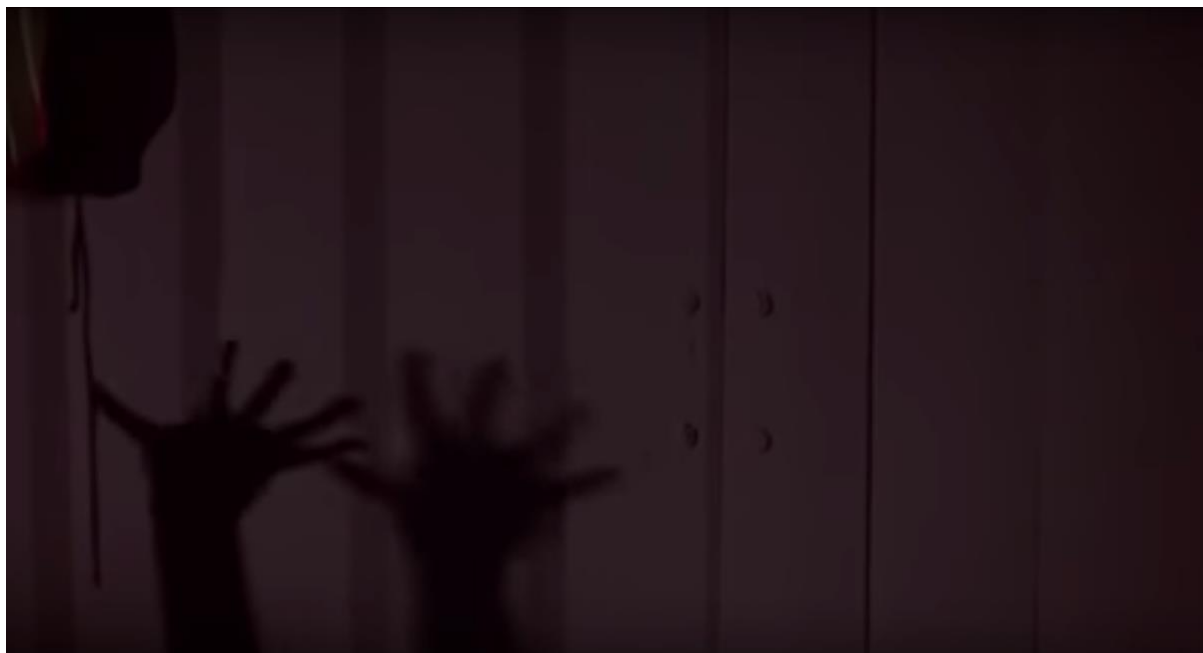


Figure 9. Angela kills Judy with a curling iron. Still from *Sleepaway Camp* (Hiltzik, 1983).



Figure 10. Meg is stabbed to death in the shower. Still from *Sleepaway Camp* (Hiltzik, 1983).

Meg, who previously throws Angela into the lake against her wishes, is stabbed in the back while water pours down on her from above. Judy and Meg are two of the strongest oppressors in this film and thus meet the most violent ends. According to Miller (2017), the harassment Angela endures “is rooted in her refusal to conform to the norms of the camp; she does not act like the other kids and is tormented for it. Her violent attacks on the other campers are motivated by the demands that she conform and the bullying she receives for her failure to

comply” (p. 44). In effect, not only does Angela have transgressive reactions to the bullying she endures, but this reaction is rooted in her inability to comply with the cisnormative ideologies of her oppressors. These transgressive reactions of murder, maiming and dismemberment are in fact a gesture of dominance, transforming Angela into the role of oppressor and forcing her own oppressors to become victims.

The ultimate source of Angela’s queer monstrosity is the gender confusion enforced upon her by her Aunt Martha, who asserts cisnormative control by raising Angela as female. The character of Aunt Martha only makes two appearances in the entire film, once in the beginning, when she sees Angela and her cousin off to camp, and at the end in a flashback when Angela’s true gender is revealed. In the flashback, she tells Angela she “always wanted a little girl.” Since she already has a son (Angela’s cousin), another one “simply would not do.” By choosing to raise Angela as a different gender, Martha has removed Angela’s human agency and gender autonomy. However, Angela is never seen killing Aunt Martha in order to seek revenge for this trauma as she does with the other campers, and whether Angela continues her reign of transgression is left open for interpretation.

Miller (2017) writes that the visual construction of transgender horror films, particularly in the case of *Sleepaway Camp*, “distances the transgender characters from the audience and reinforces the cisnormative identification that exists between the cisgender author and the audience for the films” (p. 6). When the audience only witnesses brief glimpses of the characters’ transgender identities, this “prevents any understanding of their embodied experiences, while showing only fearful reactions to their identities allows the audience to feel justified in their feelings of fear towards the characters and, by extension, transgender people in general” (p. 6).

According to Barry Keith Grant (2008), in his analysis of ideology in cult cinema, cult films have “contradictory qualities of both sameness and difference” and the ability to be

both “transgressive and recuperative [...] to reclaim that which they seem to violate” (pp. 78-79). Cult films achieve this “through a particular inflection of the figure of the Other” (p. 78). The actions of Angela work similarly in this film, which has become a cult classic. While she violates the normalities and boundaries of heteropatriarchal society, she also manages to reclaim her identity by asserting herself as dominant over her oppressors, even while existing as the Other. Yet this inflection of the Other, according to Grant, often becomes a “caricature” of the Other “that makes what it represents less threatening to the viewer” (p. 78). When recognised in this way, the portrayal of Angela as a caricature or parody could be deemed mistakenly as transphobic or transmisogynistic. The final scene of the film, where Angela’s true gender is revealed, exemplifies this possible caricature. However, when analysed more closely, this scene can be read more formidably as an assertion of dominance or power over the heteronormative patriarchy.

After the dead bodies of Judy and Meg have been discovered, the camp is thrown into chaos and the counsellors realise that Angela is missing. Unbeknownst to them, Angela and a



Figure 11. Angela's monstrosity is revealed. Still from *Sleepaway Camp* (Hiltzik, 1983).

boy named Paul (who has shown kindness and attraction to Angela but betrayed her by kissing another girl) have set up a secret rendezvous near the lake. “Let’s go swimming,” Angela says and instructs Paul to take off his clothes. Meanwhile, the camp counsellors Susie and Ronnie are searching for them and come upon the lake front beach. They find Angela on the beach with her back turned, seemingly holding Paul in her lap. There is the sudden flashback, which reveals that Angela has been raised as a girl by her eccentric aunt after her father’s death because “She always wanted a little girl.” Back on the beach, Angela stands up and turns towards Ronnie and Susie, dropping Paul’s decapitated head on the ground. She is making animalistic growling noises, mouth open wide, and the camera slowly zooms out to reveal Angela having male genitalia (Figure 11). “How could it be?” Ronnie says, “My god, she’s a boy.” The two counsellors look on in horror as a freeze frame of Angela’s face turns monochromatic as the credits roll.

One can clearly see how the construction of this scene, and the way in which Angela’s gender reveal is represented as horrific, contributes to understandings of this film as transphobic. The object of horror, the one responsible for countless murders, has been concealing her true gender. She has been exposed and violated and, now that her true identity has been revealed, the status quo is maintained. The look of horror on the counsellors’ faces also resembles true shock and revulsion, not only because of Paul’s decapitated head, but because of Angela’s repressed gender finally being exposed. Still, if examined more closely, this scene can also represent Angela’s extreme assertion of dominance over her oppressors. This is exhibited in the feral, animalistic noises she makes, her stance as she holds the meat cleaver threateningly, and the strong, lasting intensity of her gaze. She is no longer “Angela,” but a true subject of frightening monstrosity, ready to frighten and eliminate that which oppresses her.

Similar to *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*, *Sleepaway Camp* has also undergone a resurgence in popularity as a cult classic since its initial release. The film was the subject of a documentary entitled *At the Waterfront After the Social: The Legacy of Sleepaway Camp* (2014) featured on the film's DVD extras. Jeff Hayes, founder of the website SleepawayCampMovies.com, states in the documentary that the purpose of creating the website was to "bring *Sleepaway Camp* to a whole new generation and an even wider audience." Several of the actors being interviewed were unaware of the cult fanfare surrounding the film until the website became popular. The film's sequels also highlight a shift in understandings of queer monstrosity present within the franchise.

In the four subsequent sequels to this film, *Sleepaway Camp II: Unhappy Campers* (1988), *Sleepaway Camp III: Teenage Wasteland* (1989), *Return to Sleepaway Camp* (2008), and *Sleepaway Camp IV: The Survivor* (2012), Angela has undergone full sexual reassignment to become female but continues killing campers for their deviant behaviour as a head camp counsellor. While the first film has a much more serious tone, the sequels blend elements of black comedy and a satirisation of horror tropes. This shift to parody demonstrates the humour and cult appeal that have developed around the original film, mainly because of its rather exaggeratedly camp aesthetic. In the sequels, Angela's gender is no longer the object of horror and is only briefly mentioned in passing; rather, Angela's motivation to kill stems from misbehaving campers who refuse to conform to her standards and rules. Her complete sexual reassignment to female seemingly makes Angela less monstrous, but her continued violence has ultimately shifted her into the role of dominant oppressor.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the presence of queer monstrosity in cult horror films of the 1980s, a decade which saw the rise of increased heteropatriarchal representations of homophobia during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Representations of queer monstrosity in film effectively arose as a means to reconstruct existing representations and homophobic societal understandings of the queer subject. This monstrosity is also exemplified, as I have analysed here, in how the figure of the oppressor influences the queer subject or imposes a type of monstrosity upon them, and how the queer monster might then reverse this by constructing their own representations. I have identified these representations as being rooted in images of grotesque form and transgressive behaviour, but I do not deem to suggest that these are the only representations up for debate.

Given the diverse spectrum of queer identities represented in contemporary society, there are a wide variety of ways in which marginalisation of the queer subject can occur, as well as numerous ways to rearticulate images of these queer identities to the heteropatriarchal oppressor. Jesse and Angela are merely two examples of how the queer subject is represented in cult cinema in the 1980s at a time when marginalisation of the queer subject was at a record high in the scope of this thesis. The threat of a deadly disease believed to primarily affect gay men led to an increased Othering of all queer identities which was then reflected in cinematic representation. By analysing images of how queer monstrosity is represented in this time of Othering, we begin to see how the queer subject is marginalised more broadly and how these representations can shift over decades.

CHAPTER THREE

QUEER NOSTALGIA, COMMUNITY AND IMMERSION

In the previous chapter, I formulated an interpretation of queer monsters and how these appropriations can be represented through elements of grotesquerie, transgression and the abject in cult films. Through these representations, it is possible for queer monstrosity to construct perceptions of queerness that counteract mainstream conventions of queer identity and performance. This chapter somewhat deviates from this analysis of queer monstrosity, instead focusing on cult audiences and the ways in which these audiences engage with queer monstrosity and its transgressions through appropriation. The queer monster appeals to particular fans and audiences who celebrate transgression, those who desire to transgress within the temporary immersive experience of cult screenings and gatherings.

Firstly, while cult films are often considered non-mainstream, the active visibility of cult participation has arguably ignited a mainstream popularity in recent decades, particularly given the Fox Network's 2016 television reboot of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. This type of reinvention around cult, as well as the continuation of participatory screenings across the world, effectively illustrates a progression of cult participation into a more contemporary and mainstream direction. In engaging with queer monstrosity and transgression, contemporary cult cinema screenings often work through *nostalgia*, *community*, and *immersion* as forms of engagement. With nostalgia, the audience appropriates films to the point of cult status. The type of cult ignited around nostalgia is indicative of the millennial coming-of-age audience now engaging with cult cinema of the past, using nostalgic films from childhood to form a community of like-minded enthusiasts. Mathijs and Mendik (2008), in relation to nostalgia, observe that cult cinema receptions "are drenched with a nostalgic yearning for an idealized past, a sense of belonging that can only be located outside of

present reality” (p. 18). They also observe that this nostalgia is the result of two factors: “the emotional impression of nostalgia that is part of a film’s reception, and nostalgia as a component of the film’s story” (p. 184). In terms of queer monstrosity, the audience feels a nostalgia for transgressive past experience, either from personal experience or a communal viewing experience.

Nostalgia provides a means in which audiences can embrace these “idealized” past encounters with particular films, and in a similar way, engage with images of queer monstrosity. The viewer’s initial impression of a film, upon first viewing, might adapt and change as growing tastes and experiences are altered by technological advancement, environment, and temporal circumstances. What one remembers from a childhood viewing experience at a movie theatre, or perhaps on a VHS tape, might take on an entirely different meaning when seen in a re-mastered, digital format later in life. That is, of course, if the film itself has a wide enough fan base to encourage a repeated viewing, enough for studios to re-release the film and for theatres to screen them. This is where the *community* aspect around the film would develop, a way for fans of a film to come together in one place with similar interests in re-creating this nostalgia of past viewing experience.

The idea of nostalgia, community and immersion as foundations for current cult cinema participation will be the basis for this chapter in relation to queer monstrosity. While the previous chapter attempted to situate queer monstrosity in relation to cult cinema through grotesque, transgression and the abject, this chapter will trace queer millennial cult audiences within contemporary cult cinema participation and queer monstrosity through three identifiable modes: (1) *the use of nostalgia*, (2) *queer cult communities*, (3) *cult immersion*. Each section of the chapter involves a theoretical analysis of these three modes and how they are situated within queer cult audience engagement. How do cult audiences use nostalgia, cult

communities, and immersion to formulate a re-interpretation of queer identity in relation to monstrosity and transgression?

I would first like to stress that these three modes of contemporary cult audience engagement are not meant to be quintessential; the methods behind them and the basis for their formulation have developed through careful research that has highlighted certain patterns of audience behaviour. The purpose of identifying these three modes of queer cult audience participation is not only to bring about more contemporary understanding of *queer* cult audiences, but also to expand on an analysis of queer monstrosity and how this monstrosity moves across different, more current modes of engagement. Cult films featuring queer monstrosity often reject any queerphobic representations in cinema, and these cult audience engagement modes are used by the queer audience in order to facilitate this rejection, and to celebrate cult films that also reject these representations.

The case studies for this chapter fit within the context of these cult audience engagements of nostalgia, community, and immersion. I re-examine *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (as seen in Chapter One) within the framework of nostalgia and immersion and the film's devoted and participatory cult audience, showing how transgressions represented in the film influence the actions of the audience. I also examine Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls* (1995) within the context of queer cult communities and the film's representation of queer monstrosity. Contemporary screenings of the film often involve interactions in the screening space by queer cultists who have formed a community around the film's camp aesthetic. By analysing how *Showgirls* fits within a communal aspect of cult cinema viewing, we begin to understand how communities form around particular cult films through appropriation, and also how these communities shift, expand, and develop over time.

Nostalgia and the Queer Audience

To mark the 40th anniversary of *Rocky Horror* in 2015, long-time fan Bill Wyman (2015) published a reflective piece on Vulture detailing his first experiences watching the film.

Growing up in what he refers to as the “cultural wasteland” of Phoenix, Arizona, Wyman felt himself an outcast, and remembers he and his friends being “suburban misfits.” Upon discovering *Rocky Horror*, Wyman soon noticed that screenings of the film were becoming a gathering of very similar people:

At those midnight showings of *Rocky Horror* we discovered something else, too: that there were misfits like us from every high school in town. The gay, the questioning, the hangers-on, the proto-punks, the wannabe-intellectuals, the disdained, and the otherwise shy convened to delight in Brad and Janet's individual deflowerings; to mourn the martyrdom of Eddie (played by a very young Meat Loaf); and to swoon, week after week, at Frank-N-Furter's lubricious entrance and the signifiers of his signature song, "Sweet Transvestite." [...] The guys who might have been gay certainly marvelled at Curry's beefy physique, and those of us who weren't could ogle Susan Sarandon, who ran around most of the film in her underwear. If nowhere else, at drama club, and at *Rocky Horror*, we had a tribe. (n.p.)

Wyman’s description of *Rocky Horror* screenings as being a place for other outcasts or “misfits” is particularly significant in illustrating how nostalgia operates for cult audiences of a past generation. Upon first discovery of the film and its audience, Wyman felt a place of belonging in an environment where, outside of the screening space, this type of queer expression would be rejected by heteronormative culture. When reminiscing on this experience, his nostalgia for the past allows him a similar re-entry into the same environment of acceptance. While he remembers key elements of the film itself, his main point of return begins with his nostalgia of acceptance, or “fitting in.”

Contemporary cult audiences, while still using cult cinema for its communal aspects, have a more temporal and generational-based sense of nostalgia. Typically, millennials or ‘Generation Y’ are constituted as those born between 1980 and the mid-1990s (Lyons, 2016, n.p.), and would not (like Wyman) have been present for midnight movie screenings of cult

films in the early to mid-1970s. These more contemporary millennial cult audiences, particularly the queer cult audience, will also not have experienced the same othering of queer identity as with this past generations of viewers. As such, the millennial generation experiences nostalgia for childhood films produced in the 1980s and 90s, while also revelling in a nostalgia for what these cult films represented to earlier generations of queer viewers. In other words, in a digital age, nostalgia is not always a longing for the past as much as it becomes a social construction and stylisation of what the film represents.

Paul Grainge (2000) argues that nostalgia is not rooted in a longing for the past, but rather through cultural style. This cultural style “has developed in accordance with a series of cultural, demographic, technological, and commercial factors that have made ‘pastness’ an expedient and marketable mode” (p. 33). In this way, the commercialisation of the past as a means of marketing in the present works as an engagement with the past but does not signify nostalgia as the result of an anxiety or dissatisfaction with the present. As acceptance towards queer identity develops over time, the millennial queer cult audience is not rejecting negative queer representation in the present, but rather engaging with the past as a means of sustaining this acceptance. Katharina Niemeyer (2014) notes the use of nostalgia as a companion to “progress,” and the latest developments of new technologies that might “activate” nostalgia. Citing Boyer (2013), Niemeyer writes that a re-emergence of nostalgia indicates a “crisis of temporality”:

In this sense, nostalgic expressions or the creation of nostalgic worlds could indicate a twofold phenomenon: a reaction to fast technologies, despite using them, in desiring to slow down, and/or an escape from this crisis into a state of wanderlust (*Fernweh*) and nostalgia (in the sense of *Heimweh*) that could be ‘cured’, or encouraged, by media use and consumption. (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 2)

For Niemeyer, nostalgic expressions in contemporary society work as a reaction to quickly evolving technology, a means of escaping from the fast-paced environments these technologies produce, but this desire for the nostalgic past can also be encouraged by media

consumption and the use of these technologies. The millennial queer cult audience would use these new emerging technologies as a means of reengaging with the past through nostalgia, and also as a way to evolve and reinvigorate past forms of queer audience participation.

These audiences might also use prior technologies to achieve a particular inflection of the past. Matt Hills and Jamie Sexton (2015) illustrate prior technologies as forming nostalgia because of their “residual” nature; this nostalgia can exist on both a personal and impersonal level: “Technologies and other cultural phenomena which are now ‘residual’, or perhaps close to extinction, assume a growing patina of romance as they age and disappear. Such nostalgia can exist on a personal level (in which nostalgia for particular technologies and practices is intertwined with memorial longing) or on a more impersonal level, where one may wistfully rue not having experienced a particular period that one never lived through” (p. 3). The cult which might develop around a past or increasingly enduring technology, such as analogue VHS or present-day DVD, and even a cultural phenomenon such as midnight movie participation, involves a particular level of nostalgia around a yearning for these viewing platforms, or a wish to engage with a nostalgic technology that was never experienced. In a sense, by viewing cult films through prior technologies, the modern viewer is experiencing the films in the same manner (or in a similar manner) as their cult predecessors.

Barbara Klinger (2006) takes a different approach to new technologies and audience nostalgia, namely through “re-viewing” or repeated viewing experiences. Home technologies (such as playback devices) that encourage repeated viewing behaviours “exercise dramatic effects on text and viewer, shaping the narrative experience and its place within the viewer’s imagination” (n.p.). With this type of technology, the viewer can “travel through the text selectively” to locate their favourite parts. Klinger uses data collected from survey participants to construct her argument, noting the pattern of some participants expressing a wish, through repeated viewing, to recapture original affective emotions felt upon first

viewing a film. Many times, these repeated viewings are generational and can identify how individuals of a particular generation characterise their societal involvement: “But perhaps more than other motivations, nostalgic impulses for re-viewing signal how individuals within a generation comprehend not only themselves and their peer group but also broader histories that define their social experience” (Klinger, 2006, n.p.). As a result of these generational understandings of viewing experience, the millennial cult audience often engages with this re-viewing or replay culture of cult cinema through more modern platforms such as streaming technology. To this extent, the modern audience undergoes a distinct nostalgic viewing experience unique to their own generation of spectators.

To diverge from this argument that nostalgia is technologically positioned (with or against), we recall Mathijs and Mendik’s (2008) discussion of nostalgia in relation to cult cinema, which yearns “for an idealized past, a sense of belonging that can only be located outside of present reality” (p. 184). In their “Anatomy of Cult Film,” they cite nostalgia as being one of the cult film’s main features. The nostalgic can work as part of a film’s story or rely on the ability to “evoke nostalgia for the glamour and picturesque scenery” such as in *The Sound of Music* (1965). Some cult films, such as *Donnie Darko* (2001), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946), elicit nostalgia through time-travel plotlines, which allow for “visualizations of past, future, or a parallel present” as a “guaranteed way of generating speculation on how to interpret the story” (Mathijs & Mendik, 2008, p. 3). These particular definitions work within the context of memory, the idealisation of an experienced (or unexperienced) past that translates into a yearning to recapture that nostalgic memory in the present. Yet, one could argue that these definitions somewhat neglect the purpose (or use) of nostalgic imagery for minority groups, such as the queer community. These groups in particular might disregard any idealised past in favour of a created or constructed nostalgic past.

For the queer community, this inclination to construct or create a past nostalgia could be the result of two factors: (1) Negative or adverse sensitivities towards the genuine/authentic past, which would negate nostalgia and any evocation of nostalgic affective response, and (2) A desire to disengage with heteronormative culture and its nostalgic imagery of the past ('Your nostalgia is not my nostalgia'). Firstly, a negative response to past experience, either because of discrimination, abuse, homophobia, or even a lack of acceptance in society, might lead to a disregard for this past in creating any nostalgic narrative. A solution would be to construct new nostalgic interpretations of one's history that evoke a more preferred affective response to that past. In a way, queer audiences use nostalgia as a means of confronting, and in a sense deconstructing, the past. Gilad Padva, (2014) writing on queer nostalgia, discusses the use of nostalgia for the queer community as a means of coping with cultural anxieties and discrimination:

Reinventing or retelling the past is a major part of the creation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender heritage with its own role models, icons, symbols, emblems, and glorified imageries. In their coping with prevalent bigotry, prejudice, ignorance, discrimination, and diverse sorts of homophobia, sexual minorities gradually develop their own legacy, which is interwoven with their members' private and collective memories, dreams, anxieties, and nostalgia. In a highly hostile world that demands sexual conformity and does not tolerate erotic transgressions, persecuted minorities create a counterculture with its own values, symbols, and beliefs, reflecting their members' quest for a nostalgic haven in an alienated, unsafe and homophobic world [...] (pp. 6-7).

Padva's statements here offer a rich, descriptive interpretation of how and why queer audiences in particular value nostalgia—a reinvention of the past in coping with bigotry and homophobia in a hostile world to create a nostalgic haven. With no feelings of nostalgia from childhood or adolescence, queer people might instead have nostalgia for certain, more favourable times. Arguably, queers are not unaccustomed to constructing their own temporal narratives, although Padva maintains that most queer nostalgia "is involved with temporal rather than temporal *narratives*" (p. 7, emphasis mine). This nostalgia is affected by the ways

in which queers create their own identities and construct their own lives through alternative methods.

In the previous chapter, I discussed Halberstam's (2005) argument for the "queer way of life" which encompasses "subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these wilfully eccentric modes of being" (p. 1). Here, queer identity is not working towards assimilation, but rather creating its own *separate* place, one that detaches from normalisation and situates queerness outside of mainstream categorisation. This is particularly true of queer subcultures, such as queer subgroups of cult cinema audiences, that detach themselves from more heteronormative cultural understandings of cinema and performance. Halberstam (2003) writes that, "queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities [...] by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of the conventional forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction and death" (p. 314). Of course, Halberstam is not arguing for queer subcultures of cult cinema, but rather the queer subcultures of urban club kids who spend their time and money on "subcultural involvement" and "new modes of deliberate deviance" (p. 174). These "alternative temporalities" produced by queer subcultures also translate into cinema spaces. While somewhat distinct from these subcultures of "deviance," there are distinct viewing subcultures taking place in urban environments that might work to highlight nostalgia and focus on the queer experience. Many times, these subcultures of viewing occur at audience participation screenings.

One of the main venues in the UK to host frequent participation screenings is the Prince Charles Cinema in London. They regularly show "sing-a-long" screenings of classic films such as *The Sound of Music*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Grease* and the more recent Disney hit *Frozen*, as well as quote-a-longs with films such as *Mean Girls*. The sing-a-longs encourage

audience members to sing along with the films on screen and also, in many cases, to come dressed in costume. They are also known for their cult participation screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *The Room*, and gay pride-themed screenings of films such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. These screenings encourage not only costuming and sing-a-longs (if applicable), but also full-blown participation where costumes are invited, props are provided, and the audience is encouraged to use them. In addition to this, the Prince Charles develops events like a Disney pyjama party for adults, where the audience is encouraged to wear their pyjamas and spend the day watching classic and contemporary Disney films. Audiences are encouraged to bring sleeping bags to themed events such as the “80’s Summer Camp Slash-a-thon,” which screens summer camp-based horror films from the 1980s as an all-nighter.

These events hosted by the Prince Charles are all particular examples of film communities developing around nostalgia. What does this type of nostalgia create for the audience, and why do cinemas such as the Prince Charles capitalise on the participation and cult elements of these particular films? Arguably, these types of screenings are invested in nostalgia, knowingly developed by the exhibitors who are aware of the nostalgia behind these particular films. Therefore, they enhance the screenings to allow audience members to *immerse* themselves in their nostalgia.

My discussion of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in the first chapter analysed its depictions of the grotesque, abject and transgressive and why the queer cult audience appropriates the film to subvert traditional representations of queer identity. Here, I argue for its nostalgic factor as initiating and maintaining its popularity for queer cult audiences in present day. The queer cult audience engages with the film because of a pre-determined understanding of its queer monstrous representation, but also because of nostalgia towards an awareness of its strong queer cult following.

Firstly, the film itself evokes nostalgic parody of 1950s B-horror and science fiction films, which audiences of the 1970s in midnight movie screenings would have recognised and alluded to in their participation. The film's opening song, "Science Fiction/Double Feature," alludes heavily to this 1950s nostalgia, referencing the science fiction and horror films from which it has drawn its influence:

*Michael Rennie was ill
The Day the Earth Stood Still
But he told us where we stand
And Flash Gordon was there
In silver underwear
Claude Rains was The Invisible Man
Then something went wrong
For Fay Wray and King Kong
They got caught in a celluloid jam
Then at a deadly pace
It Came From Outer Space
And this is how the message ran... (Sharman, 1975, n.p.)*

With this parodic nostalgia of classic B-horror and science fiction films, the audience of *RHPS* at midnight movie screenings in the 1970s would have been aware of these references, and the film's parody would have perhaps invoked a nostalgic past experience in watching them. Contemporary cult audiences attending *Rocky Horror* screenings are experiencing a different kind of nostalgia, one for the experience of participation that has become so synonymous with the film itself. *Rocky Horror* is also (as I discussed in the first chapter) queer, and its previously established queer audience in effect determined a continuation of this queer following into present day. In a time of IMAX and 3-D blockbusters being shown at plush, expansive commercial chain theatres, where spaces for queer identity could be lost under a more mainstream, heteronormative-focused environment, attending a screening event of *Rocky Horror* (particularly when participation is encouraged) would call to mind a nostalgia for a queer community film experience. This is a tool, as mentioned previously, to overcome this hyper-digitalisation of film screening space.

In his book *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture*, Lincoln Geraghty (2014) argues for nostalgia and the reclaiming of the past as connected to the creation of contemporary fan identity:

We might understand the nostalgia fans feel [...] as being part of contemporary culture's marketing and remediation of the past; not necessarily a longing for what historical texts may or may not get brought back but a re-examination of the media history archive. By extension, in the physical objects that fans collect, salvage and reclaim from the past we can see how notions of nostalgia and memory are bound up in the creation of a contemporary fan identity rather than a recreation of the past by substituting bits of history with myth or things that never existed. (p. 3)

Geraghty's claim that nostalgia and memory allow for the creation of contemporary fan identity is particularly revealing towards the contemporary queer cult audience and brings us back to the earlier discussion of queers constructing or creating a past nostalgia. In this way, the queer audience could perform this construction by engaging with or appropriating cult films that closely (or distantly) represent queer monstrosity. In many cases, these engagements and appropriations take place within constructed queer cult communities, which I explore in the next section.

Queer Cult Communities and Cinema

Benedict Anderson (1983) argues for the theory of "imagined communities," which he claims are imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p. 5). This definition of a community, while depicting a definition of a broader, more nationalised community, neglects to place particular subjects (such as independent audiences, unconventional performative audiences, sexual minorities) within its scope. Scholars such as Elizabeth Evans (2011) have developed distinctive, and more nuanced, delineations of cinema audience communities that focus on shared ideology, taste, space and etiquette. Evans posits the formation of "indirect communities" through empirical

research conducted at three East Midlands independent art cinemas in the UK. These communities collectively share similar ideas (as mentioned above) of ideology, taste and etiquette “despite lacking direct, consistent interaction” (p. 329). They do not appear as more than a collection of individuals, but Evans claims that these communities’ shared ideologies form a commonality that creates an indirect community showing a connection of place:

Even if such communities do not seem, on the surface, to be more than groups of individuals, the presence of shared attitudes and beliefs alongside loyalty to a specific space indicates that more is at stake in such social gatherings. A sense of commonality may emerge that whilst not being as concrete as families or friendship groups, still offers a sense of collective identity; such identity offers further insight into the pleasures of engaging with narrative forms in some public environments but not in others. (p. 344)

Evans’s argument, however, raises several questions about the formation of communities when placed within the context of performative queer audiences, those who frequently have this “direct, consistent interaction” which the indirect communities lack.

In their book *Audiences*, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) classify audiences into three categories: “fan, cultist (or subcultist) and enthusiast, who are members of fandoms, cults (or subcultures) and enthusiasms respectively” (p. 138). ‘Fans’ are those who attach themselves to particular programmes or stars “within the context of relatively heavy mass media use,” and they predominantly do not engage with other fans that “share their attachments.” ‘Cultists’ also engage in heavy media use but have “certain defined and refined tastes” that are “more specialized” with “increased immersion” (p. 139). In this way, cultists are more characterised by their *networking*, circulating materials amongst themselves in a number of forms that are “essentially characterized by informality.” This informality “may often exist in spaces which oppose the dominant forms of organization of an activity” (p. 139). These dominant forms can take on the form of “enthusiasms” with very specialized media engagement and tight organisation around a very specific body of work and these enthusiasms do not tend to work informally.

Queer cult communities, those created and those expanded from pre-existing cult communities, can be classified as cultist or enthusiast by these definitions. In this way, the queer cult community subculture derives from an existing cult film enthusiast subculture, suggesting a “blockage in the system of representation” the existing subculture has failed to address (Hebdige, 1979, p. 90). The existence of the queer cult subculture often works informally with a specialised and increased immersion (thus being cultist) while the existing subculture works more formally around specialised activity (enthusiast). However, queer cult communities often counteract these particular categories of ‘fan,’ ‘cultist,’ and ‘enthusiast’ by engaging in distinct, performative behaviours that diverge from the norm. I argue for two subcategories of queer cult audiences that expand on Abercrombie and Longhurst’s classifications: The queer *subcultist* and the queer *enthusiast*. ‘Subcultist’ combines the prefix ‘*sub-*’ meaning ‘secondary,’ the word ‘cult’ meaning a large devotion or veneration around a particular thing (in this case, the cult film), and the suffix ‘*-ist*’ denoting one who practices. Subcultist implies a supplementary or secondary member of a cult following who engages in activity that diverges from his/her originating cult group. Therefore, the *queer* subcultist, while following the traditional practices of a subcultist, practices a cultist type of engagement that specialises in specific queer appropriation of cult film texts, namely an engagement with queer monstrosity.

The queer enthusiast closely resembles the enthusiast defined by Abercrombie and Longhurst. The informality of cultism, which traditionally opposes dominant forms of organisation around social activity, is reversed with the enthusiast. The enthusiast embraces these dominant forms with a very specialised media engagement and tight organisation. The *queer* enthusiast, then, practices this specialised media engagement around a specific body of work, namely films that strictly or closely represent queer identities.

These two subcategories place the queer cult audience within scholarly definitions of audience activity, which often neglect the inclusion of queer people within their scope. I do not suggest that the queer audience cannot be placed with definitions of ‘fans,’ ‘cultists’ or ‘enthusiasts.’ This type of suggestion would be restrictive and insinuate that queers only participate in specialised activity central to queer identity and inclusion. Instead, I introduce these subcategories of the ‘queer subcultist’ and ‘queer enthusiast’ to highlight particular inclinations of the queer audience around cult cinema and their viewing practices.

Janet Staiger (2005), in her book of *Media Reception Studies*, outlines two very specific types of viewing practices for cult audiences: “paracinematic” and “camp” viewing (p. 125). While she argues that both paracinematic and camp viewers “exaggerate portions of the text,” “create double entendres” and “focus on stylistic excess,” (p. 127), the paracinematic viewer does not “exercise this viewing strategy on standard-quality Hollywood movies” but rather obscure B-movies or exploitation films (p. 127). Paracinematic viewers are also known for asserting their intelligence and education on the subject of these chosen texts. Camp viewers, on the other hand, are distinguished by their “purposefully hypergendered” reading positions (p. 127). Camp is, of course, an incredibly broad term which has seen its share of delineations in academic research. Susan Sontag (1999) articulates camp as “a certain mode of aestheticism” (p. 54) and a “sensibility” (p. 53). Judith Butler (1990) articulates the camp aesthetic (in drag performance) as effectively mocking “both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (p. 363). Jack Babuscio (1999) defines camp through four central features: “irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour,” (n.p.), while Glyn Davis (2004) discusses distinctions between “gay camp” and “queer camp,” stating that these distinctions work to “sustain the cohesion of ‘subculture’” (p. 57).

In this way, where do queer cult communities (or subcultures), namely the queer subcultist and the queer enthusiast, fit into definitions of camp? More pointedly, are these queer cult communities “paracinematic” or “camp” viewers? Firstly, the queer subcultist (who practices an engagement that specialises in the queer appropriation of cult films) is not inherently camp. Instead, a camp aesthetic (if present) is initiated by the queer subcultist’s appropriation of a film or derives from camp that is already existent in the film itself. The queer enthusiast (who practices a specialised media engagement around films that strictly represent queer identities) is also not inherently camp, unless the films representing queer identities they engage with contain elements of camp. If the queer subcultist or queer enthusiast engages less with standard Hollywood films and more with B-movies or exploitation films, they could then be considered a paracinematic viewer. Thus, the queer viewer (as subcultist or enthusiast) could work as both a camp viewer *and* a paracinematic viewer. In order to further situate the queer viewer within these viewing contexts, I would like to explore the queer cult following and queer monstrous representation around a 1990s cult classic—*Showgirls* (1995).

The *Showgirls* Queer Cult Audience

Queer audiences, particularly gay audiences, have drawn a particular subcultist following around Paul Verhoeven’s campy cult classic *Showgirls* (1995). The film, as with many cult films, was very poorly received upon its initial release. When eventually released by MGM on home video, those who purchased the film began having gatherings and screenings as well as “throwing *Showgirls* irony parties, laughing sardonically at the implausibly poor screenplay and shrieking with horror at the aerobic sexual encounters” (Klein, 2000, p. 79). These parties were thrown largely, in part, by gays in New York and Los Angeles in 1996 “to celebrate it was ‘the camp cult classic of the decade’” (Hunter, 2000, p. 190). Shortly after,

MGM and United Artists, as well as Verhoeven himself, capitalised on the idea of re-inventing the film as cult and edited the video release version to highlight its “tastelessness” (p. 190) and camp. They also called on a drag queen entertainment company, Screaming Queens Entertainment, to help provide an interactive experience of the film at midnight screenings in Manhattan, especially repackaging the film as a midnight movie. The drag queens engaged in shadowcasting, mimicking the film’s dance routines and fight sequences and inviting the audience to call back dialogue (Nayman, 2014, p. 11). Drag queen Peaches Christ created a “Midnight Mass” show based around her love of midnight movies, using *Showgirls* to create an experimental, audience participation-based performance. The performances advertised “free lap dances with any large popcorn,” using what she calls “filthy, disgusting, boogery, horrifying drag queens” with the prerequisite that they should “horrify the audience” (McHale, 2019, n.p.). This type of engagement by drag performers is signalling a form of queer monstrosity that has developed around *Showgirls* and its relationship to transgression.

Participations around *Showgirls* vary and adapt to suit the tastes of the audience but carry on in a tradition that echoes a *Rocky Horror*-esque style of engagement. Common props used by the audience include noisemakers, tampons, play money and potato chips, all of which directly correlate to what happens in the film. There are also many different callbacks, for example: grunting or saying “HA!” whenever the main character, Nomi, dances; yelling “hairpiece!” whenever you see Kyle MacLachlan’s character, Zack; meowing at Gina Gershon’s character, Cristal, or restating her repeated use of the word “Darlin.” There are also drinking games played in screenings where alcohol is permitted that correspond to different actions (i.e. finishing your drink during a sex-scene before the two characters climax). These participations, as well as the film’s cult following, have also inspired location screenings in historic places and unique venues.

In June 2015, to mark the film's 20th anniversary, a screening was hosted at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery by Cinespia. Launched in 2002, Cinespia is a California-based organisation known for hosting outdoor screenings of classic films in and around Los Angeles. The star of the film, Elizabeth Berkley (Nomi Malone), surprised the audience with a special appearance and introduction, and made a specific nod to the LGBTQ+ audience in particular: "The love you have for this movie has made it the cult film that it is." The event coincided with the United States Supreme Court marriage equality ruling the very same day and Berkley stated she could "not think of a better night" to celebrate the film (Hernandez, 2015, n.p.).

Yet, what is it about *Showgirls* and its themes that resonate so considerably with the queer audience and how does this film represent queer monstrosity? There are several ways in which Nomi Malone signifies different aspects of queer identity and monstrosity that could resonate with queer audiences: (1) an excessive, hyperbolic, and performative representation of 'camp', (2) the use of sexuality as transactional, and (3) a reinvention of the heteronormative self. To put this into context, I would like to analyse these particular aspects of the film that work to construct a queer appropriation and a representation of queer monstrosity.

The first is the concept of "camp." According to Susan Sontag (1999), camp is "a seriousness that fails," (p. 59) but not all failed seriousness can be considered camp. Camp as failed seriousness comes through "only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve" (p. 59). *Showgirls* contains all of these elements of camp, but this camp is very self-aware. It is knowingly performative, openly exaggerated, and far from "naïve." The purpose of *Showgirls* was to create an excessive, exaggerated critique of sexuality in modern society (McHale, 2019, n.p.) and the heightened excess shown on screen was entirely intentional. For instance, the dialogue is considerably exaggerated and

over the top, which is partly the root cause of the harsh criticism it received. The following exchange between two main characters, Nomi and Cristal, is one particular example of this, where the women wistfully discuss eating dog food:

Cristal Connors: I've had dog food.

Nomi Malone: You have?

Cristal Connors: Mmm-hmmm. Long time ago. Doggy Chow... I used to love Doggy Chow.

Nomi Malone: I used to love Doggy Chow, too!

Or the following line by character, Al Torres, directed at Nomi Malone after she quits working as a lap dancer at his strip club:

Al Torres: It must be weird not having anybody cum on you.

Throughout the film, we are also witness to Nomi's naïveté and her exaggerated, hyperbolic actions. In several scenes, she mispronounces fashion designer Versace as "VER-SAYCE," which has become a commonly quoted line in participation screenings. She maintains a constant manic, excessive energy from beginning to end, overreacting at inappropriate moments and never straying very far from full-blown meltdown. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 2015, director Paul Verhoeven admitted to this openly hyperbolic approach and his use of excess:

I always felt that it was what you might call a hyperbolic approach to filmmaking. Yes, it was over the top. And that was on purpose. The environments were very flashy. There were too many lights, too many idiotic things, and too much Vegas — not only in the surroundings, but "Vegas" in the way the people behaved, in the dialogue, in the acting. As for the finished product: I thought it was perfect. Otherwise I would have changed it. I had time to change it. I could change whatever was there. (Wood J. , 2015, n.p.)

Verhoeven also admitted in the same interview that Elizabeth Berkley's exaggerated and excessive performance as Nomi Malone was due to his insistence, as he thought it worked best for the film. (Wood J. , 2015, n.p.) In this way, the film could be considered a representation of queer monstrosity because of this exaggerated and openly aware camp

performativity that knowingly satirises more traditional, conventionalised representations of heteronormative sexuality and sexual expression.

Nomi represents a queer monstrosity through her use of sexuality as transactional, frequently using an unrepressed sexuality to get what she wants, or as an attempt to further her career. There is a stigma around queer sexuality in society, a social pressure to conform to heteronormative rules of normality. Rejecting these rules is a key part of queer liberation. Hence, Nomi Malone's strong uninhibited sexuality might cause her to become a sort of 'role model' for queer identity. I.Q. Hunter (2016) defends the film's depiction of sexuality as almost non-sexual: "The emotional implications of sex and the subtleties of sexual pleasure are unimportant; what matters is sex as performance, sex as work, sex as commodity and commercial transaction. Instead of adventurous, intimate explorations of 'sexuality,' the film distributes quantities of choreographed flesh, nude 'stuff,' across the widescreen" (n.p.). The film has none of the characteristics of what one might classify as soft-core porn, or sex for the sake of pleasure. Rather, sex is being depicted as work, or as a tool for transaction. Nomi uses sex to her advantage and for career opportunity, which could translate into a rejection of more heteronormative conceptions of sexuality as a means of pleasure or reproduction.

This film also relates to monstrosity through the concept of reinvention, or the reinvention of the heteronormative self. Nomi Malone is aspirational in the sense that she reinvents herself, or attempts to reinvent herself, throughout the film. Moving to Las Vegas as a drifter with very little money, she begins as a lap dancer and eventually works her way into stardom as the headliner of a stage show. According to Hunter (2000), Nomi's experiences are "a fable of that most open of secrets: the dark side of the American dream" (p. 193). On her path to stardom, Nomi relies on different people to make a new life, even though she might destroy their lives in the process. This type of reinvention is a type of reinvention to which some (including the queer audience) might aspire. Nomi reinvents her

identity and creates her new life with the help of a *chosen* family, which some queer people also do when constructing their place in society. We recall Halberstam's (2005) argument on queer time and space, which work in opposition to institutions of "family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (p. 1). Nomi is, in effect, following this queer way of life by choosing to reject a more heteronormative, traditional form of familial contact and identity.

I have illustrated here the concept of queer cult communities that engage with queer monstrosity through particular *Showgirls* participations and how this film also represents aspects of this queer monstrosity. These engagements are already bound in pre-existing audience formations (such as groups of fans, cult cinema fans, or film enthusiasts), but diverge by focusing on particular queer, or queer identifiable, film texts. The next section attempts to illustrate how these queer audiences *perform* around cult cinema through forms of immersion.

Immersion and Cult Cinema

The queer audience also engages with cult films and monstrosity through immersion and performance. Immersive cinema has developed as a recent topic of scholarly debate, namely when analysing cinema and audiences within the context of emerging technologies. With changes in cinematic apparatus, such as projection technology and the development of high-quality cinema architectural devices (stadium seating, wide screen, digital surround sound), some scholars hypothesize these technologies and advancements as linked to the immersion of the spectator. Tim Recuber (2007), for instance, highlights these changes as ignoring artistic process and instead focusing on technology to immerse the spectator in the film world: "Rather than elicit this absorption or intensity through the somewhat standard artistic processes of screenwriting, acting, and direction, new cinema achieves a more calculable, predictable absorption or immersion of the spectator based not around the vagaries of artistic

processes but on the certainties of technological advancements” (p. 316).

On the other hand, Janet H. Murray (1997) uses the concept of cyberspace, changing internet platforms, and virtual reality technology to discuss immersion, which she also equates with “being submerged”:

The experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content. We refer to this as immersion. *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. (p. 98)

This idea of being “submerged” in technology as an immersive experience is undeniably accurate. When an audience engages with cinema as an alternate reality through technology, they can become fully immersed in the experience as one would submerge themselves in a body of water. Still, when this immersion happens by embodying a particular type of performance, namely a queer performance, definitions of what immersion actually *is* and what it *becomes* can take on much different connotations. I argue that, in many cases, forms of immersion for the queer cult audience take place through *performance*, or by engaging with specific modes of performance in relation to queer monstrosity.

Performance modes, as they exist in cult cinema fandom, can be defined as types of performative actions from an audience in a cult cinema screening that characterise specific methods of subcultural, gender and queer identification. These performance modes take on several forms depending on the action involved and the person performing the action. I identify the following three modes of performance which I believe most closely categorise queer cult audience immersion. The first is what I term a *discourse* mode: Audience members using performative speech acts to elicit response, to have an effect on the other audience members, to persuade the audience to perform a certain action (or actions), or to convince the rest of the audience that participation is justified. The second is a *gender performance* mode:

audience members bending and changing heteronormative gender roles through the characterisation of a character or characters, specifically through cross-dressing or by performing as gender nonconforming. The third is the *appropriation* mode: audience members appropriating the cult film for purposes of re-identifying culturally as a marginalised group. This type of mode includes mainly queer and LGBT audiences, but at times is also used by other subcultures such as cosplayers and superfans. My identification of these performance modes requires some justification and further definition, namely in illustrating the relevant theory behind each of these modes and how they translate into immersion.

Discourse Mode (Performative Utterances)

According to J.L. Austin's (1962) theories of "performative utterances," the uttering of the performative is, "or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something" (p. 5). Austin places performative utterances into three categories: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is the performance of an utterance, or the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning. An illocutionary act can be defined as "the performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something" (p. 99), while perlocutionary acts are "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something" (p. 108). The illocutionary act is connected to the production of a certain effect and the act cannot be successfully performed unless the effect is achieved. This effect involves bringing about the force of the locution (or form of expression), making it clear that an act was performed. The performance of an illocutionary act changes "the natural course of events" (p. 116) and namely works in "securing uptake, taking effect, and inviting responses" (p. 120). A perlocutionary act is emphasised by its actual effect on the listener or audience and its

consequences: “what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading” (p. 108).

Suppose, for example, that a cinema manager informs an audience that “The film will commence in five minutes.” He or she is thereby performing the *locutionary* act of saying that “The film will commence in five minutes.” In saying this, the cinema manager is also performing the *illocutionary* act of informing the cinema patrons of the film’s imminent start and urging them to take their seats. The cinema manager also intends to be performing the *perlocutionary* act of convincing the patrons to believe the film is about to start and persuading them to sit down. Yet how do these speech acts and the use of performative utterances connect to queer cult cinema audiences?

Active queer audiences of cult cinema, as well as the characters themselves, perform speech acts that attempt to make statements about the film, achieve response, instigate an effect, and/or to persuade other audience members to participate and engage. These speech acts might also be used by the queer monster to generate a response with regard to negative queer representation. Therefore, these audiences and characters are performing all three types of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary) as illustrated by Austin. A common example of speech acts in cult audience activity lies with *Rocky Horror*.

The cult audience of *Rocky Horror* is considered one of the largest and most active cult audiences and, among other forms of participation, is well known for its use of *callbacks*, or audience call and response. These callbacks are so prominent that Sal Piro, President of *RHPS* Fan Club, published *The Official Rocky Horror Picture Show Audience Participation Guide* in 1991 to assist newcomers. The guide includes a full script that has been annotated with official callbacks and audience instructions for participation. The following passage is an excerpt from the participation guide, where it is possible to see the three types

of speech acts being performed by the audience. The callbacks and audience actions compiled by Piro (1991) are starred and written in bold:

(Scene changes to the office of The Criminologist. He turns in his chair and speaks directly to the audience.)

The man you are about to see has no neck!

CRIMINOLOGIST: I would like ***You would, would you.*** if I may ***You may.*** to take you ***Where?*** on a strange journey. ***How strange was it? It was so strange they mad a movie about it; not the book, the movie.*** It seemed a fairly ordinary night ***Ordinary?*** when Brad Majors ***Asshole*** and his fiancée, ***Slut*** Janet Weiss, ***Veiss*** two young, ordinary, healthy kids, ***Healthy?*** left Denton that late November evening to visit a Dr. Everett Scott.

AUDIENCE BOOS AND HISSES (p. 11)

This excerpt shows several examples of the *types* of responses made by the audience, generally insulting in nature or working to create humour where humour is absent. Yet, these responses offer examples of Austin's speech acts being performed in what I referred to previously as the "discourse mode," which has the audience using performative speech acts to elicit response, or perhaps persuade others to perform the same action.

For instance, in saying the words "The man you are about to see has no neck," the audience is performing the *locutionary* act of commenting on the appearance of The Criminologist, while also performing the *illocutionary* act of using the phrase to invite a response, or produce a certain effect—in other words, they are performing what they observe in saying something. Simultaneously, the audience is performing a *perlocutionary* act to have an effect on the viewer/listener and persuade others to similar distinctions of The Criminologist's appearance. It is important to note, however, that Austin's definition of speech acts does not represent a quintessential understanding of performance and performativity, particularly when examined from a perspective of queer and gender performance.

The Gender Performance Mode

Several scholars have constructed ideas of “performance” and “performativity” that differ from Austinian definitions on the speech act, while also using Austin’s theories as a root source. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) discusses her own notion of “periperformatives,” which are not performatives in themselves, but are “*about* performatives” and “cluster *around* performatives” (p. 68). The periperformative speech act, in effect, lies with the spatial metaphor of the third person or “witness” to the act and how they are interpellated into the act through its performance, with or without their consent. Sedgwick uses Austin’s example of the phrase, “I dare you,” as an example of the periperformative—even though the phrase tacitly involves a first person (the one performing the speech act) and a second person (the one who has been “dared” by the action), the effect of the phrase depends upon the “tacit demarcation of the space of a third-person plural, a ‘they’ of witness—whether or not literally present” (p. 69).

If considered from the perspective of queer cult audiences, the use of periperformatives adds further definition to the way these audiences perform speech in the space of the cinema. While callbacks and verbal audience response at times invoke the performative, they are not consistently articulating *explicit* performatives (such as “I do” or “I apologise”), but rather making statements *around* performatives (the performance of the queer monster in the film itself), and the audience is conceivably being interpellated into a subject position through discourse. According to Sedgwick (2003), “by contrast to the performative, the periperformative is the mode in which people may invoke illocutionary acts in the explicit context of other illocutionary acts. Thus, it can also accomplish something toward undoing that fateful reliance of explicit performativity on *the exemplary*, on the single example” (p. 79). In this quote, Sedgwick concedes that the periperformative works through illocutionary acts in the context of other illocutionary acts, meaning that the speech act being

performed to take effect can be invoked by another illocutionary act. However, this reliance on “the exemplary” in performativity, and what the periperformative does to reduce the exemplary, can problematically diminish what performativity (or rather “performance”) represents in other contexts.

Judith Butler (1996) writes of the performativity of the speech act through the “power of the subject or its will” in her essay “Burning Acts: Injurious Speech”:

If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that ‘success’ is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*. It is not simply that the speech act takes places *within* a practice, but that the act itself is a ritualized practice. (p. 205)

Butler’s definition emphasises the actions and set of practices that govern the actions of speech through repetition and ritualized practice, which bears a striking resemblance to her definition of the performativity of gender. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler (1990) observes that gender should not be understood as a “stable identity” but rather as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (p. 191). Butler argues that gender itself is *performative*, that the appearance of substance is a constructed identity and constituted in time through a “stylized repetition of acts”: “The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (p. 191). What this quote illustrates is the performativity of gender, the learned behaviours, socialisation and practices that constitute gender as ongoing. What I aim to discuss, in addition to the earlier discussion of the performativity of speech, is “performance,” which is the act or embodiment of the moment (for instance, the bounded act of the stage), an artifice, and expresses a certain kind of choice within that.

Therefore, the *performance* of gender (less the *performativity* of gender) is that which works within the context of the cult audience in what I refer to as the “gender performance mode.” As defined previously, gender performance mode involves the audience members bending and changing “normative” gender roles through the characterisation of the queer monster, specifically through cross-dressing or by performing as gender nonconforming. I refer again, as an example, to the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* cult audience and the characterisation and embodiment of various characters by audience members. While most costumed audience members at *Rocky Horror* screenings tend to embody a character of the same gender, self-identified males frequently dress as the gender-bending queer monster, Dr. Frank-N-Furter. As a self-proclaimed “sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania,” the character of Dr. Frank can be identified as what Chris Straayer (1996) refers to as the “she-man.”

As analysed in Chapter One, “She-man” is not to be confused with the pejorative term “she-male,” but instead used to describe a “phenomenon in contemporary popular culture [...] that exploits cross-dressing’s potential for intense double sexual signification [...] the appropriation of female coding by a male performer as a straightforward empowering device” (Straayer, 1996, p. 80). The she-man is “glaringly bi-sexed rather than obscurely androgynous or merely bisexual. Rather than undergoing a downward gender mobility, he has enlarged himself with feminine gender and female sexuality” (p. 80). Straayer’s concept of the she-man using femininity as an empowering device speaks to the context in which cult audiences use the performance of gender with cult cinema.

The Appropriation Mode (“Queering”)

Mathijs and Sexton (2011) briefly consider the queer audience in their study of cult cinema, discussing how these audiences use the method of “queering” to identify with particular cult films: “The concept of queering relies on the pun involved in merging the terms “queer” (gay) and “query” (investigation). It refers to the audience activity of reading against the grain, of wilfully reinterpreting films by looking for performances of non-normative sexuality even against the intentions of the filmmakers [...] While largely playful and seldom attempting to effectively alter the course of a film’s reception, queering has nevertheless impacted on the status of resolutely mainstream films, up to the point where it has ignited, rather than extended, cult status” (pp. 115-116). While this definition of queering identifies key aspects in the process of queer identification, the appropriation of cult cinema by a queer audience goes much deeper.

In a sense, queer audiences of cult cinema use the cinema space and the cult film as performative arenas for liberation from an oppressive heteronormative patriarchy and to allow for the open expression of queer identity. They engage in transgressive acts that mimic the performance of the queer monster. The monstrous body (or bodies) on screen, or the subject matter of the film, influences the bodies in the cinema, and thus, the audience performs in a similar manner as a means of “disidentification” from society (Muñoz, 1999). This is also a means to rid oneself of a dominant societal ideology that inhibits sexuality, renounces taboo, and fortifies rejection. In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) discusses the queer performance and its way of disidentification: “Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture” (p. 95). Particular queer monsters, such as Dr. Frank-N-Furter, would be identifiable to a queer audience, someone whose transgressions could be respected, admired, and/or emulated. The

queer audience could also use these characters to “disidentify” with the dominant, hegemonic culture and prescribe to their own specific ideology in the cult cinema space and elsewhere.

Darren Elliott-Smith (2016), in his book on queer horror, discusses the queer appropriation of Brian De Palma’s 1976 horror film *Carrie*. According to Elliott-Smith, the film is relatable to the gay male spectator, in particular, as a “cross-gender identification [...] via its basic coming-of-age narrative” (p. 23). The film itself can be understood by gay males as “a variation on the ‘coming out’ tale, both sexually and socially” (p. 23), and the film’s “use of excess” adds to its camp allure. Expanding on the work of Mary Ann Doane, Elliott-Smith refers to the gay male subject as “parading his social constructed gender” (masculinity) while the female subject “masquerades” hers (femininity) (p. 41). He writes, “In parading an exaggerated masculinity, the gay male subject idealises what he both worships and aspires to be (an impenetrable, masculine ideal) and yet, conversely, disidentifies with what he is *not* as symbolically deemed by the patriarchal (heterosexual) hegemony” (p. 41). In a cross-gender masquerade as female characters from *Carrie*, the gay male could use this masquerade as a “reaffirmation of masculinity” (p. 54). With queer appropriations of *Carrie*, Elliott-Smith references gay male spectators and drag performance, which are major components of queer performance itself. However, performance in cult cinema occurs in a variety of ways through different forms of reception, regardless of a queer audience presence.

These modes of performance around cult cinema dictate types of engagement that tend to diverge from technological immersion. The cult audience, by performing through these modes, is effectively attempting to immerse themselves in the performativity of cult and experience a more communal exchange. This is not to suggest that all cult audiences wish to distance themselves from technology, or that all cult audiences wish to immerse themselves in cult cinema through performance. Instead, these modes of performance

immersion indicate the tendencies of distinct groups (such as the queer audience) towards an engagement with cult cinema that is more *personal* and tailored towards their own identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to initiate a more contemporary understanding of queer audiences and their uses of nostalgia, community and immersion around cult cinema and queer monstrosity. With digital technologies being so prevalent in cinema viewing, cult cinema participation contends with becoming antiquated or even lacklustre. Marketing nostalgia, forming a community, or encouraging immersive performance can help to transcend the influence of technology and allow cult cinema to remain a useful tool for representing queer monstrosity. These modes of nostalgia, community and immersion are also denoted by the queer audience when they engage with or appropriate cult films.

In terms of nostalgia, scholarly debates often focus on technological factors and innovations that make nostalgia marketable and also temporal in reaction to this technology evolving and changing. Many audiences re-purpose old technologies through different viewing experiences to re-capture a nostalgia of the past, or to assimilate a past that never existed. Certain queer audiences might create their own nostalgia either due to negative or adverse sensitivities toward the genuine past, or because of a desire to disengage with heteronormative culture and the way it represents the past.

Similarly, the queer audience can often create queer cult communities by expanding and developing from pre-existing cult communities (which at times become what I have termed ‘queer subcultism’ or ‘queer enthusiasm’). These communities develop reading positions of texts that are queer, camp, or paracinematic, depending on viewing tastes and tendencies. I used the example of a *Showgirls* queer cult following to illustrate this position and to represent how queer cult communities appropriate or “queer” existing film texts with

recognisable elements of queer monstrosity. When these queer cult communities perform within cult cinema spaces, they begin to engage in immersion through three performance modes: *discourse*, *gender performance*, and *appropriation*. Immersion, in terms of performance, is not always the idea of being “submerged”; performances in which one *surrounds* him or herself with the film text when performing also take on immersive characteristics.

It was not my intention here to make generalisations about how *all* queer cult audiences use nostalgia, community and immersion, but rather to indicate how particular groups of queer audiences develop tendencies *towards* these particular forms when engaging with queer monstrosity. These methods are not intentional but subcultural and work to orientate (and encourage) cult cinema participation in a more digital age when audiences tend to favour more technology driven forms of engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE QUEER MONSTER IN THE 21st CENTURY

Cult cinema, once limited to its subcultural appeal and fervent fandom, has slowly merged with the mainstream in the 21st century. As discussed in the previous chapters, cult films often exhibited various forms of transgression. While not all cult films could be defined as transgressive, queer monstrosity worked as a means of exhibiting this transgression in opposition to assimilation. When cult films became readily available to the masses through VHS rentals and DVD technology in the late 1990s/early 2000s, any definition of cult through “excess and controversy” became meaningless (Sconce, 2008, p. 48). Rather than continuing as a means to celebrate transgression, cult cinema has become a brand of entertainment, working less through social function in counterculture and more through marketing, or as “pseudogenre, more or less identifiable with independent films directed at young, middle-class white audiences” (Hunter, 2008, n.p.). Filmmakers might promote lack of box-office success by marketing a film as an instant cult classic, which in itself contradicts the very definition of cult films and their designation.

This chapter seeks to explore the landscape of cult cinema in the 21st century and to analyse how the queer monster on screen has gradually shifted as understandings of transgression alter and transform. The films analysed are not cult as such, but yet have cult characteristics, cult appeal, or the tendency to *become* cult through these representations of monstrosity and transgression by the queer monster. These films indicate *potential* cult status based on their depictions of queer monstrosity, transgression and recuperation. This indication of potential cult status also illustrates how understandings of cult, and indeed representations of queer monstrosity, change over time across various cultural landscapes. In these more mainstream representations of the queer monster, the monster becomes more

dynamic, nuanced, and complex; in other words, more human. I begin with a discussion of transgression and cult cinema in a contemporary setting, illustrating how perceptions of queer monstrosity have been influenced by the New Queer Cinema movement of the early 1990s. Following from this, the main case studies for analysis involve gay representations in mainstream cinema and three categories of transgression present within these representations: *acceptable* transgression, *direct* transgression, and *unacceptable* transgression.

Transgression and Cult Cinema in the 21st Century

Classic queer cult films of the late 20th century such as Jim Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), Tom Holland's *Fright Night* (1985), Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1990), Stephan Elliott's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), Beeban Kidron's *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995), and John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) are often now screened in more event cinema spaces, or in queer film festivals. *Pink Flamingos* (1972) is still often screened at John Waters-focused or event cinema spaces. For instance, Amy Grimehouse, a London based cinema/arts club night that celebrates trashy, camp, cult and transgressive film, has hosted a 12 Hour John Waters Filth Festival since 2010 (Abraham, 2015, n.p.). Having visited one of these festivals in 2014, there were screenings of John Waters' films across the 12-hour period, and a number of drag queens dressed as Divine and other characters, including Edie from *Pink Flamingos*, sat in her crib asking me if I had any eggs. This is in homage to the obsession Edie has with eggs throughout the film, sitting cross legged in her baby crib. There was also a video booth to shoot your own homage to John Waters, and a particularly raunchy screening of *Pink Flamingos*, where the drag queens re-enacted the scenes on screen and passed out melted chocolate to the observers during the film's infamous final scene where Divine consumes real dog excrement. In the United States, The New

Orleans Museum of Art hosted a John Waters Film Festival in 2017 which screened *Pink Flamingos* featuring drag performer CeCe V. DeMenthe as Divine (New Orleans Museum of Art, 2017, n.p.). The IFC Center in New York, formerly the Waverly Theater which hosted the first midnight movie screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, hosted a screening of *Pink Flamingos* in 2018 as part of their “Waverly Midnights: Late-Night Favorites” series (IFC Center, 2018, n.p.).

Being one of the more transgressive of midnight movies, the lack of more mainstream queer film festival screenings of *Pink Flamingos* could speak to a wider shift in ideologies and conceptions of the transgressive surrounding queer identity. While definitions of transgression shift over time, there always remains a concept of exceeding limits and societal limitations. Chris Jenks (2003), in his book *Transgression*, writes that “a feature of modernity, accelerating into postmodernity, is the desire to transcend limits—limits that are physical, racial, aesthetic, sexual, national, legal, and moral” (p. 8). As previously discussed in Chapter One, *Pink Flamingos* acted as the epitome of transgression upon its initial release, which ultimately led to its cult status at midnight movie screenings. John Waters once stated in an interview that the film was “a terrorist act against the tyranny of good taste” (Liebenson, 2017, n.p.), a comment that exemplifies the transgression of the film as well as its camp factor. Yet, when viewing this film in the 21st century, I argue that the queer transgression and monstrosity associated with *Pink Flamingos* no longer correspond to contemporary queer readings of monstrosity.

Rebekah Sheldon (2019) writes about the concept of the “hopeful monster” in contemporary queer theory in relation to transgression. Whereas the queer monster of the past has been associated with readings of transgression as “undoing—messing up boundaries, destabilizing rigid forms,” hopeful queer monsters are “tuned to modulation rather than transgression” (pp. 179, 181). In this case, modulation refers to altering, adapting or

adjusting, a method of generating new ways of understanding queerness or “how to navigate instability and how to foster precarious survivals and local thriving” (p. 181). In a frequently unstable environment of queer experience, the hopeful monster nurtures and cultivates instead of dividing, separating, or detaching. While Sheldon’s argument is rooted in literature rather than film, one can see a distinct correlation here between the transgressive queer monster in cult films of the past and the move towards more positive ideology in monstrosity of the present. If previous representations of the queer monster worked to subvert patriarchal ideology through transgression, the “hopeful” queer monster works to assimilate and expand these representations.

In his chapter, “Assimilation and the Queer Monster,” Sam J. Miller (2011) asserts the “death of the queer monster” in contemporary horror cinema as an analogy for the normalisation and assimilation of queer identity in society, “at the same time as queer activism and queer culture evolved from militant movements against fundamentalism and ignorance into assimilation-minded and professionalized forums for gaining access to two of patriarchy’s most cherished institutions: marriage and the military” (p. 222). Miller associates the death of the queer monster in horror cinema with queer assimilation, an assimilation caused by the legalisation of gay marriage and the repeal of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in the United States military, which prohibited people from disclosing their sexual orientation while serving in the armed forces (Belkin, 2008, p. 278). This death of the queer monster through assimilation is indicative of the changes occurring in transgressive cult cinema post-2000.

The queer monster in cinema represented a rejection of queer oppression, particularly during the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s. In Chapter Two, I used cult horror films of the 1980s as a grounding point for my analysis, a decade which saw the demonization (or monsterization) of gay men at the beginning and height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The widely

held belief that HIV/AIDS was a disease that primarily affected gay men developed into a moral panic and hysteria that led to increased Othering of the gay community. This Othering, combined with the panic of Satanic Ritual Abuse, also known as Satanic Panic (Janisse & Corupe, 2015, p. 16), led to an environment of fear over transgressive behaviour in society at large. Queer monstrosity in cult horror films of the 1980s potentially developed out of this societal rhetoric around gay disease and the threat of this rhetoric to the sustainability and preservation of queer identity. In this way, queer monstrosity was able to rearticulate and restructure representations of the queer subject. This inclusion of queer people into these significant US patriarchal institutions of marriage and military that Miller (2011) mentions would seemingly end the need for this transgressive representation provided by queer monstrosity.

As a precursor, in 1992, B. Ruby Rich coined the term “New Queer Cinema,” attempting to define a queer movement in independent filmmaking during this period. Unlike contemporary movements of the 2000s which tend to stray from transgressive representation, New Queer Cinema signalled “a move towards cinematic explorations of the perverse and the deviant within the sexual domain” (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012, n.p.). In her original article, Rich (2013, new edition) pinpointed recent trends of queer films in film festival circuits, queer films that did not “share a single aesthetic vocabulary, strategy, or concern,” but those that broke with previous films that “accompanied identity politics [...] irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist, and excessive” (p. 18). Films of the New Queer Cinema movement often include Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* (1991), Todd Haynes’s *Poison* (1991), Laurie Lynd’s *RSVP* (1991), Isaac Julien’s *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Derek Jarman’s *Edward II* (1991), Tom Kalin’s *Swoon* (1992), and Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* (1992) (Rich, 2013, p. 16). In all of these more recent new

queer films, were “traces of appropriation, pastiche, and irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind” (p. 18).

Effectively, these films of the New Queer Cinema movement were more transgressive and radical in their representations of queer identity, working to alienate repressive heterosexual power structures or to reconfigure traditional heterosexual concepts of marriage and family life. For Michele Aaron (2004), mainstream spectatorship has frequently been a place of queer “disavowal,” but she maintains the argument that New Queer Cinema has been an “intervention” into this process of disavowal. Rather than the queer transgression being contained or below the surface, New Queer Cinema “has been worked to divulge the knowingness or complicity at the heart of the spectatorship” (Aaron, 2004, p. 187). While queer representations have constantly been present in mainstream cinema in contained or sanitised ways, New Queer Cinema worked as an intervening measure to expose the complicity of the knowing mainstream spectator.

Rich (2013) later acknowledged that, post-2000, this “earlier queer movement had given way to new social landscapes and a new generation of queers” (p. 261). Dedicated to a more inclusive representation of queer lifestyles in LGBTQ+ film festivals and programming strands, films such as *Pink Flamingos* become irrelevant along with previous ideologies of transgressive behaviour. What made the queer monster transgressive in the 1970s is no longer transgressive in the 21st century and, if it is considered transgressive, no longer achieves its desired effect. These new festivals and strands, while screening cult movies, often focus on the historical relevance and significance of these films, particularly through their influence on (and appropriation by) contemporary mainstream culture.

One particular cult film that frequently makes the queer film festival circuit is Jennie Livingston’s documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990). Filmed in the mid-to-late 1980s, the film chronicles the underground LGBTQ drag ball culture of the time period, as well as the racial

and gender minority communities connected with it. This ball culture, sometimes referred to as “Ballroom,” was a significant part of queer subculture in New York City before and during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Over the past five years, many queer film festivals in the USA, Canada, and the UK have screened *Paris is Burning* as a special event: Out Film CT Connecticut LGBTQ Film Festival, Portland Queer Film Festival, QFest Houston, in addition to mainstream film festivals such as GenreQueer at the Milwaukee Film Festival, the New York Jewish Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, and Edinburgh International Film Festival.

Paris is Burning seems to continually resonate with audiences because of its historical significance, its documentation of a queer subculture that has long since been appropriated and overshadowed by the mainstream. It has also sparked numerous critical debates about the film’s representation of queer racial minorities, in addition to criticisms about white audience response to the film. In her essay “Is Paris Burning?”, black scholar bell hooks (2014) at first believed the film’s title “evoked the death and destruction of a dominating white civilization and culture, an end to oppressive Eurocentrism and white supremacy,” (p. 149) yet quickly realised the subjects of the film are viewed through a lens of whiteness. Hooks recounts viewing the film in the cinema and the white audience members who seemed “entertained” and “pleasured” by the sad and tragic (p. 154).

From a gender studies perspective, Judith Butler (1993) analyses the aspects of gender subversion and drag present within *Paris is Burning* which “calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for the reconsolidation of hegemonic norms” (p. 85). Therefore, from Butler’s point of view, the film’s representation of gender performance through drag works to displace hegemonic standards of gender. With these

theories and criticisms in mind, we begin to establish the cultural perceptions *Paris is Burning* carried into the 21st century and its influence on contemporary queer culture.

In the years following the New Queer Cinema movement and *Paris is Burning*, one begins to see a transition in mainstream Hollywood cinema towards further representation of queer characters, namely gay men. Films such as *Philadelphia* (1993), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995), *The Birdcage* (1996), and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) become critically and commercially successful. The success of these films and their mainstream recognition demonstrates a wider shift in the acceptance and assimilation of gay characters in the 21st century and the enduring presence of the queer monster.

Queer Representations in Mainstream Cinema

There exists a movement in queer cinema in the 21st century towards assimilation of gay characters, a compulsion or need to work within mainstream culture rather than reject it. In the years following *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), many films featuring gay characters involve empathy, inclusion and sentiment. Rather than exemplifying transgression, promoting activism, or rejecting assimilation, these films become classifiable and accessible. The image of queer monstrosity becomes represented through gay characters and their struggle to fully assimilate in society, or those who are seemingly assimilated but face a struggle that threatens their assimilation. These films are not cult on account of their mainstream success and lack of fanatical fanbases, yet they do reflect the shift in representations of queerness in the 2000s.

I specify gay characters here given that queer films of this period predominantly feature gay men and represent this image of empathy and inclusion towards a gay experience. This movement towards assimilation develops from the acceptance of gayness in more

mainstream, popular films, but remains limited by a lack of representation for other queer identities: lesbian, bisexual, transgender, genderfluid, and others. In this section of the chapter, I will analyse four films released between 2000 and 2010: two popular mainstream films with gay representation, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Milk* (2008), followed by *Party Monster* (2003), *I Love You Phillip Morris* (2009), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), and *Transamerica* (2005). I analyse these films in order of their transgressive representations, how the queer identities represented in them reflect varying levels of acceptance by heteronormative society. While they may not outwardly appear to reflect representations of queer monstrosity, these films depict the queer monster across three distinct levels of transgression. This transgression is based on the type of queer identity being characterised—in *Brokeback Mountain* and *Milk*, acceptable transgression (innocent gay men), in *Party Monster* and *I Love You Phillip Morris*, direct transgression (openly transgressive gay men), and in *Breakfast on Pluto* and *Transamerica*, unacceptable transgression (transgender women). The following table specifies these films, as well as other queer films of this period between 2000-2010, into these distinct categories of transgression. The following table is not exhaustive or focused on any particular country of origin yet represents well-known films with wider mainstream recognition that strongly represent these three categories.

Acceptable Transgression	Direct Transgression	Unacceptable Transgression
<p>Often include gay or lesbian representation, shame, fear, empathy and pathos, persecution, tragedy and (more infrequently) feel-good romance and comedy.</p> <p><i>Kissing Jessica Stein</i> (2001)</p> <p><i>The Hours</i> (2002)</p> <p><i>Connie and Carla</i> (2004)</p> <p><i>Kinsey</i> (2004)</p> <p><i>Brokeback Mountain</i> (2005)</p> <p><i>Capote</i> (2005)</p> <p><i>Kinky Boots</i> (2005)</p> <p><i>Shelter</i> (2007)</p> <p><i>Milk</i> (2008)</p>	<p>Open and honest transgressive representation of queer characters, including crime, prostitution, excess, hedonism, abuse, suicide, violence and death</p> <p><i>Mulholland Drive</i> (2001)</p> <p><i>Die, Mommie, Die!</i> (2003)</p> <p><i>Elephant</i> (2003)</p> <p><i>Party Monster</i> (2003)</p> <p><i>Mysterious Skin</i> (2004)</p> <p><i>Kiss Kiss Bang Bang</i> (2005)</p> <p><i>The Night Listener</i> (2006)</p> <p><i>I Love You Phillip Morris</i> (2009)</p> <p><i>A Single Man</i> (2009)</p>	<p>Often represent transgender, gender non-binary, intersex, or androgynous queer characters in diverse ways. These characters are often outcast, abused/maimed, and often suffer or grieve.</p> <p><i>Hedwig and the Angry Inch</i> (2001)</p> <p><i>Bad Education</i> (2004)</p> <p><i>Transamerica</i> (2005)</p> <p><i>Breakfast on Pluto</i> (2005)</p> <p><i>XXY</i> (2007)</p>

In each of these sections, I analyse the four films mentioned above given that these films most effectively represent the characteristics of either acceptable transgression, direct transgression, or unacceptable transgression. I also give more in-depth definitions of each type of transgression as they relate to the queer identities represented.

Acceptable Transgression: *Brokeback Mountain* and *Milk*

Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) is the story of a forbidden and secretive relationship between two cowboys, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal). The two men are hired one summer to herd sheep in the Wyoming mountains and begin a

passionate sexual and emotional relationship. The men eventually part ways once the job finishes and marry two women, Alma (Michelle Williams) and Lureen (Anne Hathaway). Upon visiting Ennis several years later, Jack suggests they runaway and create a life together, but Ennis refuses, haunted by a childhood memory of the torture and murder of two men suspected of being homosexual. Sometime later, Ennis discovers that Jack has died, seemingly by a car accident, but secretly Ennis imagines he was beaten and killed for being homosexual.

Ennis and Jack are positioned as queer monsters because their illicit romance transgresses the heteronormative boundaries of the society in which they exist through no fault of their own. Simultaneously, their love story also transgresses the heteronormative confines of masculinity surrounding cowboy culture. To this extent, the film represents an acceptable transgression of queer monstrosity inasmuch as the two cowboys do not purposefully transgress these heteronormative boundaries. Acceptable transgression, as briefly defined in the table above, often represents gay and lesbian characters within the spectrum of queer. I define this as acceptable transgression for two reasons: (1) the gay or lesbian characters are transgressive for the reason that their sexuality challenges the boundaries of heteronormative sexuality, thus making them inherently transgressive, but not *purposefully* transgressive (as we will see with direct transgression), (2) any transgression becomes acceptable through the characters' shame, fear, persecution, and the empathy and pathos through which these are represented. Shame on the part of the gay characters Ennis and Jack in *Brokeback Mountain* is a shame towards their sexual orientation or a shame towards a gay relationship and the fear of the repercussions if their sexual orientation is discovered.

This representation of shame or need to assimilate for risk of not passing as heterosexual is ultimately the main driving force behind the film's tragedy. Ennis, in

particular, fears being outed as homosexual because of past trauma and ultimately rejects Jack because of this fear and the shame of admitting his homosexuality. This shame is indicative of assimilation, a rejection of transgressive behaviour due to repressed desire and guilt for not conforming to heteropatriarchal values. *Brokeback Mountain*, as a gay cowboy movie, also contends with the history of masculinity in the American Western and the “frontier myth,” which Helen A. Shugart (2010) defines as “one that constructs the US and its citizens as shaped by the harsh, empty continent, characterized by vast, wild, and dangerous terrain that pulled individuals westward to the end of taming and cultivating it” (pp. 177-178). Within this wild frontier is the masculine image of the cowboy, who arrives on the scene “a lone, mysterious stranger, distinguished by his rugged individualism, stoicism, asceticism, and work ethic [...] eventually he alone is able to rid the town of the threat where members of the community have failed” (p. 178). Ennis and Jack, as gay cowboys, defy the very archetype of the “culturally sacred, ostensibly heterosexual masculinity” long embodied by the cowboy (p. 180). Therefore, within this culturally represented idea of masculinity, Ennis and Jack fall victim to the shame and fear of their transgression. Rather than embracing this transgression and their own homosexual desires, they attempt to assimilate into heterosexual culture and ultimately fail.

As such, Ennis and Jack are considered acceptably transgressive because they do not embrace their transgression yet remain shameful and fearful towards further engagement with their queer sexuality. This shame is further indicative of the shift in transgressive representation of queer characters. Representations of queer characters becomes submissive, digestible commodities that satisfy the masses, where queer characters are fearful of transgression and struggle to properly assimilate. In a similar way, the empathy and pathos evoked by *Brokeback Mountain* produce a type of emotional efficacy on the part of the spectator, one that reinforces the need for acceptance and recognition in a frequently hostile

environment. This empathy and pathos evoked by the film to some extent diminish or cushion the impact of the transgression, making it more acceptable. As submissive queer characters struggle to assimilate on screen, audiences and critics thunder with applause and tears. By producing an emotional affect, the transgression of homosexual love is accepted and, in a sense, no longer transgressive at all. Similarly, Jack is persecuted for his homosexuality and is ultimately killed, which leads to further empathy and seemingly absolves him of his transgressions. Gary Needham (2010) believes that the affective emotions produced by the film work through elements of queer melodrama: “Powerlessness, emotional vulnerability and a constant waiting are relentlessly underscored by the melodramatic structures of storytelling and create an experience of passivity and helplessness that tends to be overwhelming” (p. 79). The affect produced by the film’s emotional structure, rather than producing affect through transgression, becomes the way in which queer mainstream films of the 2000s assimilate queerness into heterosexual culture through acceptability.

Empathy and pathos evoked by shame, fear and death seems to be the prevailing theme in these acceptably transgressive queer films of the early 2000s. Gus Van Sant’s *Milk* (2008) tells the story of gay rights activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in California, and his subsequent assassination. Two of Van Sant’s early films, *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) and *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993), are considered part of the New Queer Cinema movement of the early 1990s (Rich, 2013, pp. 240-241). New Queer Cinema films rejected heteronormativity and embraced the sexually perverse and deviant, depicting LGBT+ characters living on the margins of society. With *Milk*, Van Sant departed from the New Queer Cinema style and rhetoric, returning to a more conventional form in what Harry M. Benshoff (2009) refers to as “neo-queer.” Benshoff defines neo-queer as an advancement from the New Queer Cinema films through “bigger budgets, the backing of major studios,

and less ‘in-your-face’ rhetoric” (Benshoff, 2009, n.p.). Similar to *Brokeback Mountain*, the film is an example of acceptable transgression through its representation of persecution, fear and tragedy. This element of tragedy surrounding Harvey Milk’s unprecedented rise to political office and subsequent assassination brings an acceptability to his transgression. As Milk seemingly assimilates into this hetero-dominated political sphere, he is persecuted for his transgression of not conforming to standards of heteronormativity, which also positions him as a representation of queer monstrosity.

After Milk is elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, he meets fellow supervisor Dan White (Josh Brolin), a politically and socially conservative Vietnam veteran and former police officer. The two have a difficult relationship, with Milk opposing different city projects that White proposes. White asks for Milk to assist in preventing a psychiatric hospital from opening in his district in exchange for his support on Milk’s gay rights ordinance. Milk refuses, worrying about the impact this will have on troubled youth in the community, and White becomes the sole vote against the gay rights ordinance. Soon, Milk believes that White might be a closeted homosexual, telling his team in a meeting that he believes White is “one” of them: “I know what it’s like to live that life, that lie, and I can see it in Dan’s eyes, that fear and pressure” (Van Sant, 2008, n.p.). Sometime later, White sneaks into City Hall and shoots Milk with a fatal bullet delivered execution style in the back of the head.

Dan White never officially claimed closeted homosexuality, either in the film or in real life, as constituting his motivation for killing Milk. Instead, White claimed what reporters coined the “Twinkie defence,” that he suffered diminished capacity because of depression and that his diet of Twinkies and other unhealthy, sugary foods was a symptom of this depression. Whether White was a closeted homosexual or not, his assassination of Milk exemplifies the monstrous threat of the homosexual, or the threatening presence Milk brought

to the heterosexual dominant world of politics. By not fully assimilating into this world because of his open sexuality and by potentially making one fearful of their own sexuality, Milk is punished for his transgression. White murders Milk because he views him as a queer monster, one who will threaten society and politics with his transgressive lifestyle.

Therefore, *Milk* fits within this category of acceptable transgression in queer cinema through the tragedy of Harvey Milk's assassination and the persecution he faces by attempting to assimilate. The queer subject(s) of these films never fully assimilate but instead struggle to assimilate or face an obstacle which threatens their assimilation. It should be noted that *Milk*, along with *Brokeback Mountain*, was critically successful in the mainstream and received Academy Awards, but not 'Best Picture'. The mainstream recognises these films and accepts their transgression, yet this recognition seemingly happens through affective emotion (empathy, pathos and grief), rather than inclusion or unanimity.

Direct Transgression: *Party Monster* and *I Love You Phillip Morris*

Queer films of this period with less focus on empathy and pathos and more focus on comedy, irreverence and the subversive notably performed less well critically and commercially. These films feature gay characters engaging in direct transgression, an open and honest depiction of transgressive behaviour often with images of crime, drug use, abuse and death. Films with direct transgression vary in subject matter, style and imagery, at times told with a dark sarcastic irony and other times with strict sombre earnestness. The two films I have chosen to analyse here, *Party Monster* (2003) and *I Love You Phillip Morris* (2009), follow depictions of transgression and queer monstrosity based on real-life events re-told through

first person narration. Both feature a dark, somewhat playful and unapologetic tone as they recount images of crime and self-indulgence.

Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato's *Party Monster* depicts the real-life story of Michael Alig (played by Macaulay Culkin), founder and ringleader of the New York "Club Kids" in the late 1980s and early 90s, and his murder of fellow club kid Angel Melendez (Wilson Cruz). The film is told through contrasting narrations by Alig and James St. James (Seth Green) with their views on the events leading up to Melendez's murder and the publication of James's memoir, *Disco Bloodbath: A Fabulous But True Tale of Murder in Clubland*.

The film opens with James being interviewed by an unseen television crew about the publication of *Disco Bloodbath* (the book the film is based on) and begins to describe how he met Michael, taking him under his wing and teaching him "the rules of fabulousness." As the film shifts in time, Michael has become known as the "King of the Club Kids." James's ambition was to write "the Great American novel," but instead he says he found himself being "a sidekick in a sick and twisted buddy movie." The club kids live a life of decadence and excess, hosting debauched drug-fuelled events. Michael becomes addicted to these drugs and his life spirals out of control, eventually murdering Angel Melendez over unpaid debt. James has a vision of this while high on ketamine, seeing Michael and Robert Riggs (Justin Hagan) bludgeon Angel with a hammer, strip him naked, smother him with a pillow, and shoot drain cleaner into his veins. James recalls Michael detailing the events of the murder, also telling him of how they disposed of the body: "The meat just fell away and the bones just snapped." Michael and Robert keep Angel's dismembered body in a box in the living room and use it as a tabletop to do drugs. The film ends where it started, with James being interviewed by the television crew, when he gets a call from Michael, now serving prison time for Angel's murder. Michael tells him, "Prison isn't all that different from a nightclub,

everything's for free and I don't have to get out of bed in the morning. And I can get all the drugs and sex I want.”

This film is a significant depiction of direct transgression and queer monstrosity in several ways. Firstly, the characters openly and unapologetically transgress, living a life of debauched excess and extravagance, a hedonistic lifestyle that often marks queer monsters in directly transgressive queer films. According to Edwards and Grauland (2013), extravagance and excess are both considered more grotesque forms of transgression (p. 66). The status quo of patriarchal society is transgressed through the transgressive aspects of the film that violate “accepted, imposed, or harmonious boundaries” (p. 66). Michael, in particular, portrays this extravagance and excess to the extreme, taking cocktails of drugs such as heroin, ketamine, Rohypnol, and cocaine (what is referred to in the film as a “drug salad”). In real-life accounts, Michael is described as “intentionally and gleefully behaving like everyone’s worst nightmare, thumbing his nose at the very idea of acceptable behavior” (Van Meter, 2006, n.p.). This same *New York* magazine article describes how Michael would throw hundreds of dollar bills to “watch people scramble for them” and urinate on people and in their drinks while clubbing at The Limelight. He does this unapologetically and without remorse, even telling James in the film that he had to kill Angel in self-defence, having no choice in the matter. Effectively, Michael is the ultimate image of transgression personified through what Chris Jenks (2003) defines as a “deeply reflexive act of denial and affirmation” (p. 2). Michael acknowledges his transgressive behaviour with full awareness that his actions are transgressive, yet he simultaneously denies this transgression through a flippant, pretentious persona. His lifestyle of hedonistic excess and extravagance is a threat to normality and the social order of things, a conscious choice of disobedience.

Secondly, *Party Monster* depicts direct transgression and queer monstrosity through a representation of camp. Susan Sontag’s (2008) most relevant notation on camp, in the case of

Party Monster, would be “the hallmark of Camp is the spirit of extravagance,” yet perhaps more importantly “what is extravagant in an inconsistent or an unpassionate way is not Camp” (p. 47). Michael Alig is nothing if not extravagant, consistent, and passionate towards his endeavour of being the ultimate Club Kid. His very persona and *raison d'être* is to achieve the ultimate pleasure associated with the transgression and deviance of his subcultural queer lifestyle. While Sontag argues that “camp taste is much more than homosexual taste” (p. 51), the representation of camp associated with homosexuality in this film is undeniable.

Jack Babuscio (1999) defines camp through four central features involving a “gay sensibility”: “irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour” (p. 119). He defines the gay sensibility as “a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream, a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is colored, shaped, directed, and defined by the fact of one’s gayness” (p. 118). I do not argue here that Michael’s transgression or his campiness is solely based on a gay sensibility, as Babuscio defines, but rather that Michael (as a gay character) and the film itself reflect these four features of camp.

The film represents camp *irony* through the incongruous contrasts of “masculine/feminine” (Babuscio, 1999, p. 119). Michael, James, and the other club kids frequently blur these lines between masculine and feminine in their club night themed costumes, sometimes in feminised drag and other times, in day-to-day life, in full menswear. Sometimes these lines are blurred, representing androgyny or gender fluidity, neither masculine nor feminine. Sontag (2008) also identifies androgyny as “one of the great images of camp sensibility” (p. 44). These characters are camp via the irony of the juxtapositions of gender through which they perform. The film also provides images of camp through its *aesthetics*, yet insofar that the gay characters of the film present these aesthetics of camp in

opposition to the status quo. Camp is “an assertion of one’s self-integrity [...] an intense mode of individualism and a form of spirited protest” (Babuscio, 1999, p. 120). The characters in *Party Monster* often express their emphasis on individualism and protest what is considered normal. While being interviewed on a talk show (similar to when the Club Kids appeared on *Geraldo* in 1990) and asked by the host, “So just what is a club kid?”, James replies: “It’s all about self-expression. You know, if you feel like a troll, then you should look like a troll. It doesn’t matter what you look like. I mean if you have a hunchback, just throw a little glitter on it, honey, and go dancing!” James’s assertion that club kids embrace self-expression alludes to the aesthetics of the film, and the club kid lifestyle, as camp but also the transgression incited by this campiness.

The film’s *theatricality* also presents images of camp through notions of “role-playing, reality and appearance” (Babuscio, 1999, p. 123). The very image and persona of the club kid is one of role-play and performance, appearing as something else through artifice and exaggeration. The manner in which the characters engage with each other is often theatrical, with actors Macaulay Culkin and Seth Green speaking in exaggerated, affected Mid-Atlantic accents. Much of their dialogue seems purposefully overstated in a high degree of stylisation, with lines such as “The road of excess leads to the palace of... fabulousness!” and “I am not addicted to drugs, I’m addicted to glamor!” This theatricality of camp in the film also works in conjunction with transgression, which also adds to its camp *humour*. Babuscio (1999) writes that “humour constitutes the strategy of camp: a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity” (p. 126). The camp humour in the film lends itself to the hostility the characters experience from society for being transgressive and monstrous. By evoking humour together with their transgressive actions, the characters mitigate their transgression while simultaneously acknowledging it.

Other queer films with direct transgression do not engage with camp, but still evoke humour and excess to represent open and honest transgression by queer monsters. Glenn Ficarra and John Requa's *I Love You Phillip Morris* (2009) is a dark comedy drama based on the real-life story of con artist Steven Jay Russell (Jim Carrey) who, while incarcerated, falls in love with a man named Phillip Morris (Ewan McGregor). Steven spends his early adult years working as a police officer and then produce manager, married to a woman named Debbie (Leslie Mann), and seemingly has a wholesome, suburban life. The scene in which Steven's sexuality is revealed shockingly disrupts this idealism of the American dream. We see a sweaty Steven aggressively penetrating someone from behind, presumably his wife. The camera pulls away to reveal a macho moustached man as the object of the penetration. Steven yells, "I'm going to come!" to which the macho man replies, "Do it, man! Come in my ass!" There is a freeze frame and, in a voiceover, Steven says, "Oh, did I forget to mention I'm gay? Yeah, I'm gay. Gay, gay, gay, gay, gay. Have been as long as I can remember" (Ficarra & Requa, 2009, n.p.). The narrative disruption that occurs in this scene works through transgressive shock value, but also through Jim Carrey's exaggerated performance, adding a comedic tone that masks (or softens the blow) of this transgressive queer monstrosity. It also works to subvert homophobic understandings of gay sex and masculinity.

Kenneth Chan (2013), writing on the depiction of negativity surrounding gay romance in the film, notes the "soft-core" pornographic imagery of the scene, which ruptures "the gendered heterosexual formulation of gay sexual practice: a masculine top fucking a feminized bottom" (pp. 27-28). As Chan notes, this scene exemplifies a particularly disruptive pleasure in showcasing the subversive, an uninhibited, somewhat explicit, and carnal depiction of gay sex. This scene defers significantly from the rough-and-ready, darkly shot tent sex scene in *Brokeback Mountain*, with a fully clothed Ennis spitting into his palm

and roughly penetrating a fully clothed Jack from behind. The scene is short, fast and nothing verging on soft-core erotic. Yet, this rather graphic scene in *Phillip Morris* represents the subversive nature of the film and its celebration of the transgressive. There is no shame or guilt attached to Steven's transgressions, but instead he defends them and attempts to justify them.

After getting into a major car accident on his way to a homosexual tryst, he decides to come out to his wife and move to Florida, where he begins a luxurious gay lifestyle. He realises that "being gay is expensive" and becomes a con artist to make money, saying "I had no choice." He is soon pursued by the police and sent to prison where he falls in love with fellow inmate, Phillip Morris. After Steven is released from prison, he cannot bear being kept apart from Phillip, so he poses as a lawyer to get Phillip released. He eventually gets caught embezzling again after getting Phillip released and goes back to prison, but Phillip wants nothing to do with him. Months later, Steven fakes dying of AIDS to be allowed to see Phillip again. The film's ending sequence describes how the real-life Phillip was released from prison in 2006, but that Steven was given a life sentence and remains in 23-hour-a-day lockup.

While its subject matter appears somewhat tragic, dismal, and pathetic, the overarching tone of the film is one of subversion and humour. Rather than evoking the empathy and pathos of earlier queer films of this decade, *Phillip Morris* depicts an open and honest transgression by a queer monster. Steven does not assimilate for the very reason that his transgression, both as a con artist and as a queer man, prevents him from doing so. In this way, *Phillip Morris* could be considered a slight return to representations of transgressive queerness in earlier cult films and stands alone among the more mainstream queer films of this decade.

Unacceptable Transgression: *Breakfast on Pluto* and *Transamerica*

Queer films with unacceptable transgression nearly always feature transgender, gender non-binary, intersex, or androgynous queer characters who are outcast, abused/maimed, and often suffer or grieve. I have identified these films as containing unacceptable transgression based on the level of acceptance shown towards the queer characters by heteronormative society, both within the film and in real life. Unlike films with acceptable or direct transgression, these queer characters are represented as transgressive queer monsters for the reason that their gender identities prevent them from conforming to cisnormative binaries. While they may transgress in other ways, their ultimate transgression emanates from this non-conformity. These films vary in genre, yet the two films I have chosen to analyse here are considered comedy-drama, or dramedy, a hybrid genre combining elements of both the comedic and dramatic. In the case of these two films, Neil Jordan's *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005) and Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* (2005), the main characters (Kitten and Bree, respectively) are both transgender women, assigned male at birth, who struggle to fully assimilate with heteronormative society set against them in these narrative representations.

Jack Halberstam identifies different sets of motivations for the representation of transgender life in the artistic work of cisgender people, which I use to frame my subsequent analysis. The first is "the project of stabilization," where the "destabilizing effects of the transgender narrative are defused by establishing the transgender narrative as strange, uncharacteristic, and even pathological" (Halberstam, 2005, pp. 54-55). Both Kitten and Bree are effectively stabilised as transgender characters through a strange or eccentric narrative that positions them as others. The second is "the project of rationalization," where the artist "finds reasonable explanations for behavior that may seem dangerous and outrageous at first glance" (p. 55). Kitten's transgender identity in *Breakfast on Pluto* is rationalised through her own voiceover that accompanies the main narrative, where Kitten justifies her actions as well

as the actions and behaviours of others acting against her. By identifying Halberstam's motivations of stabilisation and rationalisation in these two films, we begin to realise the exacting presence of unacceptable transgression and queer monstrosity.

Breakfast on Pluto is the story of Patrick/Patricia "Kitten" Braden (Cillian Murphy), a transgender foundling who is abandoned by her mother (Eva Birthistle) as a baby in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s. She is left on the doorstep of the local parish priest, Father Liam (Liam Neeson), later revealed to be her father, who then places her with an unloving foster mother (Ruth McCabe). Patrick (now coming out as Kitten) struggles through her late teen years and, after running away from home, goes on a journey to search for love and her long-lost mother. She hitches a ride with a glam rock band and quickly begins a relationship with the lead singer, Billy (Gavin Friday). Billy sets Kitten up in a caravan, which he secretly uses to smuggle guns for the Irish Republican Army. She is nearly murdered by the IRA, but her lack of connection to their politics saves her from being murdered. Thus far, the narrative of the film echoes Halberstam's "project of stabilization," as Kitten narrates this strange and uncharacteristic story of her upbringing. The story is presented as surreal and almost magical. When Kitten is first left on Father Liam's doorstep, two birds descend upon the scene and begin holding a dialogue through subtitles: "This looks like trouble!" The birds continue to appear throughout the film, commenting on the events of the narrative and adding a comedic, surreal effect. The presentation of the birds works to stabilise the transgender narrative by adding an element of fantasy as Kitten progresses through a life of increased othering.

Kitten travels to London and finds herself working at a children's entertainment park dressed as one of The Wombles. She is soon fired from the job and is forced into prostitution to care for herself. She is violently attacked in the car by her first client (Brian Ferry), who attempts to strangle her, but she manages to escape by spraying him in the eyes with perfume. During this scene, as the client attempts to strangle her, Kitten says in a voiceover, "But did

true love save Kitten from the hands of the beast in the worst of all fairy tales? No, what saved Kitten was her precious perfume spray, bought for 2.99 in Roches Stores on Henry Street before she left her beloved Emerald Isle.” This particular voiceover represents a further element of Kitten constructing fantasy to stabilise the othering she experiences. For Kitten, this is not a man attempting to murder her but a “beast” in an awful fairy tale, defeated by a precious fragrance she purchased in her native homeland. This is once again an example of this “project of stabilization” where Kitten lessens the impact of her othering by creating fantasy.

After the incident, she is at a diner writing in her notebook when she is approached by magician Bertie Vaughan (Stephen Rea). He hires her as his magician’s assistant and they also begin a relationship. Charlie (Ruth Negga), her friend from home in Ireland, finds her at a show and takes her away. Later, Kitten goes to a club frequented by British soldiers and dances romantically with a soldier (Dominic Cooper) but is injured when the club is bombed by the IRA. When the police discover Kitten is transgender and Irish, they arrest her as a suspected terrorist and horribly beat her into giving a statement of guilt. They eventually realise she is innocent and release her but with no place to go, Kitten is once again forced into prostitution. Kitten’s stint as the magician’s assistant, the later IRA bombing, and the abuse by police now signals the “project of rationalization.” She finds herself in these scenarios as a victim of her own circumstances. While being wheeled out of the club on a gurney, the paramedics cut her dress to treat her injuries and discover her maleness. The camera freezes

in a still shot of Kitten, bruised and bloodied, with the words: “The smile of a cross-dressing killer?” (Figure 12)

In this way, Kitten is immediately identified as a possible suspect in the bombing and becomes a transgressive other because of her supposed sexual deviance. However, this othering is rationalised through a heteronormative association between sexual deviance, criminality, and transgression. Her transgender identity immediately signals her as someone who goes against the boundaries and rules of society yet this becomes rationalised through



Figure 12. The smile of a cross-dressing killer? Still from *Breakfast on Pluto* (Jordan, 2005).

the severity of events. Later, one of the policemen who interrogates her takes pity and brings her to work for a peep show. While there, her birth father (Father Liam) accepts Kitten, acknowledges his paternity and tells her where to find her mother. She goes to her mother’s house, posing as a telephone company market researcher, and discovers she has a half-brother also named Patrick. She leaves without revealing her identity to her mother. She goes home to tend to a pregnant Charlie and reconciles with Father Liam. The town reacts to the unwed pregnant Charlie and her transgender friend living with Father Liam by firebombing the parish house. Kitten and Charlie once again flee to London, where Charlie has her baby, and

encounter Kitten's birth mother at the hospital, who is also pregnant. Kitten again does not reveal who she is and she and Charlie walk away happy, presumably going to care for Charlie's baby together.

As a film with unacceptable transgression, Kitten is not a transgressive queer monster because of transgressive behaviour, but for the reason that her transgender identity prevents her from conforming to the heteronormative standards of the society in which she lives. This lack of conformity and the othering Kitten endures is stabilised and rationalised through both elements of fantasy and the validation of characters' actions. From the plot synopsis above, it becomes blatantly apparent that almost every step of Kitten's journey and struggle is dictated by her gender and the inability of others to accept it. Much of this struggle and unacceptance comes from traditionally masculine figures.

The film is rich with juxtaposing imagery of heteronormative masculinity and Kitten's transgender identity as monstrous. The opening scene of the film, for instance, depicts a group of men working construction on a building. Kitten struts by (at this point presenting as female) and manages to catch the attention of one of the men, who catcalls her: "How 'bout it, kitten? What's the chance of a bit tonight?" Kitten replies, "Oh yes, of course, boys. I'll leave the front door open and you can all troop in and give me a jab!" At this point, the man has realised that Kitten is transgender and stares at her, mouth agape in shock and disbelief. "Not up to it then?" Kitten says, "You innocent, shovel-wielding, horny-handed sons of the native sod!" Her statement here is rather encumbered with negativity towards heteronormative masculinity, no doubt caused by the oppression she has faced, which we witness as the movie progresses.

Her love and relationship with Billy, the glam rocker, forces her into the role of conspirator in his transgressions with the IRA. Aisling B. Cormack (2014) writes that "in order to become the woman she longs to be, Kitten must overcome the forces that enmesh her

in the violent political affairs of her homeland” (p. 171). In other words, Kitten merely longs to embrace her transgender identity, yet in order for this to happen she must conquer the transgressive boundaries placed against her. She also experiences violence and backlash not simply for being transgender but also for being Irish. She is beaten into submission by British policemen after the club she attends is bombed by the IRA, but her transgender identity is ultimately what signals the police in the first place.

However, it is not simply heteronormative masculinity that oppresses Kitten but also femininity. In one early scene, a young Patrick (pre-transition) dons her foster mother’s dress and lipstick and struts around the house. Her foster mother comes home and admonishes Patrick, forcing her into the bathtub and scrubbing her fiercely with a brush. “He’ll make a disgrace of us,” she says, “I’ll march you up and down the street and disgrace you in front of the whole town. Say it—‘I am a boy, not a girl!’” This opposition from a female figure signifies the unacceptable transgression represented by Kitten in this film. The queer characters in these films, who are often transgender, face a struggle and opposition that threatens their assimilation and positions them as monsters. Yet, this representation of unacceptable transgression is not always characterised through this fantastical, somewhat surrealist depiction of events, but also through more honest and realistic interpretations of transgender life.

Transamerica tells the story of a pre-operative transgender woman, Bree (Felicity Huffman), who goes on a road trip with a long-lost son Toby (Kevin Zegers) she never knew existed after bailing him out of jail. While Bree’s reassignment surgery will undoubtedly further her assimilation, her therapist refuses to sign off on Bree’s surgery until she acknowledges her son and makes amends with her unaccepting family. She bails her son out of jail in New York and decides to drive them back to California, without admitting to him that she is his father. Along the way, the two face various challenges, such as Toby

eventually discovering Bree is trans and Bree being forced to make contact with her estranged parents. Therefore, in order to assimilate, Bree is forced to re-engage with the very existence she rejects; and the queer monstrosity of her character is represented within this struggle to assimilate.

This film represents a stabilisation and rationalisation of the transgender narrative, one in which Bree's cross-country journey constructs her as an outsider (stabilisation) and one in which this unwanted journey is justified by her desire to fully transition (rationalisation). While this journey is the driving narrative of the film, its somewhat light-hearted plot repels the threatening presence of the transgender seen in earlier films such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983, as seen in Chapter Two), *Never Too Young to Die* (1986), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *The Crying Game* (1992), and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). Rather than witnessing a queer monster through transgender horror, deception, or a threat to the individual, the audience of *Transamerica* witnesses a transgender character engaged in everyday existence. For Amy Jensen (2018), the film "focuses on the quotidian, providing insight into the transition, concerns and challenges of a gender-fluid individual" (p. 2). However, Jensen is quick to note that Bree aligns with gender binaries according to "the stereotypical, heteronormative social expectations of what a woman should look like" (p. 4). In other words, Bree is confined to a specific gender performance that adheres to the same heteropatriarchal culture that defines it and, therefore, she does not transgress but rather assimilates into society's idea of femininity. This assimilation further rationalises Bree's transition as a transgender woman, effectively justifying the way this extensive transition subverts the heteronormative. Essentially, Bree's transition is rationalised in the narrative through the performativity of her extensive bodily modification.

The first moments of the film show Bree watching a voice altering video and doing vocal exercises to sound more feminine. She dons her undergarments, using breast prostheses

tucked inside her bra and control underwear, presenting as female as part of her gender expression. She wears bright pink colours and paints her long nails a similar hue. Jensen (2018) believes this representation of the feminine is linked to Judith Butler's notions of performativity: "These aspects of gender expression are not innate to women; they are learnt behaviours. Therefore, gender is a complex notion because it is influenced by culturally specified and specific performances" (p. 4). Bree talks to her doctor about the medical procedures she had as part of her transition, such as electrolysis, hormone therapy, facial feminisation surgery, jaw recontouring, and a tracheal shave. She says she tries to "blend in" and "keep a low profile," what people refer to as "living still." The doctor asks her how she feels about her penis and she replies, "It disgusts me. I don't even like looking at it." This aversion to her male genitalia signals a feeling of monstrousness, a rejection of her physical body as grotesque and abject, or something to be cast off. Yet, simultaneously, her want to rid herself of this monstrousness is also met with rejection, causing her to struggle for full assimilation. To undergo a gender reassignment would be deemed an unacceptable transgression. The doctor tells her, "The American Psychiatric Association categorises gender dysphoria as a very serious mental disorder", and toys with the idea of not signing the consent form for her reassignment surgery. These early scenes exemplify Bree's desire and need to assimilate into this cisnormative patriarchal ideal of what it means to be a woman, but also work to rationalise her transition in this oppressive cisnormative environment.

Bree's family is a strong symbol of this cisnormativity, the barrier she must overcome before she fully assimilates. On their road trip, when Toby eventually discovers that Bree is trans after seeing her urinate, he confronts her and calls her "a fucking lying freak." As he grows to accept her transgender identity, he begins to develop an attraction for her and attempts to seduce her. Thoroughly unnerved and disgusted by the prospect, she admits that she is actually his father, before he grows angry and punches her in the face. When their car

is stolen by a hitchhiker, the two seek solace at Bree's estranged parents' house. Upon seeing her for the first time post-transition, her mother slams the door in her face before dragging her inside and saying, "Get in here before the neighbours see you." When inside the house, her mother grabs her crotch and checks for a penis. "He's still a boy," she tells Bree's father. Her parents keep referring to Bree as Stanley, her deadname, saying they love her but they "don't respect" her. When Bree's mother discovers that Toby is her grandson, she immediately begins doting on him, implying a second chance at raising a son. Later, while out to dinner, a confrontation ensues. It is revealed that Bree's mother once hired private detectives to find her and have her committed. Although it slowly seems that her mother will grow to accept it, Bree is still left with no familial resolution when she finally returns to Los Angeles and has her reassignment surgery. The film ends with Toby visiting Bree after her surgery and hints at the possibility of a friendly relationship between them.

Although Bree is eventually able to fully assimilate after her surgery, her transition is rendered by her family as unacceptably transgressive. They cannot accept her true identity or effectively rationalise and stabilise her into their cisnormative ideology of womanhood. Because she is able to successfully "pass" as female, the film does not represent her as being oppressed from other members of society. There is the occasional second glance from someone on the street, or the little girl in a restaurant who asks her, "Are you a boy or a girl?" Yet, her biological family rejects her and attempts to force her into an oppressive subject position as queer monster. She not only endures the pressure from cisnormative society to conform to a certain standard of femininity, the need to "pass" as female, but also the added pressure from her family to conform to her assigned birth gender. Jensen (2018) writes about the idea of transgender individuals "passing" in order to "avoid harassment" which involves adhering "to binary oppositions," behaving and living as one or the other gender (p. 4). Bree

conforms to this very idea of gender performativity, presenting a strong visual femininity to avoid oppression from the society in which she lives.

The film also uses the subject of travel as a central theme, images of small-town America in juxtaposition to Bree and her forging of self: a process of stabilisation. As Bree and Toby travel across the country, the film presents a representation of an American landscape (with its dark tints of green, brown and blue) and its stark contrast to Bree's bright spectrum of colour choices (Figures 13 & 14). She is a stranger in a strange place, far away from the protective big city environment she usually blends into. Bree tells stories of the land and its formation millions of years before, how many societies such as Native Americans "revered" trans people as "two spirit people." The journey itself signifies a freedom for Bree, but also displaces her as a result of the encounters she faces that might not have otherwise occurred. Jensen (2018) notes that these road trip encounters "serve to highlight perceptions of gender in society and reflect on the changes Bree is undergoing" (p. 5). While resting at a roadside restaurant, a little girl stares at Bree and asks, "Are you a boy or a girl?" Bree says nothing and the little girl's mother turns her away and says, "Stop bothering people." While the girl has no malicious intent, Jensen (2018) posits that the little girl signifies "a portion of society who simply ignore gender complexities" and that this scene also "dismisses much-needed discourse on complex gender expression and identity" (p. 5). Yet, this scene also signifies the opposition Bree must encounter on a frequent basis, the constant struggle she endures to pass as female in a society where gender norms are conditioned from a young age.



Figure 13. Bree's bright colour choices. Still from *Transamerica* (Tucker, 2005).



Figure 14. Bree's colours set against the darker American Landscape. Still from *Transamerica* (Tucker, 2005).

The film also implies that Bree wishes to conceal this part of herself. Later, Bree and Toby seek shelter at her friend Mary Ellen's house, who is also trans. Mary Ellen is hosting a party with other transgender friends and the group speaks openly to Bree and Toby about their genders and sexual reassignments. Bree apologises to Toby for having to endure "these ersatz women." Toby does not understand the meaning of the word "ersatz," so Bree explains

“phony. Something pretending to be something it’s not.” Given that she is still lying to Toby about her own trans identity, Bree seems to be aligning herself to an image that cannot be rejected as transgressive. While speaking to Mary Ellen, Bree goes as far as to say that one of the party guests “couldn’t pass on a dark night at 200 yards.” Mary Ellen informs her that the woman is a “GG” or “genuine girl,” meaning cisgender. By judging the other guests as passing or not passing, Bree is attempting to stabilise and rationalise her own transgender identity and precipitating an understanding that transgenderism is unacceptability transgressive.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed a move towards mainstream depictions of queer monstrosity in the first decade of the 21st century in three identifiable categories: acceptable transgression, direct transgression, and unacceptable transgression. These representations of transgression signify the level of acceptability surrounding queerness and the performance of queer monstrosity. *Brokeback Mountain* and *Milk* represent acceptable transgression and queer monstrosity given that the sexuality of the gay characters challenges the boundaries of heteronormative sexuality, thus making them transgressive, but not *purposefully* transgressive (as we see with direct transgression). Any transgression becomes acceptable through the characters’ shame, fear, persecution, and the empathy and pathos through which these are represented. *Party Monster* and *I Love You Phillip Morris* are representative of direct transgression. Queer films of this period with less focus on empathy and pathos and more focus on comedy, irreverence and the subversive notably performed less well critically and commercially. These films feature queer monsters engaging in direct transgression, an open and honest depiction of transgressive behaviour often with images of crime, drug use, abuse and death. Films with direct transgression vary in subject matter, style and imagery, at times told with a dark

sarcastic irony and other times with strict sombre earnestness. Finally, *Breakfast on Pluto* and *Transamerica* both feature representations of unacceptable transgression, a transgression which is deemed unacceptable by heteronormative society, both within the film and real life. Unlike films with acceptable or direct transgression, these queer characters are represented as transgressive and monstrous for the reason that their gender identities prevent them from conforming to heteronormative binaries.

While these mainstream films depict queer characters featuring various levels of acceptability, there are also a surge in horror films in this decade evoking queer transgression, placing queer characters at the forefront of horror cinema. Most of these films are not mainstream, yet they represent an evolved continuance of earlier transgressive queer cult cinema. Rather than depicting queer people as deviants, outcasts, lustful mass murderers, and tragic victims, the queer characters in these horror films become the protagonists and challenge previous depictions of queer monstrosity, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:
QUEER HORROR AND TRANSGRESSION: 2000-2010

The first decade of the 2000s saw a significant rise in queer horror films with central queer protagonists. Horror films of previous decades often represented the queer person as the murderous villain or deviant; for instance, Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Bobbi in Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* (1980), Angela in Robert Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), Velvet Von Ragnar in *Never Too Young to Die* (1986), and Buffalo Bill in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Concurrently, queerness was often hidden through subtext or the homoerotic in films such as Tom Holland's *Fright Night* (1985), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985, as seen in Chapter Two), and Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). Even different aspects of sexual kink often seen in queer culture (for instance BDSM, or Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission) inspired villains in films such as Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987). Instead, these queer horror films of the early 2000s feature openly queer characters with everyday lives who either blatantly transgress, become victims of violent transgression, or become caught up in the transgressions of others. In any of these scenarios, queer horror films of this decade resist similar categorisations of transgression in mainstream queer films. Instead, the queer characters of these films are either transgressive, transgressive victims, or transgressive friends.

Transgressive Monsters	Transgressive Victims	Transgressive Friends
Openly transgressive characters breaking rules or boundaries, queer monsters who prey on victims	Queer victims of criminal acts, or queer victims at threat from queer monsters	Transgression through association
<i>High Tension</i> (2003) <i>The Covenant</i> (2006) <i>Otto; or Up With Dead People</i> (2008) <i>The Brotherhood</i> series (2001-2010) <i>LA Zombie</i> (2010)	<i>Make a Wish</i> (2002) <i>Hellbent</i> (2004) <i>October Moon</i> (2005) <i>The Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror</i> (2007)	<i>Beastly Boyz</i> (2006) <i>Let the Right One In</i> (2008) <i>Jennifer's Body</i> (2009)

With these types of transgression being represented in queer horror films, we also see a return to queer monstrosity. While Sam J. Miller (2011) argues for the death of the queer monster in contemporary horror cinema (pp. 221-222), I argue that the queer monster, while effectively absent from mainstream queer films of the 2000s, was and still remains very much present within contemporary horror cinema as my following analyses will attest. This image of monstrosity is present within the transgressive queer monster, through the victims of criminal acts or the victims of queer monsters, and through transgressive friends, a secondary transgression that comes from socialising or connecting with the queer monster. It is important to note that, while I have categorised these films into three distinct groupings, some of them cross the categorical lines between all three or fit within more than one grouping. I have placed these films within the category I believe they fit most explicitly but address this intersection, if applicable, in each individual analysis.

Transgressive Monsters: *Otto; or Up With Dead People* and *High Tension*

Bruce LaBruce first emerged as an underground filmmaker in the early to mid-1990s with his films *Super 8 ½* (1994) and *Hustler White* (1996). His filmmaking style often blends explicit pornography, as well as transgressive taboo subject matter, with more conventional filmmaking and narrative techniques associated with art cinema. In her analysis of the director, Eugenie Brinkema (2006) writes that LaBruce's films exist on the boundary between art cinema and pornography, that the films "bear witness to the aesthetic and historical crisis of this borderland, speaking the wild language of the indeterminable" (p. 97). In this way, LaBruce can be considered a transgressive filmmaker, blurring the boundaries between pornography and narrative filmmaking by openly displaying what mainstream audiences might consider shocking or disturbing taboos. Although LaBruce (2009) once stated that he believes his films are "politically correct" in terms of sexual representation (n.p.), they have featured images of gang-rape, racially-motivated violence, amputee fetishism, gerontophilia (a sexual attraction to the elderly), prostitution, and vampire and zombie sexuality, among others. His film *Otto; or Up With Dead People* (2008) is a queer horror film that features the representation of transgressive monsters. The film tells the story of Otto (Jey Crisfar), a gay zombie living in a world where zombies have become commonplace. These zombies have become more refined over time, with more intelligence and the ability to speak and reason. Otto hitches a train ride to Berlin and is discovered by Medea Yarn (Katharina Klewinghaus) who begins to make a documentary about him with the help of her brother Adolf (Guido Sommer) and her girlfriend Hella Bent (Susanne Sachße). Medea is also in the process of trying to finish her film *Up with Dead People*, an epic political-porno-zombie movie. *Up with Dead People* is shown in clips throughout within the film's frame narrative, transitioning between Otto's storyline (colour) and Medea's film

(black and white). The final scene of Medea's film features a sexually graphic gay zombie orgy which Medea explains is "to prepare them against the overwhelming forces of the dead and the living."

The transgressive queer monstrosity in this film stems from three different images or representations: violence, the abject, and images of "gay plague" seemingly reminiscent of the HIV/AIDS crisis. In many ways, the film exemplifies the persecution of queer people and a transgressive response towards this persecution through these representations of transgressive queer monstrosity. The gay zombies, who have become more refined and intelligent than their predecessors, signify a form of retaliation. As the character Medea states in a voiceover, their refined intelligence perhaps developed as "a clandestine guerrilla activity born out of resistance against the violent and unceasing hostilities of the living." The resistance of these gay zombies stems from the violence which they endure from the heterosexual living, who hunt them down and kill them.

In Medea's extradiegetic film, the main character and anti-hero Fritz Fritze (Marcel Schlutt) and his gay zombie boyfriend Maximilian (Christophe Chemin) are attacked by a group of thugs, who shoot Maximilian in the head and eliminate him. In the real world, Otto is also attacked by a group of thugs and left beaten and bloodied. Unlike Otto, who is quite placid and non-violent, Fritz retaliates by creating an army of other gay zombies. He lures other homosexuals into dark alleyways and "fucks them into immortality," thus creating an army of gay zombies to infiltrate the living. The way in which the gay zombies violently turn young men into other gay zombies is representative of the transgressive monstrosity in this film, with queer monsters preying on victims. These victims are, as Medea states, "vigorous young men" who become plagued by a virus that turns them into an army of gay zombies that work to start a revolution. This is something constructed by Medea for her film, a fictionalised depiction of violent oppression and hostility in a world where zombies, formerly

the Other, have now become commonplace. Yet, this oppression is represented in the diegetic world of the film through Otto, who Medea believes is “conducting his own one-man revolution against reality.”

In a scene Medea is shooting for her documentary about Otto, she has him lie beneath the dirt in a graveyard and instructs him to raise his hand from the grave:

Raise it as a protest against all the injustices perpetuated against your kind. Raise it in solidarity with the lonely and the weak and the dispossessed of the earth, for the misfits and the sissies and the plague-ridden faggers who have been buried and forgotten by the merciless, heartless hetero-fascist majority.

Medea’s instructions to Otto in shooting this scene represent the violence which envelops transgressive monstrosity but also the oppression which incites it. She instructs him to raise his hand in solidarity with the other, not simply the “sissies” and “faggers,” but also the “weak and the dispossessed.” The transgression of the queer monster is called into question here given that the implied transgression of protest is reactionary, a consequence of the oppressive nature of this “hetero-fascist majority.” Zombies, as cinematic creatures, are commonly known to consume the flesh of the living, a consumption that creates other zombies by way of their innocent victims. As the queer monsters here react to their oppression, they violently transgress against the living. However, what makes them transgressive is not simply their violence, but also their creation of other transgressive queer monsters.

It is also the abject nature of Otto’s zombieism and otherness, often seen through images of the death and decay, as well as the fracturing of abject boundaries, that represents the image of the transgressive monster. In a voiceover, as Otto hitches his way to Berlin, Medea explains the impression she had upon first meeting him:

He looked extremely abject with clothes that appeared to have been lived in for days if not weeks or months, which smelled like they were on the verge of rotting. He had obviously been homeless for some time. He vaguely reminded me of the other boys I had already cast in *Up with Dead People*—lonely, empty, dead inside. In a way, he fit

the typical porn profile. The lost boy, the damaged boy, the numb, phlegmatic, insensate boy willing to go to any extreme to feel something, to feel anything.

This image of Otto is witnessed throughout the film, the image of filth, death and rotting. Images of the gay zombie bodies are abject in both Otto and the gay zombies of Medea's film, breaking the border that signifies the body's separation from death and decay. Julia Kristeva (1982), in her work on abjection, writes on the image of the abject corpse:

That which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; [...] corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, against death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. (p. 3)

Kristeva's words on abject death and decay generate a deeper understanding on the abject image of the gay zombie in this film, its breaking of corporeal borders and boundaries. In a scene from Medea's zombie porn film, the main character Fritz's boyfriend has just turned him into a zombie and begins penetrating Fritz's gaping stomach wound with his penis. Here, the abject nature of the image lies within the rupturing and literal penetration of bodily boundaries, but also in the transgressive boundaries of the abject, "what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). This penetration of abject bodily wounds is also present in LaBruce's gay pornographic zombie horror film *L.A. Zombie* (2010), where an extra-terrestrial zombie (played by porn star François Sagat) penetrates the fatal wounds of dead men, which subsequently brings them back to life. However, what is also abject in these images also lies within the representation of pornography and what Medea describes above as the "typical porn profile."

This image of the men Medea has cast as gay zombies in *Up With Dead People*, those who are "dead inside," "damaged," "phlegmatic," "numb," "insensate" and fitting the typical porn profile, are representative of the connection LaBruce draws between zombie-ism and the promiscuity of gay pornography and cruising culture. The gay plague of zombies that permeates this narrative, while somewhat self-reflexive and parodic, is reminiscent of the

HIV/AIDS crisis and the persecution experienced by gay men in this context. In his study of homosexuality and the horror film, Harry M. Benshoff (1997) cites images of monstrosity and the homosexual as being tied to the AIDS crisis: “who, with a single mingling of blood, can infect a pure and innocent victim, transforming him or her into the living dead” (p. 2). The film refers to these monsters as a “gay plague” of zombies, which was often used as a somewhat pejorative term for HIV/AIDS during the peak of the crisis (Gibson, 2015, n.p.). The “vigorous young men” who Fritz “fucks into immortality” ostensibly signify HIV/AIDS victims in this world where people assault and have become paranoid of homosexuals and catching the virus. Simultaneously, with these two “body” genres of horror and pornography combined (Clover, 1987, p. 189), there is a representation of the transgressive queer monster that both horrifies and stimulates. The pornographic element of this film, particularly the zombie orgy sequence, features explicit gay sexual imagery (penis, genitalia, anal sex, fellatio) mingled with blood and gore and the consumption of flesh. The sequence is intercut with images of animal parts being prepared and carved by a butcher in a form of abject association. By combining these two body genres through explicit, abject imagery in conjunction with gay culture, LaBruce is creating a representation of transgressive queer monstrosity.

Outside of pornography, the transgressive queer monster is also present within more exploitation-based slasher films of the 2000s. Alexandre Aja’s *High Tension* (French: *Haute Tension*, 2003), released in the UK as *Switchblade Romance*, tells the story of two friends Marie (Cécile de France) and Alex (Maïwenn) on their way to spend the weekend with Alex’s parents at their farm in the countryside. Later that night, a sadistic serial killer truck driver (Phillipe Nahon) breaks into the house, murdering Alex’s parents. Marie, hearing and witnessing the attack, hides in an upstairs bedroom and eludes the killer. Alex is dragged into the killer’s truck and Marie sneaks into the truck and hides with her, still unbeknownst to the

killer. Eventually, the killer discovers Marie's presence when he stops at a gas station, where he murders the station attendant and begins chasing after Marie. When the police later watch the gas station's security tapes, they witness Marie murdering the store clerk. Quickly, it is revealed that Marie has actually been the killer all along: she is murderous, delusional and in love with Alex. Marie tells Alex: "No one will come between us ever, ever again. I won't let anyone come between us anymore" (Aja, 2003, n.p.).

High Tension is often seen as an example of what is referred to as the "New French Extremity," a term coined by *Artforum* critic James Quandt (2004) for a collection of transgressive films by French directors at the turn of the 21st century. In his article, Quandt cites a "tendency to the wilfully transgressive" by these directors such as Francois Ozon and Gaspar No  : "the determinants of a cinema suddenly determined to break every taboo, to wade in rivers of viscera and spumes of sperm, to fill each frame with flesh, nubile or gnarled, and subject it to all manner of penetration, mutilation, and defilement" (p. 126). The film is seemingly not queer from the outset and otherwise appears to be a typical, extremely violent slasher movie, a determined foray into transgressive filmmaking. The shock twist ending that reveals Marie's queerness speaks to Marie's transgressive queer monstrosity and the ways in which the director constructs Marie's queerness through her violent, psychopathic behaviour and overt transgression. However, there are instances throughout the film that not only hint to Marie's queerness but also provide connection and symbolism between this queerness and her own monstrosity.

There is a scene in which Marie and Alex have arrived at Alex's parents' house and are about to turn in for the night. Marie goes outside for a cigarette and sees Alex in the upstairs window showering. She watches her intently, perhaps lustfully. When Marie returns to her room, she begins to masturbate. The scene cuts between shots of Marie masturbating and the killer driving closer and closer to the house in his truck. The scene builds and builds,

cutting between both shots and, as the killer finally arrives in front of the house, Marie climaxes. There is an obvious connection being drawn here between the monstrous figure of the killer and Marie's queer sexuality: just as the killer seemingly arrives at the house, ready to kill, Marie gives herself an orgasm. This juxtaposition between the arrival of the killer and Marie's orgasm is an earlier signifier of the connection between her queerness and her monstrosity. Just as she experiences the *jouissance* of orgasm, her transgressive monstrosity is unleashed.

Jouissance, in this case meaning "enjoyment" in terms of sexual pleasure and orgasm, is what Jacques Lacan (1992) described as the "*jouissance* of transgression" (pp. 235-253). Lacan is referring to Sigmund Freud's (1920/2003) theory of "beyond the pleasure principle," the driving force of one's unconscious that seeks immediate gratification of all needs, wants, and the most basic primitive urges (pp. 43-102). Lacan's theory is that there is a *jouissance* which compels the subject to constantly attempt to transgress the prohibitions or boundaries imposed on his/her enjoyment, or to go beyond this pleasure principle. Transgressing this pleasure principle does not lead to more pleasure, but instead pain, since there is only so much pleasure the subject can bear. I pinpoint this element of *jouissance* in regard to Marie's orgasm and the monstrous transgression that emerges from this pleasure. Effectively, Marie's *jouissance* compels her to transgress the boundaries of acceptability and become monstrous.

Similarly, Marie's transgressive monstrosity can also be linked to a catharsis. Her queer attraction to Alex and the lack of acceptance towards this queerness leads to the awakening of her murderous persona. Marie is not monstrous because of her obsession or desire for her female friend, but rather becomes monstrous because the society she lives in renders this desire as such because of her queerness. Dejan Ognjanović (2012) believes that the film "distances itself from the old-fashioned morality of the classical horrors (society=good, monster=evil) and shows the monster as a creation of the societal cultural

apparatus that forms individuality” (p. 235). Whereas the horror film monster might traditionally be seen as a threat to normality, here normality is a threat to the monster. In many ways, it is the repression of Marie’s queer sexuality that becomes threat; in this case, surplus repression which Robin Wood (2018) defines as “specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture” (p. 74). It is precisely this conditioning by society, this repression of Marie’s sexuality that leads her to catharsis through transgressive acts of violence.

As an audience, we are not privy to Marie’s transgressive queer monstrosity until the last twenty minutes of the film. Up until the end reveal, Marie seemingly represents the “Final Girl,” what Carol J. Clover (1987) coined in slasher films as “the survivor [...] the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified” (p. 201). Marie manages to evade the ‘killer’ for a majority of the film, watching and listening to the others being murdered from in hiding. When he finally discovers her, he corners her in the forest and attacks her. She takes up a fence post she wraps with barbed wire and bludgeons him. By taking up this weapon, Marie seemingly masculinises herself while simultaneously feminising or “castrating” her oppressor by appropriating a phallus (Clover, 1987, p. 210). Yet, when we discover that Marie is actually the killer and this masculine oppressor an object of her own delusion, we witness of a bizarre queer reversal of the Final Girl subject and a representation of the monstrous-feminine.

In this way, Marie represents both the image of the Final Girl and also the image of the *femme castratrice*, or “castrating woman.” Barbara Creed (1993) defines the *femme castratrice* in two forms: “the castrating female psychotic [...] and the woman who seeks revenge on men who have raped or abused her in some way” (p. 123). The film does not

represent Marie as seeking revenge on those who have raped and abused her, but it does represent her as the castrating female psychotic. While she does not “castrate” in the literal sense, she enacts a revenge on those who represent the oppression of her queer sexuality. By killing Alex’s family, she is symbolically castrating the patriarchal, heterosexual ties that bind her from achieving her full queer potential. The dual juxtaposing imagery of Final Girl and killer also represents the ambiguity of her transgressive queer monstrosity. As Ognjanović (2012) notes, “The whole point of Marie’s peculiar monstrosity is that she can be *both things at once*: both the Final girl (the hero) and the Monster (antihero). Crucial for this particular story is to see the *schizophrenia of her position*, the internal split that cannot easily be divided into rather simplistic, black-white, good-evil, Jekyll-Hyde binaries” (p. 230). Marie represents the transgressive queer monster because of this duality, or her rejection of the binaries of masculine (the killer) and feminine (the Final Girl).

The transgressive queer monsters in these films represent transgressive queer characters breaking rules of boundaries and, with *Otto; or Up With Dead People* and *High Tension*, the queer monster preying on victims. This is often seen through images of violence or the abject and represents a break from the boundaries and binaries of systematic order. The next section analyses the queer victims of these transgressive monsters, as well as the transformations that occur when queer representation in horror cinema shifts from that of the monster or deviant to victimhood.

Transgressive Victims: *Hellbent* and *October Moon*

Queer horror films with transgressive victims feature queer victims of criminal acts, or queer victims at threat from queer monsters. Typically, these transgressive victims are also transgressive themselves and are punished by the transgressive monster through violence or death. In her discussion of victims in the slasher film, Carol Clover (1987) writes of the

victims as “sexual transgressors” both male and female who are “scheduled for early destruction” by the slasher killer (p. 199). The victims often die in a “post-coital death scene” and sexual activity of any kind is punishable by violent death (Clover, 1987, p. 200). However, this trope of sexually transgressive victimhood is subverted in queer slasher horror, given that the victims often never achieve sexual fulfilment or climax before meeting a violent end. The gay slasher film *Hellbent* (dir. Paul Etheredge-Ouzts, 2004) tells the story of four friends, Eddie (Dylan Fergus), Chaz (Andrew Levitas), Joey (Hank Harris), and Tobey (Matt Phillips), who head out on Halloween night to attend the West Hollywood Halloween Carnival. A murderer (Kent Bradley James) is on the loose, a sexualised muscular killer with a devil mask who kills and decapitates his victims with a scythe. The friends first encounter the Devil Daddy in a secluded wooded area where he has murdered two of his victims. They taunt the killer, believing he is trying to cruise them. After this, the Devil Daddy stalks them throughout the night, killing them off one by one until only Eddie remains as Final Boy.

As a slasher film, *Hellbent* features various tropes of the traditional slasher genre yet mimics these tropes through an appropriative queer lens of gay male subjectivity. In this film, the slasher tropes include the psychopathic killer, death by sex (punishment for being sexually active), weapon of choice, and the Final Girl (Clover, 1987, pp. 192-204). These elements of the slasher exemplified in a queer context are witnessed through the eyes of the transgressive victims.

The image of the queer psychopathic killer in horror cinema is one of sexual deviance through transgenerness or cross-dressing in characters such as Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960), Bobbi in *Dressed to Kill* (1980), Angela in *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), Velvet Von Ragnar in *Never Too Young to Die* (1986), and Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The gay or lesbian individual is also depicted as a psychopathic killer in films like *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977), *Windows* (1980), *Cruising* (1980), and *Basic Instinct*

(1992). Harry Benshoff (1997) makes note of these repressed queer monsters in horror cinema, these “socio-political and psychosexual Others” as being displaced “onto monstrous signifiers, in which form they return to wreak havoc in the cinema” (pp. 8-9). As queer monsters are represented as psychopathic deviant killers, their victims are often represented as straight, cisgender innocents who fall prey to these violent, depraved executioners. Queer horror films like *Hellbent* represent a shift in this killer/victim dynamic, one in which the victims are also queer and the psychopathic killer turns into an erotic masculine figure.

The “Devil Daddy” killer in *Hellbent* contradicts the image of the sexual deviant in previous slashers, instead acquiring an erotic coding as villain. He is muscular, dominant, powerful and remains half-naked for the entirety of the film. As such, the queer monster Devil Daddy is sexualised and simultaneously becomes both an object of sexual appeal and threat. Darren Elliott-Smith (2016) describes the erotic nature of the Devil Daddy, the connection between his fetishist, sexual appeal and the threat of death, which conceivably represents the possible threat of anonymous sex in gay cruising culture:

Devil Daddy’s threatening and overpowering musculature and his phallic extensions (devil horns in his helmet/head gear and his oversized scythe) provide fetishistic appeal for the voyeuristic male characters, who check him out before being mortally ‘checked out’ and killed themselves. (p. 148)

The dangers of promiscuity within gay male cruising culture are represented through the symbol of the Devil Daddy, a figure of death and damage that warns of the hazards and risks of anonymous sexual encounters, such as violent physical attack or sexually transmitted disease.

The slang term ‘Daddy’ in gay culture (and often in gay pornography) typically refers to a sexualised, masculine older male figure. The relationship between a gay ‘daddy’ and ‘son’ represents a replacement of the traditional paternal hierarchy of father-son dynamics, with the daddy providing emotional support and sexual encouragement to the inexperienced and vulnerable son. However, this term also takes on a more fetishistic definition of

dominance and control. John Mercer (2012) defines the ‘daddy’ in gay male culture as “a dominant ‘master’ in sado-masochistic sexual play, and to the sexual role of a domineering and potentially aggressive father figure in the enactment of abuse fantasies” (p. 320).

Therefore, the term ‘daddy’ itself can signify a form of fetishistic threat, a symbol of sexual pleasure which also has the power to harm.

The Devil Daddy murders those who engage in sexual acts, which is often a common trope of the slasher, and these people are his transgressive victims. As Carol Clover (1987) points out, “In the slasher film, sexual transgressors of both sexes are scheduled for early destruction [...] a generic imperative of the slasher film” (pp. 199-200). Yet, the Devil Daddy kills these sexually active victims before any sexual fulfilment or climax occurs, which contradicts the tendency of most slasher killers to murder their victims in post-coital afterglow (as seen in *Halloween* (1978), the *Friday the 13th* series (1980-present), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and *Sorority Row* (2009), to name a few). The opening scene of the film features two gay men in their car in a secluded wooded area. Lacking space in the car, one of the men sticks his head and torso out the window to receive oral sex, only to then be decapitated by the Devil Daddy. Two of the main characters, Joey and Chaz, are also killed for sexual activity before any kind of full climax or fulfilment. Joey kisses his crush in the bathroom of a club and his crush leaves with Joey’s number, and Joey is then decapitated a few moments later by the Devil Daddy. Chaz is represented as being the most promiscuous throughout the film, sleeping with anyone he finds attractive (both male and female). He is also decapitated by the Devil Daddy in the middle of a crowded dancefloor while cruising for a new lover, with the crowd believing it to be a Halloween gag. The killings of the sexually transgressive victims in *Hellbent* correspond to this ‘death by sex’ slasher trope, yet these victims are killed before their sexual urges are fulfilled. Also, those victims with more feminised queer embodiment are spared by the Devil Daddy (at first).

Tobey chooses to dress in full drag for the carnival as a means of escape. As a male model, he is used to being objectified and uses drag in this setting as a means of escape. He confronts the Devil Daddy in a dark alleyway, desperate for a sexual tryst. After he calls to him, the Devil Daddy sees Tobey in full drag and ignores him. Tobey grows angry and says “What? You got all the candy you need? You superficial faggot!” Tobey throws down his driver’s licence at Devil Daddy’s feet and begins removing different elements of his drag costume, slowly revealing his full muscular male physique. Once Devil Daddy realises that Tobey is an attractive male, he approaches him and caresses his face and lips, smearing his makeup, and decapitates him. With the traditional slasher film, the feminine figure is the usual victim of the slasher monster, with his “phallic purpose, as he thrusts his drill or knife into the trembling bodies of young women” (Clover, 1987, p. 209). In this queer slasher, the feminine figure is an unattractive kill. Only when presented or revealed to be an attractive gay male does the killer show interest in murdering his victims. In this way, *Hellbent* subverts the more heteronormative aspects of the slasher subgenre and turns them queer. The last surviving victim, Eddie, is the least sexually active and experienced and stands in this film as a queer image of the Final Girl (in this case, the Final Boy).

The Final Girl, as discussed in the previous section on *High Tension*, is the survivor of the slasher film who masculinises herself with a phallic weapon and simultaneously “unmans her oppressor” (Clover, 1987, p. 210). In *Hellbent*, Eddie stands instead as the figure of the Final Boy, a relatively uninvestigated concept in slasher film scholarship. Other instances of the Final Boy can be seen with Jesse in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy’s Revenge* (1985, as analysed in Chapter Two), Ash in the *Evil Dead* series (1981-present), Tommy Jarvis in *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (1984), and Paxton in *Hostel* (2005). Elliott-Smith (2016) defines the Final Boy in *Hellbent* as not subverting the symbolism of the Final Girl, but simply an “excising and replacement of it” (p. 155). Final Boys do not use

femininity to survive in contrast to the Final Girl becoming masculine. Rather, they also employ objects coded as masculine: “In order to survive and attain a successful male subjectivity (both in heterosexist and gay male terms), the Final Boy must masculinise himself” (Elliott-Smith, 2016, p. 156). Eddie as Final Boy is rather non-masculine, not a tomboy like the typical Final Girl but rather a “sissy” or effeminate in several respects (p. 156).

While his father was a police officer before he died, Eddie has failed in becoming one and works an administrative post at the police station. He spends time at work printing mugshots of attractive male criminals and is mocked by his sister, who has become a police officer, for doing so. He has a glass eye, having lost his real eye in a training accident. While the Final Girl possesses the masculine characteristic of an “active investigating gaze” (Clover, 1987, p. 210), Eddie’s glass eye seemingly renders him “un-masculine by his failure to master and possess it” (Elliott-Smith, 2016, p. 156). When Eddie takes up his father’s gun to defeat the Devil Daddy in the film’s denouement, he undergoes a masculinisation that corresponds to the Final Girl’s phallicization. In this way, Eddie is a reflective queer mirroring of the Final Girl and subverts the more traditional heteronormative dynamic of victim and killer in the slasher film.

It is worth noting that at least one theorist analyses *Hellbent* as an “un-queer” text. Claire Sisco King (2010) writes that the film is “un-queer” because it “contributes to the hegemony of heteronormativity” (p. 250). In reference to the Devil Daddy as monster, she observes that he “does little to disrupt traditional identity categories and asserts that the only tenable subject position is one that conforms to the laws of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 262). The gay characters of *Hellbent*, in general, represent a limited range of subject positions about what represents the norm “restricting the productive fluidity and instability that multiple, shifting identifications have the potential to offer” (p. 262). While King produces a

valid argument about the representations of queerness in *Hellbent* and its extra-texts, I would argue that the film is not “un-queer” but rather represents a queer transgression that subverts images and representations of hegemonic masculinity.

The Devil Daddy killer is erotically coded as a villain, both by his victims and through his physical image. He does not reflect the transgender or cross-dressing deviant of earlier horror films, nor is he represented as physically grotesque, as seen in slasher killers such as Freddy Krueger in the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series or Jason Voorhees in the *Friday the 13th* series. Rather, he is toned, muscular and sexualised, but also murderous, providing a fetishistic appeal of threat and dominance. Through this eroticisation, the queer monster evolves from the sexual deviant to an objectified phallic and castrating image of transgression. The transgressive queer victims of *Hellbent* do not show, as King (2010) states, a “limited range of subject positions” (p. 262), but rather a multiplicity of representations and connotations through the subversion of hegemonic femininity and masculinity. The rather hypermasculine performances and caricatures in the film are used as “a method of feminine disavowal” (Elliott-Smith, 2016, p. 139), or rejection, a way of distancing the queer subject from shameful associations with queer stereotypes. These images of the hypermasculine are seen in the costumes worn by the characters while they attend a Halloween Carnival.

These costumes featured in the film are associated with representations of hypermasculinity: a police officer (Eddie), a cowboy (Chaz), and a leatherman (Joey). The police officer is a figure of power, authority and dominance; the cowboy a strong and rugged wrangler; the leatherman a powerful and tough biker figure. The film subverts this masculine imagery by constructing the characters as exaggerated and fantastical queer caricatures of their costume masquerade. Eddie, the Final Boy, as police officer is far from dominant and remains quite passive throughout the film. He wears his father’s old police uniform to be

appear more manly and to compensate for his lack. Dressed as a cowboy, Chaz maintains the strong and rugged cowboy image but wears his vest unbuttoned to reveal his muscular figure. He is also openly bisexual and is represented as being the most promiscuous one of the group. This bisexuality rejects the stereotypical cowboy image of heteronormativity and queers the image, exaggerating and blurring its masculine characterisations. As a leatherman, Joey represents a caricature of the image of the tough and powerful biker figure, instead wearing a fetishist form of leather with a harness and chaps. He is young, thin and small, the exact opposite of a rough-and-ready biker, as well as the least sexually experienced of the group. These representations further queer masculine representations and subvert the heteronormativity of transgressive victims often exemplified in slasher films.

This queer subversion of masculine representation through costuming is also characterised through the setting of the Halloween carnival in a form of carnivalesque. The carnival is associated with assemblage and the breakdown of social order, a space where boundaries of societal distinction collapse. Mikhail Bakhtin (1965/2009) first originated the concept of carnivalesque in 1938 in a dissertation on French Renaissance writer François Rabelais, which was later published in 1965. He writes:

One might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was a true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (p. 45)

In a carnivalesque setting, as the boundaries of social distinction and order temporarily collapse, the limitations around transgression would also be broken. Through the setting of the Halloween carnival, the transgressive victims of *Hellbent* are engaging in a ritualistic parody of the social order. Within a carnivalesque environment, the different circumstances of its participants are temporarily altered and become inverted “in a riot of pleasure, excess, misbehaviour and misrule” (Jenks, 2003, p. 162). For this one particular evening of carnival

overturning, the characters of this film are able to collapse masculine representations reserved for normal life and to queer these representations, if only temporarily. Harry Benshoff (2004), in a study of homosexuality and monstrosity, writes that carnival celebrated “the lure of the deviant” and that the celebration of Halloween, in particular, allows “otherwise ‘normal’ people the pleasures of drag, or monstrosity, for a brief but exhilarating experience” (p. 66). While *Hellbent* differs from representations of queer deviance in past slasher horror, the carnival setting here celebrates the allure and attraction towards deviant behaviour or transgression. As transgressive victims, the characters of the film are victims of the Devil Daddy queer monster but are also transgressive themselves in subverting heteronormative representations in the slasher film.

As stated previously, transgressive victims in queer horror films become innocent victims of criminal acts by queer monsters. This is true of Jason Paul Collum’s independent horror film *October Moon* (2005). Collum is best known for directing this film and its sequel *October Moon 2: November Son* (2008), as well as two horror film documentaries: *Sleepless Nights: Revisiting the Slumber Party Massacres* (2010) and *Screaming in High Heels: The Rise & Fall of the Scream Queen Era* (2011). Before directing these, he performed various jobs such as writer and camera operator on films with director David DeCoteau. DeCoteau is well known for directing films in *The Brotherhood* series (2001-2010) and *Beastly Boyz* (2006), both mentioned earlier in this chapter in the transgressive monsters and transgressive friends categories, respectively.

October Moon tells the story of Elliot (Jerod Howard), a heterosexual man who falls in love and becomes obsessed with his gay boss Corin (Sean Michael Lambrecht). At the start of the film, Elliot is engaged to a woman named Marti (Tina Ona Paukstelis) and Corin is in a relationship with a man named Jake (Jeff Dylan Graham). Corin’s relationship with Jake is somewhat strained because of their age difference and Jake’s constant need to go

clubbing. Corin hires Elliot to work for his company and the two eventually strike up a friendship. Elliot's mother (played by Judith O'Dea from Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*) expresses her concern at Elliot's friendship with Corin and is desperate for him to marry Marti. She believes gays have a "disrespect for God" and that they "ruin other people's lives." Regardless of his mother's opinions, Elliot continues his friendship with Corin, sexually fantasizes about him, and becomes increasingly obsessed with him.

His relationship with Marti becomes strained. When Corin rejects Elliot's advances, the stalking becomes even more obsessive, to the point where he sneaks into Corin's house and takes pictures of him naked. When Marti finds the pictures, she ends their engagement and tells Elliot's mother, who kicks him out of the house saying, "You are just like your father." (There is an implication here that Elliot's father left Elliot's mother because he was also gay.) Corin, now more aware of Elliot's obsessive stalking, refuses to take him in after his mother kicks him out. Elliot kidnaps Corin and takes him to an abandoned farmhouse, where Jake and Marti track them down. In a fit of rage, Elliot stabs Corin to death and, in a subsequent struggle, Jake kills Elliot and Marti.

This film embodies a threat of queerness to the heteronormative and subsequently represents a repressed transgressive queer sexuality that targets an openly queer victim. Corin, as a victim of Elliot's obsession, is not transgressive but rather becomes an innocent casualty of transgressive monstrosity precipitated by Elliot's repressed queer sexuality. Elliot's queerness is bound up in a form of surplus repression, a product of his family environment and a conditioning by his mother to believe that homosexuality is immoral. Robin Wood (2018) defines two different types of repression in his analysis of the American horror film: "basic repression" and "surplus repression" (p. 74). He defines basic repression as universally human, the repression that takes us "from an uncoordinated animal capable of little beyond screaming and convulsions into a human being" (p. 74). It is the human capacity

for self-control and the consideration of other people. Surplus repression is “the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on pre-determined roles within that culture” (p. 74). Sexuality in popular culture is often repressed and involves surplus repression, given that the ideal inhabitant is someone living in a “monogamous heterosexual union necessary for the reproduction of future ideal inhabitants” (p. 75). The non-heterosexual or queer person does not assimilate into this stereotypical habitation and therefore finds themselves a victim of surplus repression.

Elliot is a product of surplus repression and becomes queerly monstrous when confronted with queer desire. Here, queer desire stands as an umbrella term for non-heteronormative desire. To experience this queer desire in a familial environment that sets out to confine this desire causes Elliot to become transgressive. Raised by his homophobic mother, who rejects homosexuality because of the queer transgressions of Elliot’s absent father, his repression stems from what Barbara Creed (1993) refers to as the “castrating mother” (p. 139). The monstrous castrating mother is a frequent presence in horror cinema, represented in films such as *Psycho* (1960), *Fanatic* (or *Die! Die! My Darling!*, 1965), *Deep Red* (1975), *Carrie* (1976), *The Brood* (1979), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Braindead* (1992), and more recently in *Hereditary* (2018). In most cases, according to Creed (1993), the perversity of the monstrous castrating mother is “almost always grounded in possessive, dominant behaviour towards her offspring, particularly the male child” (p. 139). Mrs. Hamilton in *October Moon* is similar in that her dominant and possessive behaviour towards Elliot involves her pushing him to marry Marti, saying Marti will be good for him because she “won’t be around forever,” implying that Elliot needs a feminine, maternal figure in order to survive. She emasculates him, admonishing him for not being able to tie a necktie at his age and questioning his inability to handle his new job.

There is also an implied, but never fully revealed, fear that Elliot might be homosexual. She believes marrying a woman would further solidify his heterosexuality. When Elliot reveals that his new boss Corin is gay, Mrs. Hamilton expresses her belief that she “doesn’t think it’s right to mingle with that type” and that “God made men and women for a reason.” She believes that all homosexuals “destroy other people’s lives.” When she discovers from Marti that Elliot has fallen in love with Corin, she slaps him and says, “You are either going to marry Marti and forget this entire thing...or you are no longer my son.”

However, Mrs. Hamilton does not become the violent, revenge-seeking castrating mother as often seen in this horror film representation, nor does Elliot take on her persona as Norman Bates does in *Psycho*. Rather this metaphorical castration comes through her repression of Elliot’s queerness, the inhibiting of his sexual desire which ultimately leads to his transgression. Through this repression by the castrating mother, Elliot is a monstrous embodiment of otherness. Being othered because of his closeted and repressed queer sexuality leads him to commit transgressive acts and seek Corin as his innocent victim, an openly queer person who is far from repressed. He is openly gay to his friends and colleagues and exhibits no shame for his queer lifestyle, almost the exact opposite of Elliot.

Although not repressed, Corin, as a transgressive victim, is also a willing victim of emasculation and the “feminisation of gay male culture” (Elliott-Smith, 2016, p. 117). There are moments throughout the film when Corin’s sexuality is emphasised by himself and those close to him as being associated with the feminine. When Corin discusses being young and playing with Barbies and acting like Wonder Woman, his friend and colleague Nancy (Brinke Stevens) tells him playfully, “You are such a *fag!*” Later, when Nancy asks Corin if he thinks Elliot is gay, he responds, “Oh hell yeah, she screamed ‘Mary!’ the minute she walked in.” Nancy asks him why he always refers to gay men as women to which Corin replies, “Well, aren’t we?” These moments of feminisation towards gay male culture speak to

a willing victimhood on Corin's part, an underlying anxiety or fear that being gay is transgressive and therefore deserving of emasculation.

Ultimately, victims in these queer horror films are queer victims of criminal acts, or queer victims at threat from queer monsters. These transgressive victims are occasionally also transgressive themselves and are punished by the transgressive monster through violence or death, as seen in *Hellbent*. In spite of this, the victims are sometimes not transgressive themselves (as seen in *October Moon*), but rather find themselves at threat from queer monsters. The next section analyses transgressive friends in queer horror films, those who become transgressive through friendship or association with queer monsters.

Transgressive Friends: *Jennifer's Body* and *Let the Right One In*

Transgressive friends are represented in queer horror films through a friendship or relationship between a transgressive monster and their willing counterpart, a transgressive companion or acquaintance. Typically guilty by association, transgressive friends are normally innocent at the start, but slowly diverge into transgressive behaviour as their connection with the monster deepens. A prime example of the transgressive friend representation is Karyn Kusama's *Jennifer's Body* (2009), with a screenplay written by Diablo Cody. Cody is known for writing films such as *Juno* (2007), *Young Adult* (2011), *Paradise* (2013), *Tully* (2018), and for creating the television programme *United States of Tara* (2009-2011). Before her career as a screenwriter, Cody worked as an exotic dancer and peep show performer, which she detailed in her memoir *Candy Girl: A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper* (2005). Cody's involvement in *Jennifer's Body* is particularly important because of her former engagement with what society often considers a socially transgressive form of spectacle, but also as a form of female empowerment (Schweitzer, 2000, p. 65). The

characters in this film, Jennifer and Needy, echo this duality of empowerment and transgression in their engagement with monstrosity.

The director of the film, Karyn Kusama, has directed films such as *Girlfight* (2000), *Aeon Flux* (2005), *The Invitation* (2015), a segment in the female-directed anthology horror film *XX* (2017), and *Destroyer* (2018). With the exception of *The Invitation*, Kusama's films are known for their strong feminist themes and flawed female protagonists. In an interview, she called herself a "feminist unapologetically" (Puchko, 2018, n.p.) and, in regard to *Jennifer's Body*, noted that an "emotionally honest story about toxic friendships between women is not going to be easily understood by the sort of mainstream—I want to say—male horror fans." While Kusama does not highlight or acknowledge a queer theme of female friendship in this film, her comments on the mainstream, particularly of the male audience's lack of acceptance, speak to a representation of transgression present within the central female protagonists. For example, scholars such as Aidatul Chusna and Shofi Mahmudah (2018) suggest a transgressive image of the two female characters as exemplifying Barbara Creed's definition of the monstrous feminine, where "woman as monster can transgress the border which separates the living subject from that which threatens its extinction." (p. 14) This image of female monstrosity signals an abject transgression in *Jennifer's Body* that facilitates the transgressive friendship between the two women.

The film tells the story of two high-school friends, Needy (Amanda Seyfried) and Jennifer (Megan Fox). The two girls have seemingly nothing in common. Jennifer is a popular cheerleader and Needy is an insecure and studious nerdy type, yet it is implied that Needy has a lesbian crush on Jennifer. One night, Jennifer brings Needy to a local dive bar to attend a concert by indie rock band Low Shoulder. The bar catches fire and the two girls escape, only for Jennifer to leave with the band, despite Needy's protests. Later, Jennifer comes to Needy's house, covered in blood and vomits a thick trail of black, spiny fluid.

Jennifer appears at school the next day, seemingly fine, but begins killing and eating their male classmates. She reveals to Needy that on the night she left the bar with Low Shoulder, they took her to woods and murdered her as virgin sacrifice to Satan to gain fame and fortune. Because Jennifer was not a virgin, she has become permanently possessed and must feed on men to exist. After doing some research, Needy discovers that Jennifer must be a succubus, a female demon that seduces men in order to feed on them. After Jennifer seduces Needy's boyfriend and kills him, Needy breaks into Jennifer's bedroom and stabs her through the heart, killing her and destroying the demon. In an asylum, Needy has manifested some of Jennifer's supernatural abilities and breaks out of her cell, later tracking down the Low Shoulder band members and murdering them.

The transgressive friendship between Jennifer and Needy develops through Needy's relationship with the transgressive monster: in this case, Jennifer. Through their deep connection and a very evident same-sex attraction, Needy ultimately becomes transgressive by association as a result of Jennifer's monstrosity and influence. This queer relationship between the two girls, the one which leads to Needy's eventual transgression, is demonstrated in several scenes throughout the film. The first scene comes near the start of the film, when Needy is watching Jennifer cheer at a school pep rally. They make eye contact and wave at each other. In a voiceover, Needy says, "Sandbox love never dies," implying that their bond is steadfast and perhaps deeper than friendship. The reverse shot of Jennifer is seen through Needy's gaze in slow motion, as she admires Jennifer's beauty. One of their classmates, Chastity (Valerie Tian), who is sat behind Needy leans down to her and says, "You're totally lesbi-gay." Although Needy defends this by saying, "What? She's my best friend," the lesbian representation here is quite evident.

This image of Jennifer, as seen through Needy's gaze, works as a reversal of the "active/male and passive/female" gaze identified by Laura Mulvey (1975, p. 11). Needy, as a

female, possesses the active male position or the “active power of the erotic look” (p. 12), while Jennifer is the passive female, her appearance “coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (p. 11). Needy’s gaze represents a queer subversion of the male gaze, with Needy taking on the more dominant role of looking and Jennifer the object of this gaze. Yet, the representation of Jennifer as erotic spectacle and sexual object is also subverted through her monstrosity. In monstrous form, Jennifer becomes bestial, “ranging from the reptilian to the ruminant” (Wills & Roberts, 2017, p. 16). Her body becomes abject, leaking and expelling bodily wastes and developing into an object of repulsion, or the filth and defilement the clean body rejects (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). Here, the scopophilic gaze that constructs the woman as erotic object is subverted by Jennifer’s abject monstrosity and, as a result of this monstrosity, Needy becomes transgressive in order to reject it.

There are several examples throughout the film which represent Jennifer’s influence on Needy’s own body that later motivate her transgression. In a one scene, Jennifer has been possessed and turned into full-fledged monster. Needy and her boyfriend Chip (Johnny Simmons) are having sex, while Jennifer has lured their classmate, Colin (Kyle Gallner), to a vacant house to seduce and kill him. As Needy is having sex, she envisions blood dripping from the ceiling and Jennifer in the corner of the room. She begins to make high pitched whimpers at the sight of it, which her boyfriend mistakes for moans of pleasure. Through some supernatural connection, Needy can see and hear Jennifer murdering Colin. She leaves in a panic and almost immediately drives into Jennifer on the road, covered in blood in her demonic state. Needy envisioning Jennifer kill while having sex is not only very telling of their queer connection, but Needy represents a transgressive embodiment of bodily excess through pleasure, fear, and pain.

As previously discussed in this chapter with the concept of direct transgression, representations of excess (bodily or otherwise) are considered transgressive according to

Edwards and Grauland (2013). Linda Williams (1991) analyses what she refers to as the “pertinent features of bodily excess” (p. 4) in pornography, horror, and melodrama. The first is “the spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion,” (p. 4) which builds on Carol Clover’s (1987) discussion of films which privilege sensational body genres (p. 189). For Williams, the bodily spectacle of intense sensation or emotion is most often seen through the portrayal of orgasm in pornography, in horror’s portrayal of violence and terror, and the portrayal of weeping in melodrama. While *Jennifer’s Body* is hardly pornography or melodrama, these portrayals of the bodily spectacle are all present within this scene. Needy experiences the intense sensation or emotion of sex with Chip yet envisions Jennifer in the process, and the horror and violence of witnessing Jennifer brutally murder Colin, which ultimately leads to intense weeping and overwrought emotion. Yet, because Jennifer is the source of this bodily excess for Needy, and given the already preconceived lesbian attraction between them, there is a queer embodiment of bodily excess that is present here. Aside from the fact that Needy envisions Jennifer at the height of all this bodily emotion, Jennifer is the solitary source of the bodily sensations (pleasure, sadness, anger) that lead Needy to become transgressive.

There are multiple examples in this film where the queer representation between these two characters, the one which inspires Needy’s transgression, is most strongly identified or acknowledged. On the same evening that Needy envisions Jennifer killing Colin, she returns home after encountering Jennifer on the road and finds Jennifer in her bed. The two kiss passionately for several moments before Needy revives herself and pulls away, but the kiss remains unspoken between them. Another scene takes place on the night of prom, where Jennifer has lured Needy’s boyfriend Chip to an abandoned pool and attempts to kill him. Needy comes to his rescue and taunts Jennifer, calling her “insecure” and no longer “socially relevant,” which intensely angers Jennifer. Needy tells her “I thought you only murdered

boys,” to which Jennifer replies, “I go both ways.” This informal term of “going both ways” (sometimes to “swing both ways”) works as a double entendre here, implying versatility in terms of sexual orientation or attraction (bisexuality) as well as Jennifer’s choice of victims.

In a later scene, Jennifer is at home lying in bed recovering from her confrontation with Needy and Chip. Needy breaks through her bedroom window and attacks her, trying to stab her with a utility knife in the heart to expel the demon. As they struggle, Jennifer says, “Do you buy all your murder weapons at Home Depot? God, you’re butch.” By calling Needy “butch,” Jennifer is referring to the term used in lesbian subculture to ascribe masculine identity and its various characteristics to lesbian women. Gayle Rubin (1992) defines butch as “the lesbian vernacular term for women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than with feminine ones” (p. 467). Jack Halberstam (1998) discusses the pejorative nature or stereotypes often constituted by “butch,” yet writes that the butch often exceeds these stereotypes through their societal representation and “disrupts the dominant systems of representation that depend on negative queer images” (p. 180). Jennifer is undoubtedly using the term in a pejorative way, attempting to subjectify Needy’s queer identity and make her a victim. However, Needy is ultimately able to transcend and liberate herself from these stereotypes and dominant systems of representation, yet still remain transgressive.

Jennifer’s body represents the same transgressive monstrosity often observed in the monstrous-feminine, she is “from virgin to whore, defined in terms of her sexuality” (Creed, 1993, p. 3). In contrast, Needy’s body liberates itself from social categories and conventions of the feminine, represented as “an emancipatory hybrid that resists genre conventions and cultural expectations” (Wills & Roberts, 2017, p. 19). She is simultaneously represented as the outwardly bookish, nerdy type, wearing glasses and using the library to solve the problem of Jennifer’s possession, as well as a sexually active and self-secure progressive

representation of womanhood. The more intimate scenes of Needy and her boyfriend “possess a joyous eroticism that answers and supplements Jennifer’s exaggerated pastiche of vampy sexuality” (p. 19). She also represents a contradictory image of the Final Girl, a long way from the sexually reluctant, androgynous image identified by Clover (1987, p. 204), who is ultimately saved by a male figure. She is neither virginal nor androgynous, instead fighting Jennifer on her own after Jennifer kills Chip. When Chip tries to fight Jennifer, she fights alongside him. In this sense, she has liberated herself from the confines of male/female hierarchy and the traditional horror image of the female in distress.

Although Needy does manage to liberate herself from social stereotypes of the feminine and more traditional female horror film images, she nevertheless becomes transgressive through her friendship with the transgressive monster. When Jennifer bites Needy during their final confrontation, she seemingly passes on some of her supernatural powers. Needy escapes the asylum where she is being housed and murders the members of Low Shoulder in a similar manner to Jennifer as succubus. Although the girls’ attraction to each other is never explicitly spoken about, the moments that have been illustrated above show an unmistakable queer representation. Through this relationship with Jennifer as transgressive monster, Needy herself becomes a type of monstrous-feminine. This subject of killing and consuming the flesh of men in a world of dominant queer feminine monstrosity also subverts typical horror film representations of woman as victim. Within horror films that feature transgressive friend representation, there are also subjects of subverting gender identity, as well as queerness, companionship, and immortality as seen in the following analysis of *Let the Right One In*.

Let the Right One In (Swedish: *Låt den rätte komma in*, 2008) is the story of Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant), a bullied 12-year-old outcast who develops a friendship with a vampire child, Eli (Lina Leandersson), while living in a snowy suburb of Stockholm, Sweden, in the

1980s. The film differs significantly from the representation of transgressive friendship in *Jennifer's Body*. Rather than becoming transgressive through the queer monster's influence, the queer monster (in this case Eli) ultimately protects Oskar from his own possible transgressions, but with an implication that Oskar and his association with Eli will also make him monstrous. The monstrous connection between Oskar and Eli has been analysed by some as "the integration of these two halves or alter-egos" (Weinstock, 2012, p. 5), with Eli representing a manifestation of Oskar's own otherness. As a result of this otherness, Oskar faces the struggle of his own transgression and his association with the queer monster.

Before delving into an analysis of this transgressive friendship, it is important to understand the connection between queerness and vampirism, as the monstrosity of the vampire often coincides with representations of queerness in cinematic scholarship. Kimberly J. Lau (2018), on the gendering of the immortal vampire, writes:

Figuring a fantastic immortality and a decidedly queer life/time, the vampire confounds assumptions about the worthy life predicated on dominant ideologies of temporality and invites a consideration of other ways of living, other ways of being. Constituted by queerness—predominantly by an affiliation fixed with images linking same-sex desire, blood, contamination, and death but also by an unmooring of gender signifiers across a range of polymorphous desires—the vampire finds formal resonance in a tightly intertextual genre, a genre whose conventions limit its narrative development. (pp. 3-4)

Lau's description of the vampire as representing a queer life and resisting dominant ideologies of living, engaged with images of blood, contamination, and death, shows the vampire existing outside of the "chrononormative." Citing Elizabeth Freeman, Lau defines "chrononormativity" as the part of "the hegemonic temporal order that undergirds 'genealogies of descent and the mundane workings of domestic life'" (p. 4). By resisting this heteronormative ideology of familial life and existing as an ever-present other, the vampire stands as a representation of queer monstrosity. Similarly, images of vampires are also often infused with the homoerotic, as discussed here by Andrew Schopp (1997): "The contemporary vampire's otherness configures its world as a place to act out fantasies and

desires without the constraint of human socio-cultural, sexual or even physical mandates” (p. 233). This homoeroticism implies the inherent queerness of the vampire as monster and its transgression against dominant heteronormative boundaries of sex and desire. However, I would argue that images of the queer vampire (Eli) in *Let the Right One In* modify these existing images through a depiction of victimhood, trauma, and friendship.

As an outcast at school, Oskar is bullied by particular classmates who tell him to “Squeal like a pig” and “What a good piggy you are.” Oskar envisions his revenge on them, clipping and collecting articles from newspapers about murders and stabbing trees with a secret knife, repeating the bullies’ taunts: “Squeal like a pig.” His outward androgynous appearance, along with his timid and naïve nature, seems to make him an easy target for their cruelty. He does not demonstrate a perceived standard of heteronormative masculinity and therefore becomes ostracized. In these ways, Oskar stands as a representation of a queer youth in search of discovering his own identity, enduring a persecution from his heteronormative oppressors. Because of this ostracization, Oskar’s way of asserting this standard of masculinity is through a mimicry of violence and the plunging of his knife, a phallic object he never actually uses on another person. Jeffrey A. Weinstock (2012), with his analysis of *Let the Right One In* in the context of the vampire film, discusses the scene where Oskar stabs the tree and repeats his bullies’ statements as an action that evokes the queer monster: “The spectator understands that this is a complex form of roleplaying in which Oskar, full of both rage and self-loathing, is killing his tormentor and himself—it is a murder/suicide and it summons the vampire as Eli appears coatless in the snow, asking Oskar what he is doing” (p. 4). Oskar’s connection with Eli, as a queer monster, becomes a way for Oskar to embrace his transgression and find a place of acceptance. Weinstock writes that “Eli is effectively Oskar’s empowered alter ego, the manifestation of his rage and pain and thirst

for revenge and affirmation” (p. 4). As his transgressive friend, Eli becomes a means for Oskar to embrace transgression and overcome his oppressors.

When Oskar and Eli first meet, Eli initially rejects Oskar saying, “Just so you know, we can’t be friends.” This implies that Eli is attempting to protect Oskar from their own transgressive queer monstrosity.⁵ Even Eli’s keeper, and older man named Håkan (Per Ragnar) beseeches Eli to keep away from Oskar when he notices their blooming friendship. Slowly, Oskar and Eli develop a fondness for each other, and Eli encourages Oskar to “hit back” when bullied by his classmates but agrees to defend him if he ever needs it. In this scene, Eli is not encouraging Oskar to be violently transgressive per se, but rather to stand up to his oppressors, offering up their own transgressive monstrosity as a means to an end.

As queer monster, Eli (like Oskar) is also quite outwardly androgynous, with long curly brown hair and a small wire-thin frame. They are 12 years of age “more or less” and have been the same age “for a long time.” They feed on the blood of their neighbours in the surrounding apartment complex with the help of Håkan, who kills them and then drains their blood for Eli to drink. They discuss their queer identity in several instances with Oskar, who acknowledges this and accepts it unashamedly. In one scene, Eli asks Oskar, “If I wasn’t a girl, would you like me anyway?” to which Oskar replies, “I suppose so. Why do you ask?” This exchange implies that Oskar is open to Eli’s queerness, rejecting the heteronormative standards of his environment. In a later scene, when Oskar asks Eli to “go steady,” Eli openly admits to Oskar, “I’m not a girl,” to which Oskar replies, “Oh...well, do you want to go steady or not?” This is the last time the two characters speak openly about Eli’s queerness. Instead, this becomes an open and established aspect of their relationship. They seemingly bond over their shared queer identities and make up for what the other lacks, an integration of two alter egos.

⁵ I refer to Eli here either by name or using gender neutral pronouns, i.e. “they”

However, the difference between the characters lies within Eli's monstrosity, a recognisable distinction of violent transgressive acts that distinguish the two. This is acknowledged in an exchange where Eli tells Oskar they are similar:

OSKAR: I don't kill people.

ELI: But you'd like to...if you could...to get revenge, right?

OSKAR: Yes.

ELI: I do it because I have to. Be me for a little while.

Ultimately, what prevents Oskar from transgressive behaviour is his lack of monstrosity, the natural order of his humanity or conscience that distinguishes between right and wrong. He would like to take revenge on his oppressive bullies by murdering them, but ultimately stops himself and never carries through. Eli kills in order to survive, their own monstrosity preventing them from recognising transgressive boundaries of society.

However, Eli's transgression as queer monster is not of their own choosing but because of their victimhood. Although never discussed in the film, the novel on which the film is based (written by John Ajvide Lindqvist) details how Eli was born a young peasant boy imprisoned by a vampire noble who castrated them and turned them into a vampire. The film deals with this much more ambiguously. In one particular scene of the film, Oskar watches through the door as Eli is changing clothes. Through a POV shot, we see that Eli has a brutal scar in place of their genitals. Oskar quickly turns away and there is never any specific elaboration. In the novel, Eli identifies as "Nothing. Not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl. Nothing" (Lindqvist, 2004, p. 165), but Lindqvist uses the pronouns "she" and "her" to describe Eli. When Oskar sees Eli naked, Lindqvist writes "between the legs she had...nothing. No slit, no penis. Just a smooth surface" (p. 340). The moment of flashback in the novel when Eli is castrated and made a vampire is seen through Oskar's eyes:

A red-hot iron forced into his groin, gliding up through his stomach, his chest corroded by a cylinder of fire that passes right through his body, and he screams, screams so his eyes are filled with tears and his body burns. [...] More time...Endless time. Imprisoned. The man bites. And drinks. Bites. And drinks. (p. 347)

Eli, therefore, is not transgressive by choice. Rather, they have been forced into becoming a transgressive queer monster through their castration and vampirism. Eli is essentially an innocent victim who now kills in order to survive. By distinguishing between how Eli is depicted in the film versus the novel, we begin to see the distinct ways queer monstrosity is constructed by different creators. The queer monster is not stagnant or invariable but malleable and ever-shifting. In the case of *Let the Right One In*, the transgressive friend representation does not signify transgression through the queer monster's influence, but rather symbolizes a transgression caused by victimhood and trauma.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed representations of the queer monster in horror films from 2000-2010 through three identifiable modes of transgressive monsters, transgressive victims, and transgressive friends. In a decade which saw the rise of queer representation in mainstream Hollywood cinema, where depictions of queer monstrosity faded into obscurity and transgressions of queer characters reigned, representations of the queer monster were very much active in less mainstream horror films of the same decade. These representations prove that queer monstrosity was very much an active part of horror cinema during this time, regardless of these more cleansed and sanitised mainstream depictions. Films which feature transgressive monsters involve openly transgressive characters breaking rules or boundaries and queer monsters who prey on victims. Films with transgressive victims feature queer victims of criminal acts, or queer victims at threat from queer monsters, while films with transgressive friends feature transgression through association as the main character develops a friendship with the monster. These identifiable modes of transgression in queer horror are not quintessential, but rather express trends which can be identified in queer horror films of this decade.

Due to the relative obscurity of some of these films, one might refer to them as “cult,” thus proving a continuance and survival of the queer monster well into the 21st century long after the cult of midnight movie depictions in the 1970s. However, queer monstrosity in this decade was not focused on rejecting assimilation and promoting transgression, but rather to represent queer protagonists (and antagonists) who, while still often queerly monstrous, are often always victims of an oppressive patriarchy that leads to or develops their monstrousness. In effect, these films present another aspect of how queer monstrosity prevails over time, even when queer representations are being used for profitability and market value in mainstream Hollywood filmmaking.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ENDURING QUEER MONSTER: 2010s

While representations of queer monstrosity in the first decade of the 21st century showed varying levels of acceptability surrounding transgression, as well as a significant rise in central queer protagonists in horror films, queer monsters in the 2010s become more nuanced, polished, and empathic. Films representing queer monstrosity in this decade reframe and critique considerations of the monstrous in contemporary society, while simultaneously showing the horrors encountered by queer protagonists in the modern world. In effect, these films represent queer persons as monstrous but, in many cases, show how the heteropatriarchal world in which they live constructs and treats them as monstrous.

This shift in depictions of queer monstrosity signals a changing landscape of queer representation in the modern world, with queer identity still retaining a level of transgression. Queerness is continually viewed as a threat to heteronormative culture and becomes the subject of a persistent social conservative ideology of queerness as threatening the heteronormative nuclear family unit. The films analysed in this chapter challenge these heteronormative ideologies by portraying the horror and stigma experienced by queer people in everyday life, both within queer culture and externally. Stuart Richards (2016) argues for a modern day “renaissance of New Queer Cinema,” (p. 215) a movement in the early 1990s (as discussed in Chapter Four) that broke cinematic conventions in representations of queer people. Although these newer films exist in a different film-making climate than the early 1990s, Richards believes the renaissance of New Queer Cinema is “defiant against mainstream queer representation and demonstrate[s] a resurgence of films that service a community that is in need of queer intellectual stimulation” (p. 215). The films analysed here

echo this New Queer Cinema renaissance, representing nuanced and well-developed representations of queer monstrosity.

Consistent with Richards' interpretation of this renaissance of New Queer Cinema in the 2010s, queer monstrosity is represented through this resurgence of defying mainstream queer representation. Films representing queer monstrosity in this decade challenge mainstream depictions of queerness by turning the tide on monstrosity, showing the struggles, horrors, and non-heteronormative phobias queer people endure in everyday life. These films do not simply focus on monstrous, bigoted heterosexuals working against queer people but also the horrors inflicted by queer people on each other.

The first case study, *Stranger by the Lake* (dir. Alain Guiraudie, 2013), represents queer monstrosity through sexual desire and threat, as the young gay male protagonist begins a sexual relationship with a dangerous man at a popular cruising destination. This film perfectly exemplifies the possible horrors, fears, and anxieties faced by gay men within anonymous cruising culture, as well as the threat generated by a sexual desire for the queer monster. The film is also exemplary of this renaissance of New Queer Cinema (Richards, 2016, p. 216), radically separating itself from dominant film form and prevailing film representations of LGBTQ+ characters.

The second case study, *Kill Your Darlings* (dir. John Krokidas, 2013), exemplifies a murderous queer monstrosity as it follows early members of the Beat Generation (Lucien Carr, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac) and Carr's real-life murder of long-time friend David Kammerer in the 1940s. The film focuses on the construction of false narrative around monstrous queer behaviours and understandings of queer desire as predatory.

The third and final case study, *Spiral* (dir. Kurtis David Harder, 2020), represents monstrosity through a cult of neighbours who destroy the lives of marginalised people that

move to their town. While the main characters are seen as monstrous because of their queer lifestyle, the veritable monsters of the film are the homophobic, racist cult that constructs them as monstrous. The main protagonist endures the trauma of a homophobic attack as a teenager, which he then uses as an asset for self-preservation in later life, allowing him to understand the true threat of his destructive, bigoted subjugators.

All three of these case studies represent a reframing of queer monstrosity in contemporary cinema, where the queer subjects are not solely transgressive but must endure the transgressive acts of others through violence, struggle, or persecution. By analysing these representations of queer monstrosity in the 2010s, one begins to witness shifting contemporary representations of queerness and the distinct ways in which the queer monster continues to exist in present day filmmaking.

Monstrous Queer Desire in *Stranger by the Lake*

Noted by Stuart Richards as an example of the New Queer Cinema renaissance, Alain Guiraudie's *Stranger by the Lake* (French: *L'Inconnu du lac*, 2013) is the story of Franck (Pierre Deladonchamps), a young gay man who is a regular visitor to a nude beach and its surrounding woods, both of which act as a gay cruising destination. He befriends a man named Henri (Patrick d'Assunção), who seeks solitude at the lake after breaking up with his girlfriend, and Michel (Christophe Paou), a handsome man to whom he is instantly attracted. One night, Franck witnesses Michel drowning another man in the lake. Although terrified by what he has witnessed, Franck is unable to resist his attraction to Michel and the two begin a sexual relationship. When the body of the drowned man is discovered, a police investigator (Jérôme Chappatte) begins questioning the men at the beach and grows increasingly suspicious of Michel and Franck. The film ends with Michel murdering Henri after naming

him as the killer and Franck standing in the darkened woods, longingly calling out Michel's name.

This film exemplifies the possible horrors, fears, and anxieties faced by gay men within anonymous cruising culture, as well as the threat generated by a sexual desire for the queer monster. There are several ways in which Guiraudie constructs these images of desire and sexual threat within the film. Firstly, the film is told through a choreographed, cyclical and quotidian narrative. Each diegetic passing day begins with a static shot of Franck's arrival at the lake (Figure 15) and concludes with his departure. There are no images of Franck's life outside the lake, or any discussion of his home life, and the film takes place entirely within the lakefront and its surrounding woods. The audience is only presented with the sexual aspect of Franck's existence and his interest in fulfilling his carnal desires.



Figure 15. Static shot of Franck's arrival at the lake. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

Franck engages with (and also rejects) the assorted rotations of men that visit the lakefront. He watches them, swims, cruises, and waits in the area until nightfall. There are images of different corporeal movements, gestures, and codified rhythms of cruising and sex, as Franck looks for his ideal sexual encounter. Men stare, stroke themselves, talk in hushed whispers,

touch and grab, all within the shifting environment of the lake. Guiraudie also uses various shots and diegetic sounds of the lake and its surrounding nature to choreograph and connect with the physical movements of Franck and the other men, what Saige Walton (2018) refers to as a “rhythmic ecology” (p. 244). This focus on the perception of movement, rhythm, and rotation signals the carnal regularity of sexual desire, the “gestural expressivity of the human body” (p. 244). Yet, these movements also signal an “embodied apprehension,” or personified feelings of dread, anxiety, and fear: “By interrupting the slow and the contemplative with irruptions of violence, *Stranger by the Lake* fosters the negative charge of our embodied apprehension and our thoughtful anticipation about events still to come” (p. 251). Franck’s carnal desire and his inability to distance himself from the dangerous Michel is embodied in the cyclical and repetitive nature of the film, which simultaneously represents the connection between sexual desire and violent threat.

Secondly, Guiraudie constructs this connection between desire and threat through images of the queer gaze. There are several instances in the film where this gaze is most evident. When Michel is first introduced at the lake, Franck is sat on the shore chatting to

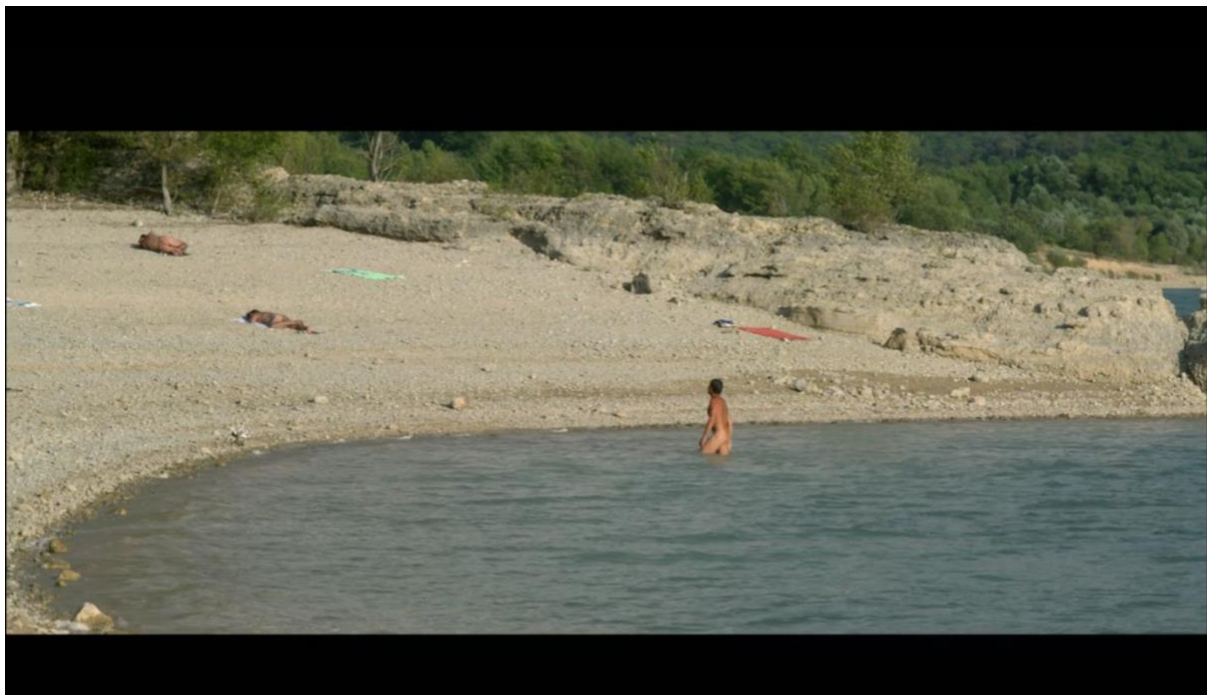


Figure 16. Wide shot of Michel’s first appearance. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

Henri, a straight man who comes to the lake for solitude. There is a wide shot (Figure 16) as Michel emerges naked from the lake and walks to shore. However, it is not Franck's point of view, given the absence of a shot/reverse shot. It is rather the camera that finds Michel, which then cuts back to Franck and Henri still speaking, looking directly at each other. A few moments later, Franck appears to notice Michel and we see the same wide shot, this time from Franck's point of view, and Michel becomes the object of Franck's gaze (Figure 17).

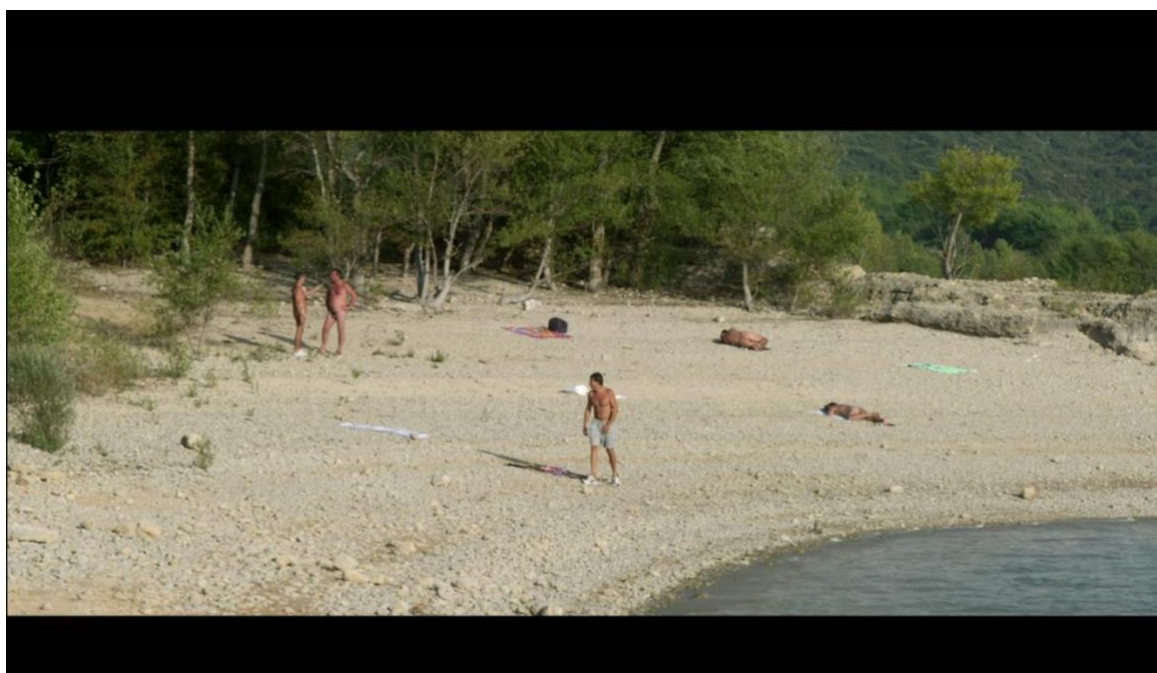


Figure 17. Franck's wide point of view of Michel. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

Franck leaves Henri and goes to cruise for Michel in the woods, only to find him performing anilingus on another man. Franck watches for a moment and the two exchange their first prolonged gaze before Michel continues his business and Franck walks away, disappointed.

In an interview with João Pedro Rodrigues (2013), Guiraudie discusses the altering of shots to reflect Franck's interest in (or desire for) Michel: "The idea was to enhance Michel. We had many shots where we saw him first from very far away. Franck started having more interest in him, then another shot where he came nearer" (p. 36). Guiraudie's statement is a response to Rodrigues's question about why Michel is found in the first instance by the camera and not by Franck. Although vague, it expresses Guiraudie's intention to construct

the shots in each scene to reflect Franck’s growing desire for Michel and as a reflection of his gaze.

On the second day at the lake, Franck once again sees Michel in a wide shot from afar and goes swimming into the lake to follow him. Michel has swum too far away, so Franck swims on his own until Michel swims into frame and the two finally cross paths. Michel turns back and waves at Franck, now reflected in an eye level point of view shot (Figure 18).

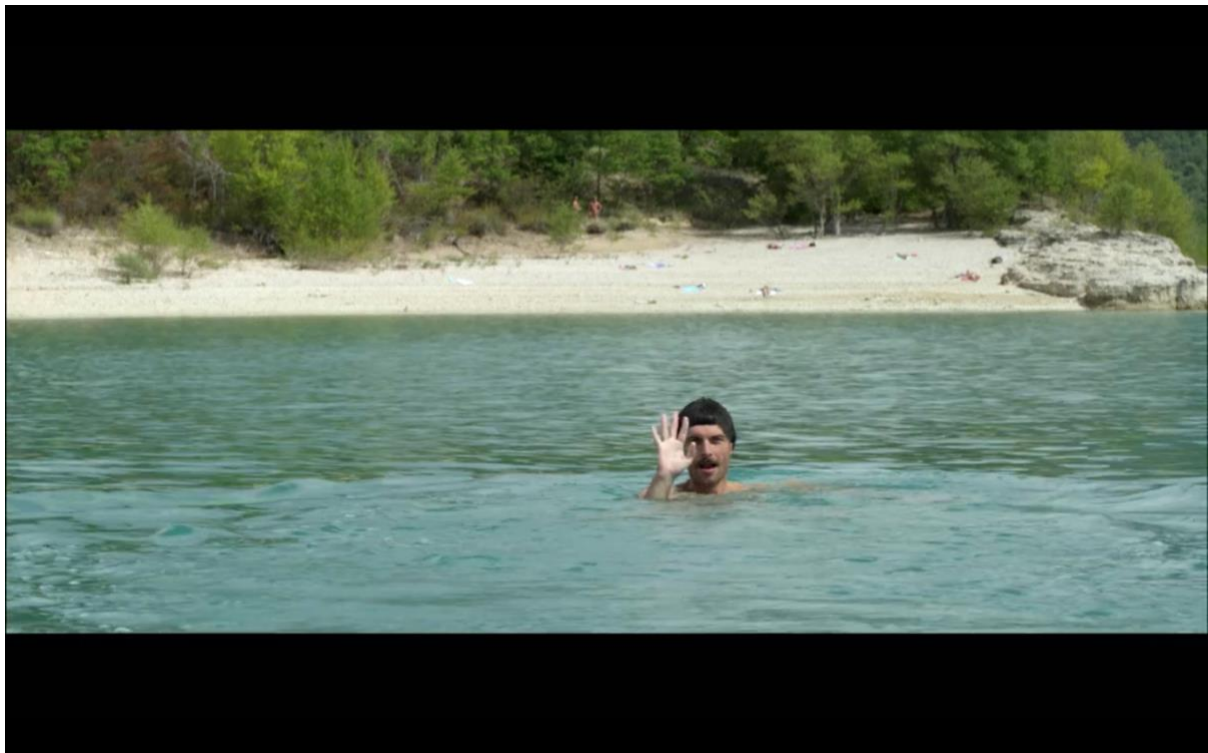


Figure 18. Franck's point of view, growing closer to Michel. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

Now that the two men are introduced, Guiraudie has changed the camera angle to reflect a further closeness or to show Franck’s enhanced desire for Michel. Guiraudie comments on the film’s presentation of looking (or gazing and staring): “I wanted to have the same point of view all of the time. There are some stares that are watchful at the beginning—we hunt the other, we flirt—but these stares quickly become oppressive” (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 35). These stares also come from the other men at the lake, the long, extended looks of desire or quick glances that signal interest or disinterest. Franck’s gaze, in particular, changes drastically

when he witnesses Michel drown another man late one night from afar, one that reflects both desire and threat.

The murder scene is shown through Franck's point of view in an extreme wide shot from above (Figure 19). He is walking through the woods late at night and begins to watch Michel and the other man from afar. At first, it appears as though the men are playing in the water, shoving each other's heads underneath. Yet, the scene suddenly turns violent when the two men begin to struggle in the water and the drowning man yells, "Stop!" and "Let go!" Franck watches Michel drown the man, but Guiraudie never presents a reverse shot of Franck's reaction. Rather, the shot remains completely stationary and the murder happens in real time. Michel drowns the man, swims to shore, and gets dressed. When Michel reaches



Figure 19. The drowning scene through Franck's point of view. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

shore, the audience is presented with a greater, more voyeuristic view of Michel in the aftermath of the murder through a dense brush of trees (Figure 20). As Michel leaves, we see one last shot of Franck cowering in the dark, attempting to obscure himself from view. By presenting the audience with this static, distanced point of view shot of the murder and the

subsequent voyeur shot of a naked Michel, Guiraudie seemingly connects Franck's fear and desire.



Figure 20. Voyeuristic view of Michel after the murder. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

Speaking on the film's representation of threat and desire, Guiraudie states that his intention was to explore the lengths someone will go to satisfy their sexual desire and to explore this through different moral questions:

Is it worth taking risks in order to satisfy your desire? Or is it better to stifle your desire in order to avoid danger? Is it better to avoid things that may, possibly, be harmful for you? And I think there's the question of, 'How does the idea of desire, and pursuing desire, hold up when we look at it in comparison with other, important moral questions?' (Osenlund, 2014, n.p.)

By posing these questions in regard to desire and danger, the risks attached to satisfying one's desire, Guiraudie is expressing a type of desire for transgression. Franck grows even closer to Michel after he witnesses the murder, finding himself attracted to the very transgression that also threatens him.

When Franck next sees Michel after the murder, Michel quite literally emerges from the lake in a wide shot and walks over to Franck sitting on the beach. He walks closer and closer to the camera from Franck's POV until he stands in a medium close-up (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Michel after the murder in a medium close-up. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

This is the nearest that Michel has been seen in a single frame so far. As the pair grow friendlier in their relationship, the camera begins to frame Michel in closer, tighter shots. Franck seems apprehensive upon seeing Michel and when Michel sits down, the two are framed in a similar medium close-up (Figure 22). Earlier in the film, the pair are only seen together in one frame upon introducing themselves and sit farther apart in a wider shot, expressing their distance. Now that Franck has discovered Michel's true nature, his desire for Michel and his transgression grows, and this growing desire is reflected in these tighter close-up and medium shots. In this case, Michel is framed in a slightly low-angle shot, which is often used to signify dominance or power.

After this, Michel performs fellatio on Franck and their sexual relationship begins. What follows throughout the film are explicit scenes of non-simulated sex in which the audience becomes the voyeur. Body doubles were used in the film when showing sex organs

as well as close-up shots of fellatio and orgasm, but Guiraudie claims the sex scenes were completely real (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 36). This heightened attention to portraying non-simulated sex speaks to Guiraudie's attempt at representing the raw power of desire.



Figure 22. Michel and Franck in a medium close-up. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

The sex scenes between Michel and Frank are not seen through either character's gaze, but rather through the eyes of the camera (Figure 23). Thus, the audience becomes the bearer of the scopophilic gaze through the active power of looking. Through these medium and medium close-up shots and lack of POV, the spectator can engage in the pleasure of looking but also be physically removed.

While Laura Mulvey's (1975) traditional analysis of the gaze argues that "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female," (p. 11) the same could also be said for a homosexual gaze through an appropriation of these heteronormative identifiers of male/female dominance and passivity. In terms of the gay male gaze, Lauren Rohrs (2019) discusses these patriarchal narrative film techniques as working in the same vein as the heterosexual gaze: "As Mulvey determines that patriarchal narrative film techniques are symbolic of sexual instinct, sexual identification, and desire, it can be argued that these same

tools, when presented from the point of view of a homosexual male character, are capable of identifying the character's sexual orientation, as well as the object of his desire" (p. 11).

However, given the lack of POV shots during the sex scenes, this point of view from the



Figure 23. Spectator's view of the sex scene. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

homosexual male character is removed and the audience takes on a phallogentric and scopophilic perspective of both active and passive. Both men are represented as objects of desire, with an "appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact," (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) and through this visual representation of their sexual organs and nude bodies "bear the burden of sexual objectification" (p. 12). Both men perform oral and anal sex on the other, switching positions between giver and receiver, and both are sexually objectified.

When asked about this representation in another interview with R. Kurt Osenlund, Guiraudie stated his wish for sex and sexual organs to be at the forefront of the film:

I wanted to show that they are also part of desire and great love. Traditionally, we've seen these great love stories in major motion pictures, but none of [those sexual elements] are seen. If we want to see the act of sex and the sexual organs, the only real place has been pornography. So my idea here was to reunite the two—the idea of the tremendous passion, and the great love story, together with the physical side of it. (Osenlund, 2014, n.p.)

Guiraudie's statements here specify an inclination to connect love and desire through a representation of sex. Yet, the raw visual power of the phallus in this scene is unmistakable, allowing for a portrayal of the connection between desire and transgression.

By not presenting any indication of the true nature of Michel's transgression, aside from his apparent desire to kill, Guiraudie presents Michel as an almost mythical figure, a dangerous Adonis of power and sex. In the scene where Franck sees Michel after the murder, Michel quite literally emerges from the lake itself (Figure 24), "a Greek God who's come out of the water" (Osenlund, 2014, n.p.). He is a strong object of stereotypical male beauty, muscular, older, and bronzed, resembling a moustachioed porn star of the 1970s.



Figure 24. Michel emerges from the lake. Stills from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

He seems to appear at moments when Franck is actively searching for someone to fulfil his sexual desires and disappears into the night when those desires are met. While Franck longs to pursue their relationship further outside the lake, Michel refuses and only wishes to have "great sex." In constructing Michel as this mythical Adonis-like figure who appears and disappears, emerges and submerges, Guiraudie provides a sense of the uncanny that

ultimately forms Michel as monstrous. His monstrosity is represented through his murderous transgression but also through this linkage between raw sexual power and death.

In one scene, after having sex, Michel asks Franck to go for a swim in the lake. Franck is hesitant at first, given his knowledge of Michel's transgressive side, but eventually joins him in the lake anyway. When Michel swims over to him and the two men kiss, the film switches to an extreme wide shot almost identical to the earlier murder scene (Figure 25). Franck is now in the exact same position as the murdered man. After this, the two have sex again. This scene further exemplifies the film's connection between sex and death, as well as Franck's attempt to transgress the boundaries of his own pleasure.



Figure 25. Franck and Michel in an identical shot of the drowning scene. Still from *Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie, 2013).

In her analysis of *Stranger by the Lake* and representations of sex acts in cinema, Linda Williams (2014) theorises that the sexual encounters between Franck and Michel seem to “thrive on a close connection between the *jouissance* of orgasm and the bigger *jouissance* of death. It is a death drive that connects Franck not only to his unknown stranger (*l'inconnu*) of the lake but equally to darker forces ‘beyond the pleasure principle’” (p. 18). As

previously discussed in Chapter Four, *jouissance*, in this case meaning “enjoyment” in terms of sexual pleasure and orgasm, is what Jacques Lacan (1992) described as “*jouissance* of transgression” (pp. 191-204). Lacan is referring to Sigmund Freud’s (1920/2003) theory of “beyond the pleasure principle,” the driving force of one’s unconscious that seeks immediate gratification of all needs, wants, and the most basic primitive urges (pp. 43-102). Lacan’s theory is that there is a *jouissance* which compels the subject to constantly attempt the transgress the prohibitions or boundaries imposed on his/her enjoyment, or to go beyond this pleasure principle. Transgressing this pleasure principle does not lead to more pleasure, but instead pain, since there is only so much pleasure the subject can bear.

In the case of *Stranger by the Lake*, Franck’s *jouissance* compels him to engage in the pleasure of orgasm while also engaging with the pleasure of death in his attraction to Michel’s transgression. At the end of the film, Michel murders Henri after he confronts him as the murderer, as well as the police inspector, and Franck hides from him in the darkened woods. Michel calls out for him, saying “Don’t leave me, Franck. I need you. We will spend the night together.” Franck still cannot resist his desire for Michel. He stands in the darkened woods, calling Michel’s name, his safety left ambiguous as the screen fades to black. While this film’s engagement with queer monstrosity involves desire, sexual threat, and the *jouissance* of transgression, there are other films where queer monstrosity is signalled through a representation of predatory queerness.

Predatory Queer Desire and Monstrosity in *Kill Your Darlings*

Very few literary groups are considered more socially transgressive than that of the Beat Generation in the 1950s. In the years following the Second World War, many writers and scholars began to question “the rampant materialism of society,” and the Beat Generation was a product of this (Rahn, 2011, n.p.). The Beats condemned the antisexualism of their

parents' generation, standing in opposition to the "taboos against frank discussion of sexuality," (Rahn, 2011, n.p.) among other social issues. The most well-known founding members of the Beat Generation include Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Lucien Carr, all of whom are represented in John Krokidas's 2013 film, *Kill Your Darlings*.

The plot of the film centres on the college days of these founding members, Ginsberg (Daniel Radcliffe), Burroughs (Ben Foster), Kerouac (Jack Huston), and Carr (Dane DeHaan) as well as Carr's killing of long-time friend, David Kammerer (Michael C. Hall). The film begins with Ginsberg attending Columbia University in 1944 where he soon meets Lucien Carr, a young colleague who is expressively anti-establishment. Carr stands on a table in the university library, reading out a quote by Henry Miller about "cock" before being quickly removed. Ginsberg discovers that Carr manages higher marks at Columbia thanks to his friend and professor, David Kammerer, who writes Carr's term papers but is also infatuated with him.

Carr is growing tired of Kammerer and his possessive, predatory manner: "A goddamn fruit who won't let me go. A queer." Having grown closer and more attracted to Carr, Ginsberg advises Carr to "get rid of" Kammerer. Carr and Kerouac decide to join the merchant marines and head to Paris, but Kammerer stops him and the two go for a walk. When Kammerer grabs Carr from behind to make an advance, Carr stabs him to death and throws his body in the river. Carr tasks Ginsberg with writing his deposition, to say he killed Kammerer because he was a sexual predator. Instead, Ginsberg writes a piece called "The Night in Question," which states that Kammerer asked Carr to kill him, devastated by his final rejection. Carr rejects the "false" narrative and is convicted of manslaughter rather than first degree murder, claiming the stabbing was an "honour slaying" for Kammerer trying to make homosexual advances.

The film represents a queer monstrosity through this construction of false narrative around monstrous queer behaviour and understandings of queer desire as predatory. Krokidas manages to develop this representation through a shifting narrative of ambiguity, using editing to enhance this ambiguity about real events and the truth about Kammerer as an apparent sexual predator. Using the stabbing as a focal point of the film exemplifies a refusal to oversimplify the predatory relationship between Carr and Kammerer and highlights the possible violence incited by sexual and emotional trauma. Also, given that each character is a writer, Krokidas also uses various imagery of writing and storytelling, as well as the decadence of the Beats' lifestyle, to convey fallacy and misconception.

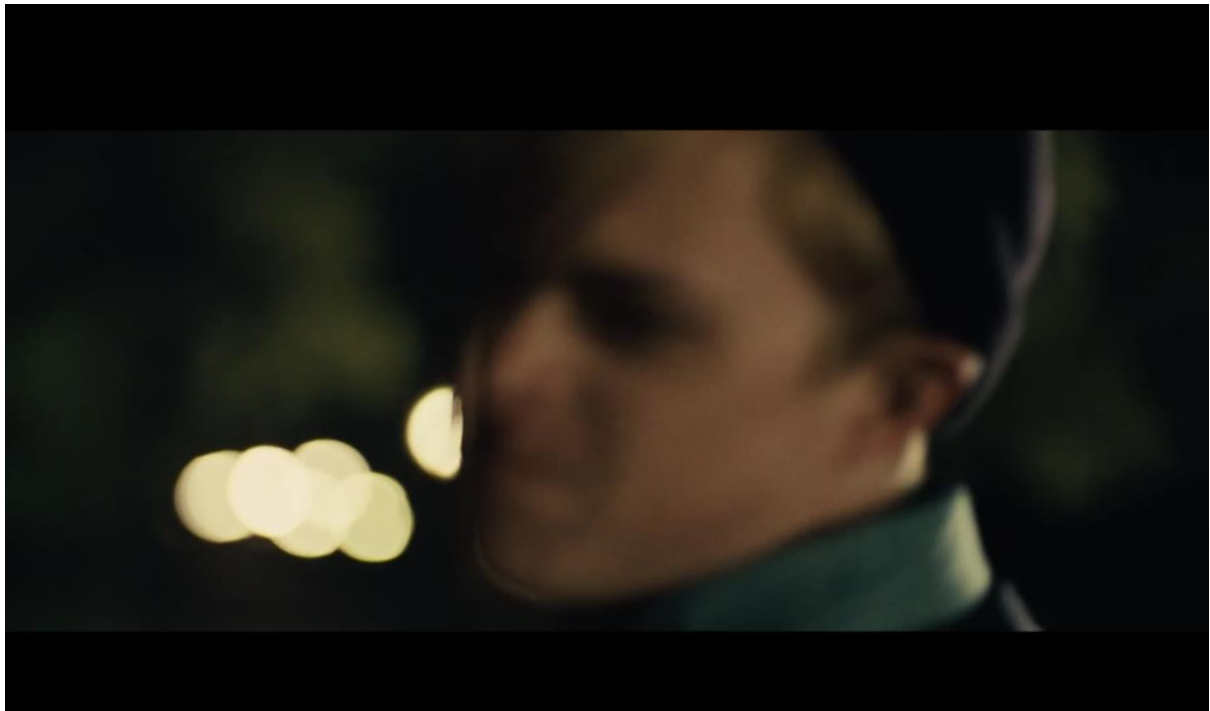


Figure 26. Carr stabs Kammerer. Still from *Kill Your Darlings* (Krokidas, 2013).

In the scene where the murder first happens, Krokidas uses cutaway shots to frame the simultaneous actions of each the characters. Ginsberg, devastated by Carr planning to leave for Paris, meets a man who resembles Carr at a bar and has sex with him. Simultaneously, Kerouac listens to a recording from his friend overseas, who has been injured fighting in the war and near death, and Burroughs is seen injecting himself with drugs. The camera cuts to Carr and Kammerer walking in Riverside Park. Kammerer grabs Carr from behind in an

attempt to make a plea for his affection and Carr stabs him with a knife (Figure 26). At the exact moment that Carr stabs Kammerer, the frame cuts away to a shot of Ginsberg being sexually penetrated (Figure 27). In using this cutaway sequence to display the murder, Krokidas is constructing a narrative between death, violence, and the act of penetration. There is an unmistakable link being drawn here between being sexually violated or penetrated, the image of the plunging knife connected to the thrusting phallus.



Figure 27. Ginsberg being penetrated. Still from *Kill Your Darlings* (Krokidas, 2013).

It is revealed during the film in various instances that Kammerer was a sexual predator. In one scene, Carr's mother (Kyra Sedgwick) tells Ginsberg that Kammerer had been following Carr for years as a youth, showing up at various places he was living. He was the first person to seduce Carr when he was a young teenager living in Chicago. "That man ruined my son," she states. "You're going to help me keep what's left of him." Ginsberg, who had developed an attraction to Carr, is tasked by Carr and his family to write Carr's deposition. Carr wishes to claim an "honor slaying" defence after he is arrested for killing

Kammerer. Kammerer is posited as the queer monster in this scenario, a sexual predator who deserved to be vanquished, but the film confounds this position through narrative ambiguity.

When Ginsberg searches for the definition of “honor slaying” in a criminal law book, it defines this as “relating to a lethal attack committed when the accused is defending himself against a known homosexual. If the accused is heterosexual, he shall be pardoned. But, if the accused is homosexual, the charge of murder in the first degree shall stand.” At first, Ginsberg is inclined to believe Carr’s interpretation of events, but Burroughs informs him that, after stabbing Kammerer, Carr tied him up, put stones in his pockets to weigh him down, then dragged him into the river to drown him. This type of action conveys pre-meditation, a desire for Kammerer to die rather than the alleged self-defence.

Ginsberg then writes his own interpretation of events, titling it “The Night in Question.” In Ginsberg’s account, Kammerer tells Carr to kill him after being devastated by his final rejection. He implies that Carr also loved Kammerer and that Kammerer once saved Carr’s life when he tried to commit suicide. In a voiceover, while the murder scene plays out again, Ginsberg says,

He loved you and the truth is, once, you loved him back. But this secret ate away at you, so in Chicago you tried to kill yourself. He rescued you. He saved your life. You needed him as much as he needed you. Some things, once you’ve loved them, become yours forever and if you try to let them go, they only circle back and return to you. They become part of who you are.

This voiceover as Ginsberg writes the account, juxtaposed with cutaway images of this interpretation of events, represents the film’s interpretation of narrative construction and the subjective reiteration of Carr’s trauma as a victim of Kammerer’s predatory behaviour. It also constructs a definition of queer shame and Carr’s inability to accept his own sexual desires. Krokidas uses a rewind effect at the beginning of this sequence: Carr’s shirt, the one he used to bind Kammerer, coming back on; Kammerer reversing from the ground after being stabbed; Kammerer following Carr during their confrontation in reverse; Kammerer placing

his hands back on Carr's shoulder. In Ginsberg's narrative, the story of this death and trauma are reversed, and the rewind technique used here reflects a reversal of Carr's narrative and the suggestive power of fiction.

In her analysis of this particular scene, Fiona Paton (2016) writes that Ginsberg's statements suggest "two important and controversial things about the Carr/Kammerer relationship: that Carr at one point felt love for Kammerer and that, in refusing to acknowledge that love, and hence his own sexuality, he came close to self-destruction" (p. 331). Yet, Carr is not represented as particularly remorseful when Ginsberg constructs this "false" narrative, but rather rejects it saying to Ginsberg, "You weren't even there. It's your truth—it's fiction." After the murder, Carr is portrayed as "sexually conflicted, manipulative, and morally unrepentant" (p. 331). With this depiction of false narrative and the ambiguity attached to the exact events of the murder, Krokidas refuses to oversimplify the predatory relationship between Carr and Kammerer and highlights the possible violence incited by sexual and emotional trauma.

These two different narratives highlight Carr's possible trauma from Kammerer's implied sexual abuse, but also focus on self-perception and the perception of others through this image of narrative storytelling. Ginsberg's interpretation of events is focused on engaging moral conscience, evoking a Beat Generation ideology of rejecting the patriarchal, normative boundaries of sexuality through purification and illumination. In his critique of the film, which also draws a connection between Ginsberg and his literary idol, Walt Whitman, Daniel Garrett (2015) comments on how Ginsberg constructs Carr's narrative through these Beat Generation principles:

Ginsberg is depicted as torn about how to respond to this brutal act, this strange assertion. The repudiation of moral conscience can lead to murder; and the failure to condemn moral offense leads to compromise of principle. It is not enough to resist the established life or culture, with its conventions of thought, manners, and habits: one has to replace that establishment with something at least equally significant. (p. 1)

Because the Beat Generation evoked a rejection of established societal conventions, Carr's narrative of homosexual "honour killing" seems to counteract the very belief system on sexual liberation he and the other Beats advocated. In noting the effects of the Beat Generation on literary and artistic voices, Ginsberg (2017) himself states that one of the effects, among others, is "general liberation: Sexual 'Revolution' or 'Liberation'" and "Gay Liberation" (p. 391). This emphasis on sexual liberation as one of the Beats' 'New Vision' ideals seems to counteract the very nature of Kammerer's murder as a homosexual honour killing. Why, then, is Carr so ashamed by telling the truth about his sexuality and his emotional connection to Kammerer? Garrett (2015) interprets Carr as a "broken angel," one who promises change and liberation from established codes of conduct yet becomes deterred from this through his own shameful self-perception:

Lucien embodies an ideal and speaks of ideals, promising transformation: he is a broken angel. Broken or wounded men, Lucien's friends, do not see how broken Lucien is; and that romantic blindness is dangerous. Self-perception must take in more than one's own good intentions--it must take in one's actions, both the accomplishments and the mistakes (p. 1).

In effect, Carr constructs his own narrative of events based on his own perception. While he advocates for liberation from patriarchal ideals, the possible trauma he has experienced at Kammerer's hands, and the shame of his own non-heteronormative sexuality, creates a transgressive monstrosity that ultimately leads to a disremembering of these principles.

Bill Morgan (2006), in his biography of Allen Ginsberg, discusses the importance influence of Kammerer's murder on the Beats' future concepts and writings: "It was a catalyst for a complete change in their way of seeing and reacting to the world. No one could understand exactly what had gone wrong with their 'New Vision' theories, which should have made everyone more tolerant of people like Kammerer" (p. 52). Kammerer's murder acting as an inspiration for the Beats' future ideologies and written work addresses the importance of self-perception in narrative texts and highlights the possible transgression

incited by sexual and emotional trauma. This issue of trauma is explored somewhat differently in more recent films, where the queer subject uses their trauma as a means of survival to vanquish their oppressors.

***Spiral* and the Monstrous Neighbour in Suburbia**

Released by the horror streaming platform Shudder, *Spiral* (Kurtis David Harder, 2020) is the story of Malik (Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman) and Aaron (Ari Cohen), a gay couple in the 1990s who move to a small town to enjoy a better quality of life and raise their teenage daughter, Kayla (Jennifer Laporte). Malik begins to notice strange behaviour from his neighbours and witnesses their cult-like gatherings as they stand in a circle and perform a strange ritual (Figure 28).

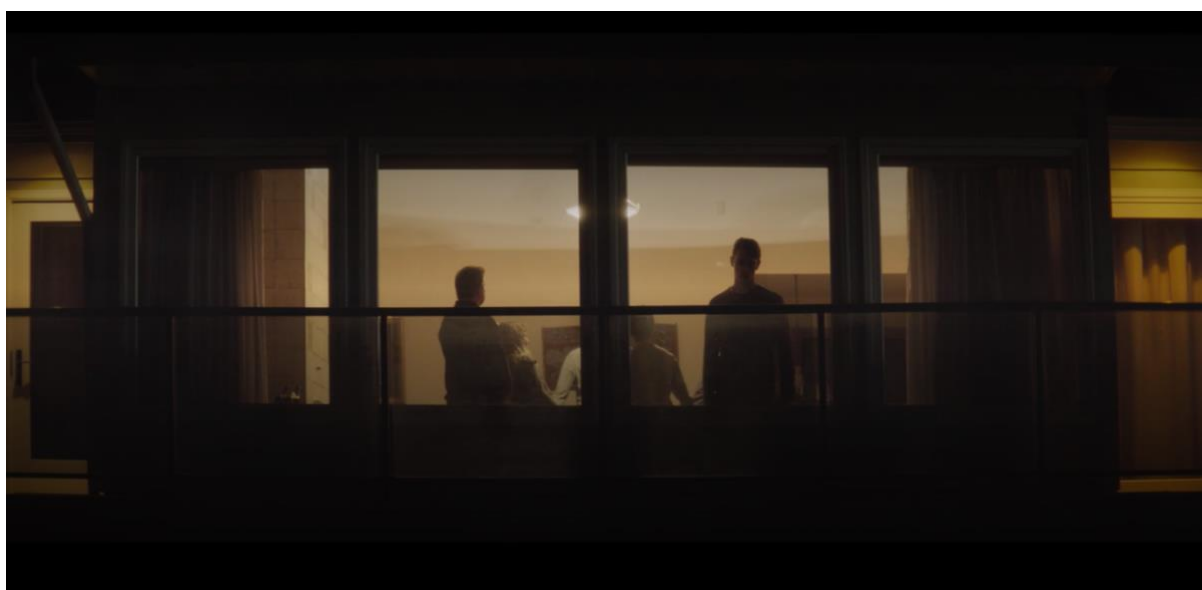


Figure 28. Malik's point of view as neighbours perform a ritual. Still from *Spiral* (Harder, 2020).

He sees an older man stalking their home and appearing at odd hours. After the man, Mr Reinhart (Paul McGaffey), hands Malik a slip of paper with a series of hidden numbers, Malik goes to the local library for research. He discovers that ten years previously a lesbian couple was killed in an apparent murder/suicide after moving to the same small town. Upon learning this, Malik realises their lives could be at risk and works to protect his family, while

simultaneously attempting to control his own mental health. It is ultimately revealed that the neighbours are in fact a cult, one deeply rooted in ancestral lineage that targets marginalised people who move into the neighbourhood.

The film speaks to the horror experienced by queer people through homophobia and the apparent threat of queerness to the heteronormative nuclear family unit, as well as the trauma of gay bashing. It becomes apparent from the opening scene that Malik endured the trauma of a gay assault as a young teenager. In a flashback to 1983, Malik is kissing his boyfriend in a parked car when they are attacked by a group of men who beat his boyfriend with a baseball bat. There are flashbacks to this attack throughout the film, while Malik takes medication and uses exercise to combat the effects of his trauma. This traumatic attack not only enhances and heightens Malik's paranoia against his neighbours but also forces him into a struggle for assimilation. He becomes obsessed with uncovering the true nature of the neighbourhood cult, even at the price of his own sanity.

Two of these neighbours, Marshal (Lochlyn Munro) and Tiffany (Chandra West), are seemingly warm and inviting to the new gay couple, even asking them to their house for dinner and feigning friendship. They tell Malik and Aaron that they are accepting of homosexuality. Tiffany states, "I don't care what anybody says. It doesn't matter if you're a single mother or a married couple like this or even...you know, love is all that matters." Malik is immediately defensive, his paranoia and suspicion growing against them: "I mean, that's a nice thought and everything, but I'm not sure most people would actually agree with that." Aaron and Kayla are seemingly oblivious to the neighbours' behaviours, believing that Malik is on a downward spiral because of his medication. Malik reverts an earlier statement to Kayla about being "loud and proud," instead advocating for her discretion in a shaky emotional voice:

People see your Dad and I as being different from them and different scares people [...] Right now, Kayla, in this town and in this country, it is *not* safe for people that

stand out, okay? You need to forget everything that I said about being loud and proud. Do not draw attention to yourself, don't speak out, don't speak up, it is *not* safe.

Malik's statement here reflects his need (and the desire for his family) to assimilate into the heteronormative environment that oppresses them as a means of survival. While the start of the film shows Malik advocating for his daughter to be proud of her family's non-heteronormative dynamic, the homophobic threat of his local community has forced him into an Othered position. He is no longer considered a member of this community but a transgressive queer monster that defies the rules and boundaries of heteronormative patriarchy.

In relation to this, there is a recurring theme in this film of religious transgression, or Christian belief in the negative effects of sin and temptation. Malik is ghost-writing a book about a man named Dr Charles Darrylson (David LeReaney) who, in videos Malik watches while doing research, discusses the importance of the "traditional family unit." Darrylson ran a clinic that offered "a path back towards righteousness, away from sin and temptation." After doing more research, Malik discovers that Darrylson's clinic offered gay conversion therapy for young men and women who were "suffering inside." Although no direct connection is established between Darrylson and the neighbourhood cult, this emphasis Darrylson makes on the traditional family unit is seemingly reflective of Malik's own trauma and his struggle for self-preservation.

On the question of ethics behind gay conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as "reparative therapy" or "sexual reorientation therapy," Cramer et al. (2008) define this type of therapy as "based on the conceptual rationale that sexual orientation is a conscious choice and, in rarer instances, a pathology or sin" (p. 94). The types of methods used in conversion therapy include "masturbatory reconditioning and aversion therapy," as well as abstinence training and "gender lessons" (p. 95), where one is conditioned to perform heteronormative

gender roles. Gay conversion therapy is thought to be an incredibly damaging psychological practice, one used to modify transgressive or “problematic” queer behaviour. Adolfo Aranjuez (2019), in his analysis of gay conversion therapy in film representation, writes: “Because of this distinction it maintains between deed and doer, gay conversion therapy – unsettlingly mirroring legitimate cognitive behavioural-therapy methodology – allocates significant time to ascertaining and reconfiguring underlying traumas and thought patterns so as to modify ‘problematic’ behaviour” (p. 56). While the gay conversion therapy highlighted in the film does not correlate directly to the neighbourhood cult, it is seemingly reflected in the cult’s treatment of queer people as monstrous.

In a scene near the end of the film, Marshal comes to find Malik in jail after Malik tries to shoot him dead. Marshal tells him that he is “Someone who has been around a very long time,” someone who exceeds the boundaries of death and mortality. Marshal and the others plan to construct a story about Malik escaping from jail with drugs in his system, killing Aaron and Kayla and then committing suicide. He tells him, “Not one soul will question it because of who you are,” meaning homosexual. Simultaneously, the cult of neighbours has entered their home, shrouded in hoods. Aaron searches for Kayla and finds her lying in her bed, dead and disembowelled, being eaten by Tyler (her boyfriend and one of the cult members). The cult has effectively constructed Malik into a queer monster as a way of destroying him and his non-heteronormative family unit, using him and his family as a sacrifice for their own immortality.

This destruction of innocent victims in a suburban setting is no stranger to horror cinema. Set within the suburbs of Alberta, Canada, the film provides an example of a type of “Suburban Gothic,” which Bernice Murphy (2009) defines as a sub-genre that plays upon “the lingering suspicion that even the most ordinary-looking neighbourhood, or house, or family, has something to hide, and that no matter how calm and settled a place looks, it is

only ever a moment away from dramatic (and generally sinister) incident” (p. 2). Rather than external threat, the horror in *Suburban Gothic* features “more danger from the people in the house next door, or one’s own family” (p. 2). The film is representative of this Suburban Gothic and uses the characteristics of this subgenre to classify the horror the main characters experience. Malik and Aaron move to the town to enjoy a better quality of life, away from the possible homophobia of contemporary society in a city environment. On the exterior, their lives appear normal and the neighbours seem accepting of gay lifestyles. The horror, however, seems inescapable from the moment they settle into their home. Effectively, because of their queerness, they are classified as monstrous from the very beginning and are unable to assimilate into their environment.

Ultimately, Malik gets the last word in this story. Ten years have passed and a Sikh family is seen moving into Malik and Aaron’s old home. They drive by Marshal, Tiffany, and Tyler who politely wave. There is a voiceover from Malik, interposed with him creating a computer document with information about the cult and burning it to a CD-ROM:

They choose someone vulnerable and they vilify them. They do this so no one bats an eye. Everything I know about this town and what the people here have been doing is in this document. I’m making this for you, so that you have a chance. I don’t know who will find this or what kind of person you are, but my hope is that you might be the one to finally break this cycle. Now that I’ve told you this, what you do with this information is up to you. Just remember—hope is never silent.

While this voiceover is happening, the young daughter of the family goes to the attic to investigate a mysterious stain in the ceiling and finds the CD-ROM Malik has left there. This final sequence reveals more of the cult’s true impetus: they do not simply target queer people, but any marginalised groups that move onto the land. Therefore, this film is ultimately reflective of the veritable nature of monstrosity in the modern world, where the true definition of monstrous behaviour is reflected in the oppression of others.

Conclusion

This chapter argued for the enduring presence of the queer monster in films from 2010 to present day. These films represent the horrors and stigmas encountered by queer protagonists in the modern world, both within and outside of their own communities. The first case study, *Stranger by the Lake*, exemplifies the possible horrors, fears, and anxieties faced by gay men within anonymous cruising culture, as well as the threat generated by a sexual desire for the queer monster. Alain Guiraudie constructs these images of desire and sexual threat through various shot techniques and representations of a queer gaze that views both the threat of violence and desire simultaneously. *Kill Your Darlings* represents a queer monstrosity through a construction of false narrative around monstrous queer behaviour and understandings of queer desire as predatory. Krokidas manages to develop this representation through a shifting narrative of ambiguity, using editing to enhance this ambiguity about real events and the truth about Kammerer as an apparent sexual predator. *Spiral* represents monstrosity through a cult of neighbours who destroy the lives of marginalised people that move to their town. While the main characters are seen as monstrous because of their queer lifestyle, the veritable monsters of the film are the homophobic, racist cult that constructs them as monstrous.

While cult films of past decades exemplified queer monstrosity in a myriad of ways, these more recent queer films represent a shifting representation of this monstrosity in contemporary times. Queer monsters are no longer represented as deviants ready to transgress and murder their way through heteronormative society. Rather, these monsters echo the struggles and stigmas of the marginalised, showing how the heteropatriarchal world in which they live considers them monstrous and positions them as Others.

CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE OF QUEER MONSTROSITY

The main intention of this thesis was to articulate the presence of the queer monster in cult cinema and to analyse how queer monstrosity endures, shifts, and becomes more multi-dimensional through representations of transgression in films from the 1970s to the present day. This conclusion will act not only as a means to reiterate the key arguments presented, but also to provide a speculative analysis of the future of queer monstrosity in the digital age, as well as an assessment of how cult cinema and queer monstrosity have changed from a contemporary perspective. Given that streaming services and online viewing technology are now commonplace, images of queer monstrosity in cult films are more accessible than ever before. While earlier representations of queer monstrosity thrived in underground spaces through word of mouth, repeated viewings, and audience engagement, queer monsters in the new millennium thrive and prosper through online media, as fans and creators continue to circulate and distribute moving images of queer monsters in these on-screen platforms. Simultaneously, the contemporary digital age and the accessibility of cult materials online have changed the landscape of cult in present day, effectively democratising any idea of cult subculture and blurring any lines between cult and mainstream.

To reiterate, the queer monster acts most often as an image of transgression and through these various images of transgression in cult cinema, becomes an embodiment of how queerness disconnects and separates from heteropatriarchal culture. Queer monstrosity is a means to restructure representations of queer identity. When seen in cinema, queer monstrosity is embodied in the physical form of the queer monster. The physical form of the queer monster is the corporeal depiction of that which is rejected by heteronormative patriarchy, the material form and substance—the monstrosity personified on film. Queer

monsters are often grotesque, embracing the stigma of queerness throughout history as abnormal; they are transgressive because they violate the rules and boundaries of heteropatriarchal society. In cult cinema, where grotesquerie and transgression often reside, queer monstrosity finds a haven, or a place of embodiment, even with the advent of digital technology and online viewing. As cult cinema and its reception change and develop over time, so does the queer monster, an ever-present and malleable force.

Summary of Analysis

Given the diversity and adaptability of the queer monster, and before suggesting new and unresolved areas of enquiry for future investigation, it is essential to briefly recapitulate the key analyses of this thesis. Chapter One analysed the queer monster in cult cinema of the 1970s. Through midnight movie presentations, many of the films being screened (which would later become cult classics) contained elements of the grotesque, transgression, and the abject. With John Waters's *Pink Flamingos* (1972), the grotesque is observed through representations of grotesque excess, caricature and transgression in the actions of the characters and the image of the feminine body of the main actor and queer monster, Divine. The grotesque exaggeration of Divine allows for the archetypal normality of the female body to be disengaged through the viewer's perspective. Essentially, the viewer is not seeing an image of femininity that has been formulated by heteropatriarchal culture, but a femininity developed through the grotesque that ridicules a mainstream, bourgeois idea of the feminine.

Aside from exaggeration, there is also the element of *excess* as grotesque that actually signifies transgression. Excess is "to overflow, to invade, [...] to exceed limits" (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 74), and when something is faced with excess, or something larger than itself, "it expands outward" (p. 75). Transgression involves going against an established code of conduct or to go beyond "the bounds of an aesthetic, ethical or established form of

behaviour” (p. 66). It also reinforces the borders of what is considered transgressive in general. In other words, what is deemed transgressive is only “transgressive” because rules and “conventional” behaviours have been formed against it. According to Chris Jenks (2003), transgression is a conduct which “breaks rules or exceeds boundaries” (p. 3). However, he is also quick to note that transgressive behaviour does not deny these boundaries, “rather it exceeds them and thus completes them” (p. 7). Transgression is not disorder, but instead reminds us of “the necessity of order.” In a way, *Pink Flamingos* contains such elements of transgression to an extent that we are reminded of order and boundaries because it purposefully surpasses them and allows us to recognise them.

In a similar way to *Pink Flamingos*, *Grey Gardens* has been appropriated by a queer audience through these recognisable elements of the non-normative or transgressive. However, with appropriation comes this idea of queer identification or “disidentification,” the ways in which the women are interpellated into a subject position, trapped within a cultural ideology that sometimes frames them as Others. The film and its main subjects (the Beales) allow the queer audience to appropriate through discernible queer acts of identification. These acts of identification involve recognition on the part of the queer audience of performances, or representations, that might relate to queer identity. Thus, while Little Edie works as a queer identifier, the queer audience uses her to disidentify with the dominant public sphere, a way of “recycling and rethinking encoded meanings” of queer (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31). The queer audience in particular might identify with Little Edie through emotional affinity, relating to aspects of her identity that are potentially queer, or feeling a sense of involvement in her life through the film’s direct cinema technique. Even more, the queer audience could self-identify with Little Edie through her queer acts of identification, placing themselves in her position.

Images of the grotesque and transgressive in this film are represented through images of Little Edie and Big Edie and how their bodies and actions are exemplified on camera.

According to Edwards and Grauland (2013), if the body of a woman is the object of a male gaze, and the perfect female body is a product of this gaze and its dynamics of power, then the display of a diverse body (with different dimensions, shapes and sizes) has the power to “subvert patriarchal gender codes related to corporeality” (p. 32). With grotesque bodies, the patriarchal, objectifying gaze cannot absorb the body that it seeks to contain, but the grotesque body resists the absorption (p. 32). With the exposure of Big Edie’s “sagging flesh,” we see a body that has the diverse abilities of subverting patriarchal normative ideas of corporeal structure.

In *Rocky Horror*, the grotesque is represented through excess and the ways in which characters exhibit exaggeration and transgression through aesthetic appearance and behaviour, particularly with the queer monster Dr. Frank-N-Furter, as well as his monstrous creation, Rocky, and ex-lover, Eddie. Superficially, Rocky has been created by Frank as the epitome of the masculine form, yet his character acts as a signifier (and parody) for Frankenstein’s monster, assembled from a variety of body parts from other humans. His body, albeit muscular with Frank’s “seal of approval,” is grotesque in its own creation, “a horrific contrast between the beautiful and the vile” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 53). In a sense, the physical beauty of Rocky is made monstrous by its hybridity and works against its intended purpose. In contrast, although not a constructed monster of parts, Eddie represents the monstrous body more explicitly in physical form. With a larger frame and visible scarring from the brain removal, he stands as physical monstrosity but also as monstrous in his abnormal, somewhat deviant behaviour, which serves to emphasise or exaggerate monstrosity. However, this transgression through deviance is not only represented by Eddie, but also by Frank-N-Furter himself through exaggeration, extravagance, and excess.

The exaggeration here is seen in Frank’s ambiguous gender representation—the bustier, garter belts, and fishnet stockings with which he adorns his body exaggerate

femininity through extravagance, but glimpses of a very apparent crotch bulge exaggerate masculinity in the same vein. I suggested that Frank-N-Furter, through the exaggeration of both masculine and feminine, is simultaneously “masquerading” and “parading” as both sexes as a form of grotesque extravagance, but also as a form of transgression. While Frank’s excess and extravagance in terms of gender do not “break rules” as such, they undoubtedly exceed the boundaries that society has placed against gender representation.

On the surface, the film stands as a musical comedy horror parody of early science fiction and B-horror movies with an exaggeratedly camp aesthetic. However, elements of abject, grotesque and transgressive behaviour in the film are still blatant beneath its upbeat and playful construction, and many times become harmonious with its parodic framework. The features of grotesque in the film are represented, in part, through the grotesque in the form of monstrosity (or the monstrous grotesque), the grotesque through excess and the queerly grotesque. These representations allow for divisions in the aesthetics of the grotesque and highlight the film’s elements of caricature and exaggeration, those which “exceed the limits of harmony” and transgress the “aesthetic principles of realism” (Edwards & Grauland, 2013, p. 67).

Chapter Two analysed the queer monster and the presence of queer monstrosity in horror films, a place where “normality is threatened by the monster” (Wood, 2018, p. 83). As a subcategory of the horror genre, cult horror would be considered a subdivision (subgenre) of horror, falling into a similar field with the slasher, supernatural or found footage subgenres, with its own subject matter, style, formula and iconography. In the horror film genre in general, monsters are considered “threats to the cultural order” (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011, p. 194), and the protagonist struggles throughout the film to destroy the monster. Cult horror films “add subversions, ambiguities, and contradictions so that it becomes unclear whether or not restoration of the order is a good thing, or the ends justify the means” (p. 195).

In other words, different societal taboos in cult horror films (such as cannibalism, necrophilia, graphic splatter violence, rape and sexual assault), lead to an environment where transgression and monstrosity continue to thrive. Order is not restored and the monster continues being monstrous.

Thematically, horror films depict three core interrelated variables, as chiefly defined by Robin Wood (1986): normality (defined by the heterosexual patriarchy), the monster (depicted as a representation of the Other), and the relationship between the two (pp. 73-74). The monsters themselves, according to Harry Benshoff (1997), can often be considered “as racial, ethnic, and/or political/ideological Others, while more frequently they are constructed primarily as sexual Others (women, bisexuals, and homosexuals)” (p. 4). These monsters (and their stories) frequently represent the “eruption” of queer sexuality into the heterosexual environment and through this eruption threaten the normality of the bourgeois patriarchy.

The 1980s saw the rise of demonization (or monsterization) of queer people at the beginning and height of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The widely held belief that HIV/AIDS was a disease that primarily affected queer people developed into a moral panic and hysteria that led to increased Othering of the queer community. This Othering, combined with the panic of Satanic Ritual Abuse, also known as Satanic Panic (Janisse & Corupe, 2015, p. 16), led to an environment of fear over transgressive behaviour in society at large. Queer monstrosity in cult horror films of the 1980s potentially developed out of this societal rhetoric around gay disease and the threat of this rhetoric to the sustainability and preservation of queer identity. By instilling fear in the cinematic audience through violence towards heterosexual cisgender victims, queer monstrosity was able to rearticulate and restructure representations of the queer subject.

The cult horror films chosen for this analysis all depicted a particular representation of queer monstrosity, either grotesque, transgressive, or a combination of both. The first,

which depicts grotesque representation, is *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, the 1985 follow-up to Wes Craven's popular and critically successful slasher film (1984). I argued how queer monstrosity is embodied in Jesse (the main character of the film) as a result of his oppression by Freddy Krueger (the film's antagonist), who represents the heteropatriarchal oppressor. Jesse, depicted in the film as having repressed bisexual desire, struggles against Krueger wanting to invade his body (or penetrate him), which causes representations from Jesse in different forms of the grotesque—namely, the uncanny grotesque and the bodily grotesque. As oppressor, Krueger inflicts the grotesque upon Jesse through this bodily invasion because Krueger himself is grotesque. When he penetrates Jesse's body, Jesse becomes forcibly grotesque, but ultimately fails to resist this grotesque representation in a struggle against his oppressor.

The second case study, which depicts transgressive representation, is Robert Hiltzik's slasher film *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) about a group of teenagers and their counsellors being killed off at a summer camp. In the last few moments of the film, it is revealed that shy character Angela is the killer and that she is assigned male at birth, having been raised by her aunt as female. She is discovered on the beach by two camp counsellors covered in blood, with full male genitalia, making guttural, animalistic noises. This shock ending has contributed significantly to the cult appeal of this film, yet the transgressive acts Angela carries out on those who oppress her (namely her fellow campers) and the way in which Angela's true gender is revealed, speak to an apparent horror surrounding transgender identity and a reinforcement of cisnormative ideology during this period of the 1980s.

Linda Miller (2017) analyses *Sleepaway Camp* as a “transgender horror film” created by a cisgender author for a cisgender audience, which ultimately leads to the film “being constructed narratively and visually in line with a cisnormative ideology” (p. 40). The image of the transgender subject is often the object of fear in these films, the one killing or causing

the violence, “knife raised high, ready to plunge it into the unsuspecting body of a victim” (p. 40). Transgender horror films with a similar image, according to Miller, include Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) and Brian De Palma’s *Dressed to Kill* (1980).

The construction of the image of the transgender subject in horror films that Miller analyses here is also one of queer monstrosity, that which develops from homophobic and heteronormative ideology and leads to a reconstruction of queer representation. Angela is the queer monster of this film who commits transgressive acts of violence on her oppressors (the fellow campers and counsellors) as a means of catharsis to overcome her oppression. She is victimised by these oppressors, but effectively vanquishes this victimisation by executing the oppressors who victimise her most.

Chapter Three traced queer millennial cult audiences within cult cinema participation and queer monstrosity through three identifiable modes: *the use of nostalgia, queer cult communities, and cult immersion*. Through nostalgia, the audience appropriates films, which were mainstream successes in their initial release, into cult status. The type of cult ignited around nostalgia is indicative of the millennial coming-of-age audience now engaging with cult cinema of the past, using nostalgic films from childhood to form a community of like-minded enthusiasts in relation to queer monstrosity. Mathijs and Mendik (2008), in relation to nostalgia, observe that cult cinema receptions “are drenched with a nostalgic yearning for an idealized past, a sense of belonging that can only be located outside of present reality” (p. 18). They also observe that this nostalgia is the result of two factors: “the emotional impression of nostalgia that is part of a film’s reception, and nostalgia as a component of the film’s story” (p. 184).

Nostalgia provides a means in which queer millennial audiences can embrace these “idealized” past encounters with particular films, and in a similar way, engage with nostalgic images of queer monstrosity. For the queer community, this inclination to construct or create

a past nostalgia could be the result of two factors: (1) Negative or adverse sensitivities towards the genuine/authentic past, which would negate nostalgia and any evocation of nostalgic affective response, and (2) A desire to disengage with heteronormative culture and its nostalgic imagery of the past ('Your nostalgia is not my nostalgia.'). Firstly, a negative response to past experience, either because of discrimination, abuse, homophobia, or even a lack of acceptance in society, might lead to a disregard for this past in creating any nostalgic narrative. A solution would be to construct new nostalgic interpretations of one's history that evoke a more preferred affective response to that past. In a way, queer audiences use nostalgia as a means of confronting, and in a sense deconstructing, the past.

Queer cult communities, those created and those expanded from pre-existing cult communities, can be classified as cultist or enthusiast. Their existence often works informally with a specialised and increased immersion (thus being cultist) but can also work more formally around specialised activity (enthusiast). However, queer cult communities often counteract these particular categories of 'fan,' 'cultist,' and 'enthusiast' by engaging in distinct, performative behaviours that diverge from the norm. I argued for two subcategories of queer cult audiences that expand on these categories: (1) the queer subcultist who, while following the traditional practices of a cultist, practices a particular type of engagement that specialises in specific queer appropriation of cult film texts, and (2) the queer enthusiast, who embraces these dominant forms of social activity with a very specialised media engagement and tight organisation, practicing this specialised media engagement around a specific body of work, namely films that strictly or closely represent queer monstrosity.

I analysed Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls* (1995) within the context of these queer cult communities, discussing the ways in which the film's cult audience engages with the film during screenings and how this film closely reflects different aspects of queer monstrosity. The reason for the queer appropriation of *Showgirls* stems from an excessive, hyperbolic, and

performative representation of ‘camp’, the use of sexuality as transactional, and a reinvention of the heteronormative self, all of which seem to resonate significantly with the queer audience. Throughout the film, we are witness to the main character Nomi’s naïveté and her exaggerated, hyperbolic actions. In several scenes, she mispronounces fashion designer Versace as “VER-SAYSE,” which has become a commonly quoted line in participation screenings. Such behaviour is not intentionally camp but becomes camp through its failed attempt at the serious.

As a representation of the queer monster, Nomi Malone frequently uses unrepressed sexuality to get what she wants, or as an attempt to further her career. There is a stigma around queer sexuality in society, a social pressure to conform to heteronormative rules of normality. Rejecting these rules is a key part of queer liberation. Hence, Nomi Malone’s strong uninhibited sexuality might cause her to become a sort of role model for queer identity. Hunter (2016) defends the film’s depiction of sexuality as almost non-sexual: “The emotional implications of sex and the subtleties of sexual pleasure are unimportant; what matters is sex as performance, sex as work, sex as commodity and commercial transaction. Instead of adventurous, intimate explorations of ‘sexuality,’ the film distributes quantities of choreographed flesh, nude ‘stuff,’ across the widescreen” (n.p.). The film has none of the characteristics of what one might classify as soft-core porn, or sex for the sake of pleasure. Rather, sex is being depicted as work, or as a tool for transaction. Nomi uses sex to her advantage and for career opportunity, which could translate into a rejection of more heteronormative conceptions of sexuality as a means of pleasure or reproduction.

Finally, I argued that forms of immersion for the queer cult audience take place through *performance*, or by engaging with specific modes of performance surrounding queer monstrosity. Performance modes, as they exist in cult cinema fandom, can be defined as types of performative actions from an audience in a cult cinema screening that characterise

specific methods of subcultural, gender and queer identification. These performance modes take on several forms depending on the action involved and the person performing the action. I identified the following three modes of performance that most closely categorise queer cult audience immersion. The first is the *discourse* mode: audience members using performative speech acts to elicit response, to have an effect on the other audience members, to persuade the audience to perform a certain action (or actions), or to convince the rest of the audience that participation is justified. The second is the *gender performance* mode: audience members bending and changing heteronormative gender roles through the characterisation of a character or characters, specifically through cross-dressing or by performing as gender nonconforming. The third is an *appropriation* mode: audience members appropriating the cult film for purposes of re-identifying culturally as a marginalised group. This type of mode includes mainly queer and LGBT audiences, but at times is also used by other subcultures, such as cosplayers and superfans.

Chapter Four explored queer monstrosity in the first decade of the new millennium, analysing how the queer monster on screen has gradually faded into obscurity as understandings of transgression alter and transform. I began with a discussion of transgression and cult cinema in a contemporary setting, illustrating how perceptions of queer monstrosity have been influenced by the New Queer Cinema movement of the early 1990s. Following from this, the main case studies for analysis involve gay representations in mainstream cinema and three categories of transgression present within these representations: *acceptable* transgression, *direct* transgression, and *unacceptable* transgression. Representations of acceptable transgression often include gay or lesbian representation, shame, fear, empathy and pathos, persecution, tragedy and (more infrequently) feel-good romance and comedy. For this, I analysed *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Milk* (2008), two films which feature this acceptable transgression.

Brokeback Mountain exhibits acceptable transgression and queer monstrosity in a number of ways. Ennis and Jack are positioned as queer monsters because their illicit romance transgresses the heteronormative boundaries of the society in which they exist through no fault of their own. Simultaneously, their love story also transgresses the heteronormative confines of masculinity surrounding cowboy culture. To this extent, the film represents an acceptable transgression of queer monstrosity inasmuch as the two cowboys do not purposefully transgress these heteronormative boundaries. Acceptable transgression often represents gay and lesbian characters within the spectrum of queer. I define this as acceptable transgression for two reasons: (1) the gay or lesbian characters are transgressive for the reason that their sexuality challenges the boundaries of heteronormative sexuality, thus making them inherently transgressive, but not *purposefully* transgressive (as we will see with direct transgression), (2) any transgression becomes acceptable through the characters' shame, fear, persecution, and the empathy and pathos through which these are represented. Shame on the part of the gay characters Ennis and Jack in *Brokeback Mountain* is a shame towards their sexual orientation or a shame towards a gay relationship and the fear of the repercussions if their sexual orientation is discovered. *Milk*, on the other hand, is an example of acceptable transgression through its representation of persecution, fear and tragedy. This element of tragedy surrounding Harvey Milk's unprecedented rise to political office and subsequent assassination brings an acceptability to his transgression. As Milk seemingly assimilates into this hetero-dominated political sphere, he is persecuted for his transgression and constructed as a queer monster for not conforming to standards of heteronormativity.

Direct transgression features open and honest transgressive representation of queer characters, including crime, prostitution, excess, hedonism, abuse, suicide, violence and death. Films with direct transgression vary in subject matter, style and imagery, at times told with a dark sarcastic irony and other times with strict sombre earnestness. The two films I

chose to analyse, *Party Monster* (2003) and *I Love You Phillip Morris* (2009), follow depictions of transgression and queer monstrosity based on real-life events re-told through first person narration. Both feature a dark, somewhat playful and unapologetic tone as they recount images of crime and self-indulgence. In *Party Monster*, the characters openly and unapologetically transgress, living a life of debauched excess and extravagance, a hedonistic lifestyle that often marks queer characters in directly transgressive queer films. The main character Michael acknowledges his monstrosity with full awareness that his actions are transgressive, yet he simultaneously denies this transgression through a flippant, pretentious persona. His lifestyle of hedonistic excess and extravagance is a threat to normality and the social order of things, a conscious choice of disobedience. With *I Love You Phillip Morris*, while its subject matter appears somewhat tragic, dismal, and pathetic, the overarching tone of the film is one of subversion and humour. Rather than evoking the empathy and pathos of earlier queer films of this decade, *Phillip Morris* depicts an open and honest transgression by the queer monster. Stephen does not assimilate for the very reason that his transgression, both as a con artist and as a queer man, prevents him from doing so. In this way, *Phillip Morris* could be considered a slight return to representations of transgressive queerness in earlier cult films and stands alone among the more mainstream queer films of this decade.

Queer films with unacceptable transgression nearly always feature transgender, gender non-binary, intersex, or androgynous queer characters who are outcast, abused/maimed, and often suffer or grieve. I have identified these films as containing unacceptable transgression based on the level of acceptance shown towards the queer characters by heteronormative society, both within the film and in real life. Unlike films with acceptable or direct transgression, these queer characters are represented as transgressive queer monsters for the reason that their gender identities prevent them from conforming to cisnormative binaries. While they may transgress in other ways, their ultimate transgression

emanates from this non-conformity. In the case of these two films, Neil Jordan's *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005) and Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* (2005), the main characters are both transgender women, assigned males at birth, who struggle to fully assimilate with heteronormative society set against them. Jack Halberstam (2005) identifies different sets of motivations for the representation of transgender life in the artistic work of cisgender people, which I use to frame my subsequent analysis. The first is "the project of stabilization," where the "destabilizing effects of the transgender narrative are defused by establishing the transgender narrative as strange, uncharacteristic, and even pathological" (pp. 54-55). Both Kitten and Bree are effectively stabilised as transgender characters through a strange or eccentric narrative that positions them as others. The second is "the project of rationalization," where the artist "finds reasonable explanations for behavior that may seem dangerous and outrageous at first glance" (p. 55). Kitten's transgender identity in *Breakfast on Pluto* is rationalised through her own voiceover that accompanies the main narrative, where Kitten justifies her actions as well as the actions and behaviours of others acting against her. By identifying Halberstam's motivations of stabilisation and rationalisation in these two films, we begin to realise the exacting presence of unacceptable transgression and queer monstrosity.

With *Breakfast on Pluto*, Kitten is not a transgressive queer monster because of transgressive behaviour, but for the reason that her transgender identity prevents her from conforming to the heteronormative standards of the society in which she lives. This lack of conformity and the othering Kitten endures is stabilised and rationalised through both elements of fantasy and the validation of characters' actions. From the plot synopsis above, it becomes blatantly apparent that almost every step of Kitten's journey and struggle is dictated by her gender and the inability of others to accept it. Much of this struggle and unacceptance comes from traditionally masculine figures.

However, it is not simply heteronormative masculinity that oppresses Kitten but also femininity. In one early scene, a young Patrick (pre-transition) dons her foster mother's dress and lipstick and struts around the house. Her foster mother comes home and admonishes Patrick, forcing her into the bathtub and scrubbing her fiercely with a brush. "He'll make a disgrace of us," she says, "I'll march you up and down the street and disgrace you in front of the whole town. Say it—I am a boy, not a girl!" This opposition from a female figure signifies the unacceptable transgression represented by Kitten in this film. The queer characters in these films, who are often transgender, face a struggle and opposition that threatens their assimilation.

Transamerica tells the story of a pre-operative transgender woman, Bree (Felicity Huffman), who goes on a road trip with a long-lost son (Kevin Zegers) she never knew existed. While Bree's reassignment surgery will undoubtedly further her assimilation, her therapist (Elizabeth Pena) refuses to sign off on Bree's surgery until she acknowledges her son and the rest of her past. Therefore, in order to assimilate, Bree is forced to re-engage with the very existence she rejects and the queer monstrosity of her character is represented within this struggle to assimilate. Bree is confined to a specific gender performance that adheres to the same heteropatriarchal culture that defines it and, therefore, she does not transgress but rather assimilates into society's idea of femininity. Although Bree is eventually able to fully assimilate after her surgery, her transition is rendered by her family as unacceptably transgressive. They cannot accept her true identity and most likely never will. Because she is able to successfully "pass" as female, the film does not represent her as being oppressed from other members of society, but still reflects society's inability to acknowledge the complexities of gender.

This film represents a stabilisation and rationalisation of the transgender narrative, one in which Bree's cross-country journey constructs her as an outsider (stabilisation) and

one in which this unwanted journey is justified by her desire to fully transition (rationalisation). While this journey is the driving narrative of the film, its somewhat light-hearted plot repels the threatening presence of the transgender seen in earlier films such as *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983, as seen in Chapter Two), *Never Too Young to Die* (1986), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *The Crying Game* (1992), and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). Rather than witnessing a queer monster through transgender horror, deception, or a threat to the individual, the audience of *Transamerica* witnesses a transgender character engaged in everyday existence.

While these representations of transgression illustrate new forms of assimilation and acceptability in more mainstream cinema, Chapter Five analysed the transgressive queer monster in horror films post-2000, where transgressive representations shift in dissimilar directions. In these queer horror films, the central queer protagonists are transgressive monsters, transgressive victims, or transgressive friends. In general, these horror films are non-mainstream and reflect the continuing presence of the queer monster in contemporary cinema. Queer horror films of the early 2000s feature openly queer characters with everyday lives who either blatantly transgress, become victims of violent transgression, or become caught up in the transgressions of others. In any of these scenarios, queer horror films of this decade resist similar categorisations of transgression in mainstream queer films.

Otto and the other zombies in *Otto; or Up with Dead People* and Marie in *High Tension* signify a transgressive queer monstrosity. Otto is transgressive through his abject representation as a zombie, as he and the other zombies turn healthy active men into “the living dead,” reflecting a representation of HIV/AIDS transmission. Marie as transgressive monster is a representation of the *femme castratrice*, or castrating female, as she enacts a revenge on those who represent the oppression of her queer sexuality. By killing Alex's family, she is symbolically castrating the patriarchal, heterosexual ties that bind her from

achieving her full queer potential. On the opposing end is the transgressive victim as seen in *Hellbent* and *October Moon*. Transgressive victims feature queer victims of criminal acts, or queer victims at threat from queer monsters. Typically, these transgressive victims are also transgressive themselves and are punished by the transgressive monster through violence or death. Lastly, the analysis of transgressive friend representation in queer horror featured *Jennifer's Body* and *Let the Right One In*. In the case of *Jennifer's Body*, Needy is made transgressive through her association with the queer monster, while Oskar in *Let the Right One In* never acts on his transgressive emotions and is eventually saved by the queer monster. In both cases, the queer monsters in transgressive friend films were victims, forced into their queer monstrosity by other violent transgressors.

In Chapter Six, I analysed queer monstrosity in the 2010s, where films represent queer monstrosity as becoming more nuanced, polished, and empathic. Films representing queer monstrosity in this decade reframe and critique considerations of the monstrous in contemporary society, while simultaneously showing the horrors encountered by queer protagonists in the modern world. In effect, these films represent queer persons as monstrous but, in many cases, show how the heteropatriarchal world in which they live constructs and treats them as monstrous.

This shift in depictions of queer monstrosity signals a changing landscape of queer representation in the modern world, with queer identity still retaining a level of transgression. Queerness is continually viewed as a threat to heteronormative culture and becomes the subject of a persistent social conservative ideology of queerness as threatening the heteronormative nuclear family unit. The films analysed in Chapter Six challenge these heteronormative ideologies by portraying the horror and stigma experienced by queer people in everyday life, both within queer culture and externally. These films challenge mainstream depictions of queerness by turning the tide on monstrosity, showing the struggles, horrors,

and non-heteronormative phobias queer people endure in everyday life. These films do not simply focus on monstrous, bigoted heterosexuals working against queer people but also the horrors inflicted by queer people on each other.

The first case study, *Stranger by the Lake* (dir. Alain Guiraudie, 2013), represents queer monstrosity through sexual desire and threat, as the young gay male protagonist begins a sexual relationship with a dangerous man at a popular cruising destination. This film perfectly exemplifies the possible horrors, fears, and anxieties faced by gay men within anonymous cruising culture, as well as the threat generated by a sexual desire for the queer monster. The film is also exemplary of this renaissance of New Queer Cinema (Richards, 2016, p. 216), radically separating itself from dominant film form and prevailing film representations of LGBTQ+ characters.

The second case study, *Kill Your Darlings* (dir. John Krokidas, 2013), exemplifies a murderous queer monstrosity as it follows early members of the Beat Generation (Lucien Carr, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac) and Carr's real-life murder of long-time friend David Kammerer in the 1940s. The film focuses on the construction of false narrative around monstrous queer behaviours and understandings of queer desire as predatory.

The third and final case study, *Spiral* (dir. Kurtis David Harder, 2020), represents monstrosity through a cult of neighbours who destroy the lives of marginalised people that move to their town. While the main characters are seen as monstrous because of their queer lifestyle, the veritable monsters of the film are the homophobic, racist cult that constructs them as monstrous. The main protagonist endures the trauma of a homophobic attack as a teenager, which he then uses as an asset for self-preservation in later life, allowing him to understand the true threat of his destructive, bigoted subjugators.

The Queer Monster and Cult Cinema in the Digital Age

In the 21st century, as streaming technology becomes a primary source of cinema viewing, representations of queer monstrosity have become more accessible. Such access might signal the death of the queer monster, given the opposition of the queer monster towards assimilation. Queer monstrosity being made so readily accessible by its creators and distributors might signal an assimilation to the mainstream and no longer a display of rebellion through transgression. However, I argue that accessibility actually signals a further display of transgression as these representations are circulated more widely. Through streaming technology, illegal downloading, and pay monthly services such as Apple TV+ and Amazon Prime, images of queer monstrosity and transgression circulate more expeditiously to a much wider audience in a shorter amount of time.

Midnight movies of the 1970s gained cult status based on repeatability, where recurring audiences attended screenings multiple times over, lengthening the staying power of a film's run. In the digital age, these viewing practices have shifted towards an element of "replayability," which has become more common "with the intensification of replay culture" (Hills & Sexton, 2015, p. 4). Effectively, queer monsters and their transgressive representations in particular cult films now gain further viewers through a repetition of viewing and circulation. While modes of cult cinema exhibition have changed and shifted over time, these new viewing technologies have made cult movie fandom "less dependent on place," allowing for the "distribution and diffusion of cult materials across space" (Jancovich, et al, 2003, p. 4). This kind of distribution allows for films to develop "large niche audiences that may be spatially diffuse but can constitute a powerful market force" (p. 4). Images of queer monstrosity can now be shared with the click of a button, therefore developing an even greater audience than previous decades.

Barbara Klinger (2010) writes that contemporary cult films secure their identity through a culture of replay, where recycling of content “provides favourable conditions for cultification to occur” (p. 4). Replay viewings of a particular film across multiple media platforms can ultimately achieve the same, if not greater, cult status as with repeated theatre viewing. Fans can engage with particular cult films through shared content, online forums such as Reddit and Cult Laboratories (a film and TV forum) and meet in person through cult film fan groups on Meetup.com. This is not to say, however, that live participatory cult screenings no longer have their place in cult film consumption.

For instance, The Princes Charles Cinema near London’s Leicester Square regularly hosts participatory and event-like screenings of films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *The Room*, and gay pride themed screenings of films such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. These screenings encourage not only costuming and sing-alongs (if applicable), but also full-blown participation where costumes are invited, props are provided, and the audience is encouraged to use them. In addition to this, the Prince Charles develops events such as a Disney pyjama party for adults, where the audience is encouraged to wear their pyjamas and spend the day watching classic and contemporary Disney films. Audiences are encouraged to bring sleeping bags to themed events such as the “80’s Summer Camp Slash-a-thon,” which screens summer camp-based horror films from the 1980s as an all-nighter. These types of screenings still hold an appeal for cult film fans as well as new fans alike who revel in the participatory nature of the event with other like-minded film enthusiasts. In this way, audiences, as well as cinemas and other venues, collectively encourage the adoption of particular types of behaviour in the viewing space with cult movies.

These screenings show that many audiences still favour collective viewing of cult films in cinemas, rather than using at-home viewing technology, because of the social

dynamics which occur in this kind of subculture. Richard McCulloch (2011), in an analysis of participatory screenings of *The Room* (2003) at Prince Charles Cinema, believes that “the audience’s participatory behaviour is geared towards the provocation or production of a distinctly comic response” (p. 190). While not a *queer* cult film, *The Room* has become synonymous with audience participation since its release, even turning its creator Tommy Wiseau into a cult icon. Similar to audience interaction with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, audiences interact with *The Room* through callbacks and props, while also mimicking the film’s poor quality, bad acting, and production value. Such an environment establishes a place of fan community with cult cinema viewing that still occurs decades after the midnight movie phenomenon. However, McCulloch (2010) is quick to note the temporary nature of these film screenings (as I discussed in Chapter One): “Each time the film is screened in a cinema, individual attendees (almost always in small groups) effectively become part of a temporary community, one that exists only in that place and until the cinema is emptied” (p. 203). Given the temporary nature of these screenings, streaming, downloading, and other types of internet sharing are actually more permanent and provide fan interaction well after leaving the cinema. Effectively, this online communal interaction can occur at any time and place, which further extends fan communication and engagement around a particular cult film.

However, this circulation of online material and the acquisition of cult films on the internet also occurs in many cases through *illegal* downloading and pirating. Using torrenting sites such as The Pirate Bay, RARBG, and 1337x, cult film fanatics can seek out their favourite cult films and television series by downloading torrent files that other users have uploaded. This of course brings up the question of authorship and the lack of benefits and residuals provided to creators, actors, and distributors (Robertson, McNeill, & Green, 2012, p. 216). If downloaded for free, those involved in the creation of these films receive no

reimbursement for their artistic work. Yet, one of the benefits of this type of downloading for viewers involves access to content censored or banned from the country in which they live, or access to content restricted by regional formatting on DVD and Blu-ray. This is particularly true for certain cult films which are still banned in many parts of the world. Through this illegal downloading, many fans and cult collectors can acquire these films and watch them in the privacy of their homes.

Hills and Sexton (2015), in their article on cult cinema and technological change, note that this illegal downloading does not only include films themselves “but also cultural artifacts related to films: trailers and selected clips from films, fan-made remixes, fan art, film memorabilia, and film sounds [...] which can and do circulate over the web” (p. 4). In this way, the communal engagement by fans frequently associated with cult cinema also occurs online and becomes even more spreadable in different forms of media. In another article, Hills (2015) addresses the “mainstreaming” discourse surrounding cult cinema in the digital age, an assumption that the “excessive accessibility of cult” leads to a loss of “subcultural capital” and damages the development of cult status (p. 118). Instead, he posits that residual media can offer a refuge for cult authenticities: “fans who were ‘there’ for early 1970s and 1980s forms of cult (midnight movies, the Scala, and video nasties) can now perform a particular mode of retroactive subcultural capital, where the very historical inaccessibility of past cult lends it exclusivity and authenticity” (p. 118). In other words, this circulation of cult materials and their accessibility actually lends a further legitimacy to these cult classics and turns them into markers of personal and cultural memory.

In terms of queer monstrosity, this circulation of cult materials through online media also represents the distribution of transgressive queer monsters. The monster continues to find a place of embodiment in cult films, or films that herald potential cult status, as these images continue to be circulated. However, these representations of queer monstrosity have

altered and transformed over time, namely through the types of transgression being exhibited and further human qualities being added to the monsters themselves. While early representations of queer monsters were intentionally constructed as transgressive and grotesque to reject heteronormative conventionality, more recent queer monsters either blatantly transgress, become victims of violent transgression, or become caught up in the transgressions of others, as well as the horrors of humanity. These contemporary representations, rather than showing a queer monster simply being monstrous, show how the heteronormative world in which they live constructs and treats them as monstrous. In other words, the queer monster is slowly becoming more human.

Some might argue for the death of the queer monster, such as Sam J. Miller (2011), who writes about the death of the queer monster caused by “assimilation” and the “normalization of queer identity” (p. 222). Miller contests that the image of the queer monster, once used as a tool to exemplify rage against an oppressive social order, is now made obsolete through the inclusion of queer people in the established patriarchal institutions of marriage and military. Some theorists also argue in a similar vein in terms of queerness more generally. Stephen Maddison (2012) notes the assimilation of queerness in society, making queer people “less marginal” than before:

As neoliberal consumer culture has embraced homosexuality for its profit potential, emboldening queers of all hues, those queers have become literally less marginal than they once were. Thus assimilated, and generally lacking a transgenerational culture with which to reinvigorate and inspire the less experienced, queers have become less meaningful than they once were, to the point of ‘disappearing’ [...] Queerness, and all it stands for, is less troubling than it once was. (p. 97)

Maddison’s argument about queerness becoming less marginal through assimilation and acceptance fails to acknowledge the ever-present image of the queer monster in contemporary filmmaking. As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, representations of queer monstrosity have continued to circulate in horror films and mainstream queer films from the beginning of the 21st century into the present day. Even though consumer culture has

“emboldened” queer people for the potential profit of their exhibition, the fact remains that queerness, in many ways, is still quite marginalised. Transgender individuals, in particular, still remain very marginalised, often the victims of violence and murder from cisnormative, transphobic oppressors. Provided that queer people “of all hues” continue to be ostracised in heteronormative society, representations of queer monstrosity will continue to be created, viewed, circulated, and distributed through films and online media.

Early representations of queer monstrosity became a means to exhibit transgression in narrative filmmaking, a way for queerness to disconnect and separate from heteropatriarchal culture. The monstrosity arose through an oppression of the queer subject and its opposition towards assimilation, embodied in the physical form of the queer monster on screen. The queer monstrous body became the corporeal depiction of that which is rejected by heteronormative patriarchy, the material form and substance—the monstrosity personified on film. The monster showed adaptability and its shifting representations in cult cinema echoed changing cultural ideologies around queer identity. In the present day, while queer representations in filmmaking have shifted in a more positive direction, queer people continue to be marginalised and discriminated against in heteronormative society. The queer monster continues to act as a means to reject this marginalisation, even if the monster is not blatantly transgressive, but rather a means of pinpointing the transgressions of heteronormative culture against queer people.

For example, the Human Rights Campaign (2020) presents some troubling statistics about contemporary queer youth, namely that LGBTQIA+ young people are twice as likely than their heterosexual peers to experience physical violence and that 92% of these youth hear negative messages about queer identities from school, the Internet, and their peers (n.p.). Since 2013, more than 130 transgender or gender-expansive individuals have been murdered in the United States, with 21 anti-transgender bills being introduced through the US

government in 2018 alone (Human Rights Campaign, 2020, n.p.). These are just a few examples of the challenges queer people face in patriarchal society, the dehumanisation, discrimination and bigotry that casts them as monsters. The queer monster then acts as a means to reject these challenges of bigotry and queerphobia, and the circulation of queer monstrous representation through online media allows these rejections and defiance to be viewed more widely.

As I have demonstrated here, combating this discrimination through monstrous transgressive representation is a long-established tradition of queer resistance. It is a shifting and malleable force that transcends cinematic boundaries of time and place. Queer monstrosity does not subscribe to belonging, but rather functions to construct its own queer ideology of dissent, protest and disunity, a desire to be transgressive. It is a method of opposition used to confront and dismantle the inequalities and oppression faced by queer people. In cult cinema, where images of monstrosity and transgression often reside, representations of queer monstrosity find a place of embodiment. More contemporary films outside the realm of cult have continued these representations into present day. For as long as queer people suffer the injustice of discrimination, queer monstrosity will remain a valuable force to convey opposition. For this reason, the queer monster continues to stand as a rejection of patriarchal injustice, waiting in the shadows, ready to transgress the heteronormative at any given moment.

FILMOGRAPHY

A Nightmare on Elm Street (Wes Craven, New Line Cinema, 1984)
A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge (Jack Sholder, New Line Cinema, 1985)
Basic Instinct (Paul Verhoeven, TriStar Pictures, 1992)
Beastly Boyz (David Decoteau, Rapid Heart Extreme, 2006)
Boys Don't Cry (Kimberly Peirce, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1999)
Braindead (Peter Jackson, Oro Films, 1992)
Breakfast on Pluto (Neil Jordan, Pathé, 2005)
Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, Focus Features, 2005)
Carrie (Brian De Palma, United Artists, 1976)
Creature from the Black Lagoon (Jack Arnold, Universal Pictures, 1954)
Cruising (William Friedkin, United Artists, 1980)
Day of the Dead (George A. Romero, United Film Distribution Company, 1985)
Deep Red (Dario Argento, Cineriz, 1975)
Desperate Living (John Waters, New Line Cinema, 1977)
Destroyer (Karyn Kusama, Annapurna Pictures, 2018)
Die! Die! My Darling! (Silvio Narizzano, Columbia Pictures, 1965)
Divine Trash (Steve Yeager, Fox Lorber, 1998)
Dracula's Daughter (Lambert Hillyer, Universal Pictures, 1936)
Dressed to Kill (Brian De Palma, Filmways Pictures, 1980)
Edward II (Derek Jarman, Working Title Films, 1991)
El Topo (Alejandro Jodorowsky, Producciones Panicas, 1970)
Female Trouble (John Waters, Dreamland, 1974)
Freaks (Tod Browning, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1932)
Friday the 13th (Sean S. Cunningham, Paramount Pictures, 1980)
Friday the 13th: A New Beginning (Danny Steinmann, Paramount Pictures, 1985)
Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter (Joseph Zito, Paramount Pictures, 1984)
Fright Night (Tom Holland, Columbia Pictures, 1985)
Future-Kill (Ronald W. Moore, International Film Marketing, 1985)
Gambling with Souls (Elmer Clifton, Jay-Dee-Kay Productions, 1936)
Ghoulies (Luca Bercovici, Empire Pictures, 1985)
Girlfight (Karyn Kusama, Sony Pictures Releasing, 2000)
Grey Gardens (Albert & David Maysles, Portrait Films, 1975)
Halloween (John Carpenter, Compass International Pictures, 1978)
Hedwig and the Angry Inch (John Cameron Mitchell, New Line Cinema, 2001)

Hellbent (Paul Etheredge-Ouzts, Regent Releasing, 2004)
Hellraiser (Clive Barker, Entertainment Film Distributors, 1987)
Hereditary (Ari Aster, A24, 2018)
High Tension (Alexandre Aja, EuropaCorp, 2003)
Hostel (Eli Roth, Lionsgate, 2005)
Howling II: Your Sister Is a Werewolf (Philippe Mora, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1985)
How to Make a Monster (Herbert L. Strock, American International Pictures, 1958)
Hustler White (Rick Castro & Bruce La Bruce, Strand Releasing, 1996)
I Love You Phillip Morris (John Requa & Glenn Ficarra, LD Entertainment, 2009)
Interview with the Vampire (Neil Jordan, Warner Bros. Productions, 1994)
Invocation of My Demon Brother (Kenneth Anger, 1969)
I Was a Teenage Frankenstein (Herbert L. Strock, American International Pictures, 1957)
I Was a Teenage Werewolf (Gene Fowler Jr., American International Pictures, 1957)
Jennifer's Body (Karyn Kusama, 20th Century Fox, 2009)
Juno (Jason Reitman, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2007)
Kill Your Darlings (John Krokidas, Sony Pictures Classics, 2013)
Laura (Otto Preminger, 20th Century Fox, 1944)
L.A. Zombie (Bruce La Bruce, Wursthfilm, 2010)
Let the Right One In (Tomas Alfredson, Sandrew Metronome, 2008)
Lifeforce (Tobe Hooper, TriStar Pictures, 1985)
Looking for Mr. Goodbar (Richard Brooks, Paramount Pictures, 1977)
Milk (Gus Van Sant, Focus Features, 2008)
Mondo Trasho (John Waters, Dreamland, 1969)
Multiple Maniacs (John Waters, Dreamland, 1970)
My Own Private Idaho (Gus Van Sant, Fine Line Features, 1991)
Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy (Daniel Farrands, 1428 Films, 2010)
Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, Image Ten, 1968)
October Moon (Jason Paul Collum, Tempe Entertainment, 2005)
Otto; or Up With Dead People (Bruce La Bruce, Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 2008)
Paradise (Diablo Cody, Image Entertainment, 2013)
Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingston, Off-White Productions, 1990)
Party Monster (Fenton Bailey & Randy Barbato, Strand Releasing, 2003)
Philadelphia (Jonathan Demme, TriStar Pictures, 1993)
Pink Flamingos (John Waters, New Line Cinema, 1972)

Poison (Todd Haynes, Zeitgeist Films, 1991)
Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount Pictures, 1960)
Re-Animator (Stuart Gordon, Empire International Pictures, 1985)
Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, United Artists, 1940)
Return of the Living Dead (Dan O'Bannon, Orion Pictures, 1985)
Return to Sleepaway Camp (Robert Hiltzik, Magnolia Pictures, 2008)
Rope (Alfred Hitchcock, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1948)
RSVP (Laurie Lynd, 1991)
Scream, Queen! My Nightmare on Elm Street (Roman Chimienti & Tyler Jensen, Virgil Films, 2019)
Showgirls (Paul Verhoeven, MGM/UA Distribution Co., 1995)
Silver Bullet (Dan Attias, Paramount Pictures, 1985)
Sleepaway Camp (Robert Hiltzik, United Film Distribution Co., 1983)
Sleepaway Camp II: Unhappy Campers (Michael A. Simpson, Double Helix Films, 1988)
Sleepaway Camp III: Teenage Wasteland (Michael A. Simpson, Double Helix Films, 1989)
Sleepaway Camp IV: The Survivor (Jim Markovic, Double Helix Films, 2012)
Spiral (Kurtis David Harder, Digital Interference Productions, 2020)
Stranger by the Lake (Alain Guiraudie, Les films du losange, 2013)
Super 8 ½ (Bruce La Bruce, 1994)
Swoon (Tom Kalin, Fine Line Features, 1992)
The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Stephan Elliott, Gramercy Pictures, 1994)
The Birdcage (Mike Nichols, United Artists, 1996)
The Bride of Frankenstein (James Whale, Universal Pictures, 1935)
The Brood (David Cronenberg, New World Pictures, 1979)
The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, Miramax Films, 1992)
The Curse of Frankenstein (Terence Fisher, Hammer Film Productions, 1957)
The Hills Have Eyes Part II (Wes Craven, Castle Hill Productions, 1985)
The Invitation (Karyn Kusama, Drafthouse Films, 2015)
The Living End (Gregg Araki, Cineplex Odeon Films, 1992)
The Rocky Horror Picture Show (Jim Sharman, 20th Century Fox, 1975)
The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, Orion Pictures, 1991)
The Stuff (Larry Cohen, New World Pictures, 1985)
The Uninvited (Lewis Allen, Paramount Pictures, 1944)

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar (Beeban Kidron, Universal Pictures, 1985)

Transamerica (Duncan Tucker, The Weinstein Company, 2005)

Tully (Jason Reitman, Focus Features, 2018)

Warning Sign (Hal Barwood, 20th Century Fox, 1985)

Windows (Gordon Willis, United Artists, 1980)

XX (Jovanka Vuckovic, Annie Clark, Roxanne Benjamin, Karyn Kusama, Magnet Releasing, 2017)

Young Adult (Jason Reitman, Paramount Pictures, 2011)

Young Soul Rebels (Isaac Julien, BFI, 1991)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaron, M. (2004). The New Queer Spectator. In M. Aaron, *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (pp. 187-200). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Abraham, A. (2015, August 11). *Amy Grimehouse is Secret Cinema's trashy, drag-loving cousin*. Retrieved from The Guardian:
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/aug/11/amy-grimehouse-drag-queen-club-night-london-john-waters-immersive-theatre>
- Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge.
- Aftab, K. (2011, October 23). *Scholar devises equation for determining a cult film*. Retrieved November 3, 2015, from The Independent: <http://tiny.cc/5s0k5x>
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Aja, A. (Director). (2003). *High Tension* [Motion Picture].
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Aranjuez, A. (2019). Change of heart: 'Boy erased, the miseducation of Cameron Post' and gay conversion therapy. *Screen Education*, 54-61.
- Austin, J. (1962). *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Babuscio, J. (1999). The Cinema of Camp (aka Camp and the Gay Sensibility). In F. Cleto (Ed.), *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (pp. 117-135). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Badley, L. (1995). *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1965/2009). *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Rabelais and His World*. (H. Iswolsky, Trans.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (2004). Rabelais and His World. In J. R. Ryan (Ed.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2nd ed., pp. 45-51). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Beale, E. B. (2009). Letter to Walter Goodman. In S. Maysles, & R. Maysles, *Grey Gardens*. New York: Tomearm/Lawrence Publications.
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1997). *The Second Sex (1949)* (New Ed edition ed.). London: Vintage Classics.

- Belkin, A. (2008). "Don't Ask, Don't Tell": Does the Gay Ban Undermine the Military's Reputation? *Armed Forces & Society*, 276-291.
- Benshoff, H. (1997). *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Benshoff, H., & Griffin, S. (2004). *Queer Cinema, The Film Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Benshoff, H. (2004). The Monster and the Homosexual. In H. Benshoff, & S. Griffin, *Queer Cinema, The Film Reader* (pp. 63-74). London: Routledge.
- Benshoff, H. M. (2009). *Milk and gay political history*. Retrieved from Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media: <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/Milk/text.html>
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2008). Introduction to Distinction. In E. Mathijs, & X. Mendik (Eds.), *The Cult Film Reader* (pp. 386-391). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Briggs, J. H. (2008). Cult Cinema: A Critical Symposium. *Cinéaste*, 43-50.
- Brighe, M. (2015, October 23). *Why Casting Laverne Cox in 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show' Reboot Isn't a Slam Dunk Idea*. Retrieved November 19, 2015, from Flavorwire: <http://flavorwire.com/544321/why-casting-laverne-cox-in-the-rocky-horror-picture-show-reboot-isnt-a-slam-dunk-idea>
- Brinkema, E. (2006). A Title Does Not Ask, but Demands That You Make a Choice: On the Otherwise Films of Bruce LaBruce. *Criticism*, 95-126.
- Brody, R. (2014, April 30). Why "Mean Girls" is a Classic. *The New Yorker*.
- Brophy, P. (1986). Horrality-the textuality of contemporary horror films. *Screen*, 27(1), 2-13.
- Brouwer, D. C., & Hess, A. (2007). Making Sense of 'God Hates Fags' and 'Thank God for 9/11': A Thematic Analysis of Milbloggers' Responses to Reverend Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69-90.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). Critically Queer. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1(1), 17-32.
- Butler, J. (1996). Burning Acts: Injurious Speech. *The University of Chicago Law School Roundtable*, 199-221.
- Butler, J. (1999). From Interiority to Gender Performatives. In F. Cleto (Ed.), *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (pp. 361-367). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Carlo, R. (2015, March). *Entering Grey Gardens, Exploring Queer Identifications with the Beales*. Retrieved April 4, 2016, from The Writing Instructor: <http://parlormultimedia.com/twitest/carlo-2015-03>
- Chan, K. (2013). Bad Boys Need Love, Too: The Cinematic Negativity of Gay Romance in *I Love You Phillip Morris*. In P. Demory, & C. Pullen, *Queer Love in Film and Television: Critical Essays* (pp. 23-32). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charles, R. (Director). (2009). *RuPaul's Drag Race* [Motion Picture].
- Chaskin, D. (Writer), & Sholder, J. (Director). (1985). *A Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 2: Freddy's Revenge* [Motion Picture].
- Church, D. (2011). Freakery, Cult Films, and the Problem of Ambivalence. *Journal of Film and Video*, 63(1), 3-17.
- Church, D., Hills, M., Hunter, I., Kleinhans, C., Koven, M., Mathijs, E., . . . Weinstock, J. (2008). *Cult Film: A Critical Symposium (Web Edition)*. Retrieved from Cineaste: <https://www.cineaste.com/winter2008/cult-film-a-critical-symposium>
- Chusna, A., & Mahmudah, S. (2018). Female Monsters: Figuring Female Transgression in *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *The Witch* (2013). *Humaniora*, 10-16.
- Clover, C. J. (1987). Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film. *Representations*, 187-228.
- Clover, C. J. (1992). *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Woodstock: Princeton University Press.
- Collum, J. P. (Director). (2005). *October Moon* [Motion Picture].
- Colman, D. (2009, March 4). "*The Cult of Grey Gardens*". Retrieved March 31, 2016, from The Advocate: <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/television/2009/03/04/cult-grey-gardens>
- Cormack, A. B. (2014). Toward a "Post-Troubles" Cinema?: The Troubled Intersection of Political Violence and Gender in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* and *Breakfast on Pluto*. *Éire-Ireland*, 164-192.
- Cramer, R. J., Golom, F. D., LoPresto, C. T., & Kirkley, S. M. (2008). Weighing the Evidence: Empirical Assessment and Ethical Implications of Conversion Therapy. *Ethics & Behavior*, 93-114.
- Creed, B. (1993). *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Davis, G. (2004). Camp and Queer and the New Queer Director: Case Study-Gregg Araki. In M. Aaron (Ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (pp. 53-67). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Desk, N. (2015, May 31). *Arresting dress: A timeline of anti-cross-dressing laws in the United States*. Retrieved from PBS News Hour Weekend: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/arresting-dress-timeline-anti-cross-dressing-laws-u-s>
- Douglas, M. (2002). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge Classics Edition ed.). London: Routledge.
- Dyer, R. (1979). *Stars*. London: British Film Institute.
- Dyer, R. (1987). *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Dyer, R. (2007). *Pastiche*. London: Routledge.
- Easton Ellis, B. (1991). *American Psycho*. London: Picador Classic.
- Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Edwards, J. D., & Graulund, R. (2013). *Grotesque*. London: Routledge.
- Elliott-Smith, D. (2016). *Queer Horror Film and Television: Sexuality and Masculinity at the Margins*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Eszterhas, J. (Writer), & Verhoeven, P. (Director). (1995). *Showgirls* [Motion Picture]. USA.
- Etheredge-Ouzts, P. (Director). (2004). *Hellbent* [Motion Picture].
- Evans, E. (2011). Superman vs Schrödinger's Cat: Taste, Etiquette and Independent Cinema Audiences as Indirect Communities. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8(2), 327-349.
- Everman, W. (1993). *Cult Horror Films: From Attack of the 50 Foot Woman to Zombies of Mora Tau*. New York: Citadel Press.
- Ficarra, G., & Requa, J. (Directors). (2009). *I Love You Phillip Morris* [Motion Picture].
- Francis Jr., J. (2013). *Remaking Horror: Hollywood's New Reliance on Scares of Old*. London: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- Freud, S. (1920/2003). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books.
- Freud, S. (1919/2003). The Uncanny. In S. Freud, *The Uncanny* (pp. 123-162). London: Penguin Books.
- Garrett, D. (2015). Poet of Body and Soul: Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, and the film Kill Your Darlings. *Offscreen*, 1.

- Geraghty, L. (2014). *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Gibson, C. (2015, December 1). A disturbing new glimpse at the Reagan administration's indifference to AIDS. *The Washington post*.
- Ginsberg, A. (2017). *The Best Minds of My Generation: A Literary History of the Beats*. New York: Penguin.
- Goodman, W. (1976, Feb 22). 'Grey Gardens': Cinéma Vérité or Sideshow? *New York Times*, pp. D15, D19.
- Grainge, P. (2000). Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling. *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, 23(1), 27-34.
- Grant, B. K. (2008). Science fiction double feature: Ideology in the cult film. In E. M. Mendik (Ed.), *The Cult Film Reader* (pp. 76-87). Maidenhead, Berkshire, United Kingdom: McGraw Hill Open University Press.
- Grimehouse, & Amy, T. (2010). *The Amy Grimehouse Facebook Page*. Retrieved March 8, 2016, from Facebook.com: https://www.facebook.com/amygrimehouse/info/?tab=page_info
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, J. (2000). *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, J. (2003). What's that smell?: Queer temporalities and subcultural lives. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(3), 313-333.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 13-64). London: SAGE Publications.
- Heba, G. (1995). Everyday Nightmares: The Rhetoric of Social Horror in the Nightmare on Elm Street Series. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 23(3), 107-115.
- Hernandez, J. (2015, June 28). *Elizabeth Berkley Celebrates Marriage Equality At 'Showgirls' Screening, Cements Status As Gay Icon*. Retrieved April 15, 2017, from Queerty: <https://www.queerty.com/elizabeth-berkley-celebrates-marriage-equality-at-showgirls-screening-cements-status-as-gay-icon-20150628>
- Hills, M. (2015). Cult cinema and the 'mainstreaming' discourse of technological change: revisiting subcultural capital in liquid modernity. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 100-121.

- Hills, M., & Sexton, J. (2015). Cult cinema and technological change. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 1-11.
- Hiltzik, R. (Writer), & Hiltzik, R. (Director). (1983). *Sleepaway Camp* [Motion Picture].
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of Constructionist Research*. London: The Guilford Press.
- hooks, b. (2014). Is Paris Burning? In b. hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (pp. 145-156). New York: Routledge.
- Human Rights Campaign. (2020, December 6). *View and Share Statistics*. Retrieved from Human Rights Campaign: <https://www.hrc.org/view-and-share-statistics>
- Hunter, I. (2000). Beaver Las Vegas! A Fan-Boy's Defence of Showgirls. In X. Mendik, & G. Harper (Eds.), *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and its Critics* (pp. 187-201). Guildford: FAB Press.
- Hunter, I. (2016). *Cult Film as a Guide to Life: Fandom, Adaptation and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury.
- IFC Center. (2018, June 8). *Pink Flamingos*. Retrieved from IFC Center: <http://www.ifccenter.com/films/pink-flamingos/>
- Irvine, L. (2014, December 22). Divine in Pink Flamingos. *John Waters creates a version of shocking cult classic 'Pink Flamingos' -- for kids*. The Baltimore Sun.
- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Janisse, K.-L., & Corupe, P. (Eds.). (2015). *Satanic Panic: Pop-Cultural Paranoia in the 1980s*. Godlaming, Surrey: FAB Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenks, C. (2003). *Transgression*. London: Routledge.
- Jensen, A. A. (2018). Gender and the transexual body in Transamerica. *Literator: Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 1-6.
- Juro, R. (2015, October 23). *Laverne Cox in Rocky Horror Makes This Writer Very Nervous*. Retrieved November 17, 2015, from The Advocate: <http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2015/10/23/laverne-cox-rocky-horror-makes-writer-very-nervous>
- King, C. S. (2010). Un-Queering Horror: Hellbent and the Policing of the "Gay Slasher". *Western Journal of Communication*, 249-268.
- Kinkade, P. T., & Katovich, M. A. (1992). Toward a Sociology of Cult Films: Reading Rocky Horror. *Sociological Quarterly*, 33(2), 191-209.

- Klapp, O. E. (1962). *Heroes, Villains and Fools*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Klein, N. (2000). *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Klinger, B. (2006). *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Klinger, B. (2010). Becoming cult: The Big Lebowski, replay culture and male fans. *Screen*, 1-20.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kuhn, A., & Westwell, G. (2012). Body Horror. In A. Kuhn, & G. Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kuhn, A., & Westwell, G. (2012). New Queer Cinema. In A. Kuhn, & G. Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LaBruce, B. (Director). (2008). *Otto; or Up with Dead People* [Motion Picture].
- LaBruce, B. (2009, June 26). Bruce LaBruce: There is a Certain Romance to It. (P. Rodriguez, Interviewer)
- Lacan, J. (1992). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959-1960*. London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Lachman, G. (2001). *Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius*. New York: Disinformation Company.
- Lau, K. J. (2018). The Vampire, the Queer, and the Girl: Reflections on the Politics and Ethics of Immortality's Gendering. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 3-24.
- Lee, A. (Director). (2005). *Brokeback Mountain* [Motion Picture].
- Library, C. (2018, August 17). *LGBT Rights Milestones*. Retrieved September 27, 2018, from CNN (Cable News Network): <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/19/us/lgbt-rights-milestones-fast-facts/index.html>
- Liebenson, D. (2017, March 17). 45 Years After Pink Flamingos, John Waters Says the Midnight Movie Is "Dead". *Vanity Fair*, p. web.
- Lindqvist, J. A. (2004). *Let the Right One In*. London: Quercus.
- Livingston, J. (Director). (1990). *Paris is Burning* [Motion Picture].
- Lloyd, M. (1999). Performativity, Parody, Politics. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(2), 195-213.

- Lyons, K. (2016, March 8). Generation Y, Curling, or Maybe: what the world calls millennials. *The Guardian*.
- Maddison, S. (2012). Is the Rectum Still a Grave?: Anal Sex, Pornography, and Transgression. In T. Gournelos, & D. J. Gunkel, *Transgression 2.0: Media, Culture, and the Politics of a Digital Age* (pp. 86-100). London: Continuum.
- Marchetti, G. (2008). "Subcultural studies and the film audience: Rethinking the film viewing context". In E. Mathijs, & X. Mendik (Eds.), *The Cult Film Reader* (pp. 403-418). Maidenhead, Berkshire: McGraw Hill Open University Press.
- Mathijs, E., & Mendik, X. (Eds.). (2008). *The Cult Film Reader*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Mathijs, E., & Sexton, J. (2011). *Cult Cinema*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mathijs, E., & Sexton, J. (n.d.). Cult Horror Cinema. In E. Mathijs, & J. Sexton (Eds.), *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (pp. 194-203). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Maysles, A. &. (Director). (1975). *Grey Gardens* [Motion Picture].
- McCulloch, R. (2011). 'Most People Bring Their Own Spoons': The Room's participatory audiences as comedy mediators. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 189-218.
- McHale, J. (Director). (2019). *You Don't Nomi* [Motion Picture].
- Mercer, J. (2012). Coming of age: Problematizing gay porn and the eroticized older man. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 313-326.
- Miller, L. J. (2017). Fear and the Cisgender Audience: Transgender Representation and Audience Identification in Sleepaway Camp. *The Spectator*, 37(2), 40-47.
- Miller, S. J. (2011). Assimilation and the Queer Monster. In A. Briefel, & S. J. Miller, *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* (pp. 220-233). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Morgan, B. (2006). *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg*. London: Viking.
- Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. (1927, June 29). *Record #365*. Retrieved from MPPDA Digital Archive: <https://mppda.flinders.edu.au/records/365>
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 6-18.
- Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

- Murphy, B. (2009). *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murray, J. H. (1997). *Hamlet in the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Musto, M. (2015, November 2). *A Conversation with John Waters, The Pope of Trash*. Retrieved March 8, 2016, from The Advocate: <http://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2015/11/02/conversation-john-waters-pope-trash>
- Nayman, A. (2014). *It Doesn't Suck: Showgirls*. Toronto: ECW Press.
- Needham, G. (2010). *Brokeback Mountain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- New Orleans Museum of Art. (2017, July 21). *John Waters Film Festival: Pink Flamingos*. Retrieved from New Orleans Museum of Art: <https://noma.org/event/john-waters-film-festival-pink-flamingos/>
- Newton, E. (1979). *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Newton, E. (1999). Role Models. In F. Cleto (Ed.), *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (pp. 96-109). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ní Fhlainn, S. (2009). Our Monstrous (S)kin: Blurring the Boundaries between Monsters and Humanity. In S. Ní Fhlainn (Ed.), *Our Monstrous (S)kin: Blurring the Boundaries between Monsters and Humanity* (pp. 3-12). Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Niemeyer, K. (2014). Introduction: Media and Nostalgia. In K. Niemeyer (Ed.), *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* (pp. 1-23). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norwich, W. (2009, April 1). "A Touch of Grey". Retrieved February 25, 2016, from Vogue: <http://www.vogue.com/874401/vd-a-touch-of-grey/>
- O'Brien, R. (2012, April 13). Abbey Talks: Other Voices-Richard O'Brien. (P. B. O'Neill, Interviewer)
- OED Online. (2016, March). queer, adj. 1. Oxford University Press.
- OED Online. (2018, July). "oppressor, n.". Retrieved October 7, 2018, from Oxford English Dictionary Online: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132013?redirectedFrom=oppressor>
- OED Online. (2018, July). grotesque, n. and adj. Retrieved October 4, 2018, from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81794?rskey=McqcGT&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
- Ognjanović, D. (2012). Why is the Tension So High? The Monstrous Feminine in (Post)Modern Slasher Films. In C. J. Picart, & J. E. Browning, *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology* (pp. 227-238). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- O'Hara, H. (2017, December 6). The director who took a rape scene too far: the shocking truth about the exploitation 'classic' *El Topo*. *The Telegraph*, p. online source.
- Osenlund, R. K. (2014, January 24). *Interview: Alain Guiraudie on Stranger by the Lake*. Retrieved from Slant: <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/interview-alain-guiraudie/>
- Padva, G. (2014). *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paton, F. (2016). Angel Tendencies and Gratuitous Acts: Kill Your Darlings and the Legacy of Lucien Carr. In D. R. Geis, *Beat Drama: Playwrights and Performances of the 'Howl' Generation* (pp. 327-345). London: Bloomsbury.
- Palmer, P. (2012). *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Plantinga, C. (2009). *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prince, S. (2004). *The Horror Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Puchko, K. (2018, October 11). *Karyn Kusama on Destroyer, Sexism in Filmmaking, and the Redemption of Jennifer's Body*. Retrieved from Syfy: <https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/karyn-kusama-on-destroyer-sexism-in-filmmaking-and-the-redemption-of-jennifers-body>
- Quandt, J. (2004). Flesh & Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema. *Artforum International*, 126-132.
- Rahn, J. (2011). *The Beat Generation*. Retrieved from The Literature Network: <http://www.online-literature.com/periods/beat.php>
- Recuber, T. (2007). Immersion Cinema: The Rationalization and Reenchantment of Cinematic Space. *SAGE Journals*, 10(3), 315-330.
- Rhodes, J. D. (2006). "Concentrated Ground": Grey Gardens and the Cinema of the Domestic. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 47(1), 83-105.
- Richards, S. (2016). A New Queer Cinema renaissance. *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*, 215-229.
- Rich, B. R. (2013). *New Queer Cinema: the director's cut*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Robertson, K., McNeill, L., & Green, J. (2012). Illegal Downloading, Ethical Concern, and Illegal Behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 215-227.
- Rodrigues, J. P. (2013, June 1). Sex, Death, and Geometry: A Conversation Between Alain Guiraudie and João Pedro Rodrigues on *L'inconnu du lac*. *Cinema Scope*, pp. 33-37.

- Rohrs, L. (2019). The Homosexual Male Gaze: Normalizing Homosexuality through the Use of Heteronormative Narrative Techniques in Film. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 5-22.
- Rosenthal, A. (1978). Ellen Hovde: An Interview. *Film Quarterly*, 32(2), 8-17.
- Rubin, G. (1992). Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries. In J. (. Nestle, *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (pp. 466-483). Boston: Alyson Publications.
- Russo, M. (1994). *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*. London: Routledge.
- Samuels, S. (1983). *Midnight Movies*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
- Samuels, S. (Director). (2005). *Midnight Movies: From the Margin to the Mainstream* [Motion Picture].
- Schaefer, E. (1999). *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Schopp, A. (1997). Cruising the alternatives: Homoeroticism and the contemporary vampire. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 231-243.
- Schweitzer, D. (2000). Striptease: The Art of Spectacle and Transgression. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 65-75.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1994). *Tendencies*. London: Duke University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Seymour, N. (2008). "What We Are Watching" Does Not Present "Us with a Struggle": Rocky Horror, Queer Viewers, and the Alternative Cinema Spectacle. In J. A. Weinstock, *Reading Rocky Horror: The Rocky Horror Picture Show and Popular Culture* (pp. 123-140). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sharman, J. (Director). (1975). *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* [Motion Picture]. 20th Century Fox.
- Sharman, J. (Director). (1975). *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* [Motion Picture].
- Sheldon, R. (2019). Reading for Transgression: Queering Genres. In T. Bradway, & E. (. McCallum, *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century* (pp. 171-187). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shildrick, M. (2002). *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: Sage Publications.
- Shugart, H. A. (2010). Consuming Passions: "Educating Desire" in Brokeback Mountain. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 173-192.

- Sontag, S. (1999). Notes on 'Camp'. In F. Cleto (Ed.), *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (pp. 53-65). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1987). Can the Subaltern Speak? In C. Nelson, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Staiger, J. (2005). *Media Reception Studies*. New York: New York University Press.
- Stallybrass, P., & White, A. (1986). *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Straayer, C. (1996). *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-orientations in Film and Video*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Telotte, J. (1991). Beyond All Reason: The Nature of the Cult. In J. Telotte (Ed.), *The Cult Film Experience: Beyond All Reason*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Tomkins, S. (1963). *Affect Imagery Consciousness, Volume II: The Negative Effects*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2016, May 11). *A Timeline of HIV and AIDS*. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from HIV.gov: <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline>
- Van Meter, J. (2006, November 16). Party Boy in a Cage. *New York*.
- Van Sant, G. (Director). (2008). *Milk* [Motion Picture].
- Walton, S. (2018). Cruising the unknown: film as rhythm and embodied apprehension in L'Inconnu du lac/ Stranger by the Lake (2013). *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 238-263.
- Waters, J. (Director). (1972). *Pink Flamingos* [Motion Picture]. New Line Cinema.
- Waters, J. (1988). *Trash Trio: Three Screenplays*. London: Forth Estate.
- Waters, J. (2005). *Shock Value: A Tasteful Book About Bad Taste*. Philadelphia: Running Press.
- Watney, S. (1987). *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media* (3rd Edition ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weinberg, G. (1973). *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. New York: Doubleday.
- Weinstock, J. A. (2012). *The Vampire Film: Undead Cinema*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Williams, L. (1991). Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess. *Film Quarterly*, 2-13.
- Williams, L. (2014). Cinema's Sex Acts. *Film Quarterly*, 9-25.

- Wills, D., & Roberts, T. (2017). Desiring Monsters: Femininity, Radical Incontinence, and Monstrous Appetite in *Ginger Snaps*, *Jennifer's Body*, and *Deadgirl*. *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, 1-31.
- Wolff, M. (1975, Sep 7). So What Do You Do at Midnight? You See a Trashy Movie. *New York Times*.
- Wood, J. (2015, September 22). 'Showgirls': Paul Verhoeven on the Greatest Stripper Movie Ever Made. *Rolling Stone*.
- Wood, R. (1986). "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s". In R. Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (pp. 63-84). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wood, R. (2018). An Introduction to the American Horror Film. In B. K. Grant, *Robin Wood On the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews* (pp. 73-110). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Wyman, B. (2015, October 16). "Why *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* Still Matters 40 Years Later". Retrieved March 15, 2017, from Vulture: www.vulture.com/2015/10/why-the-rocky-horror-picture-show-still-matters.html