

Off-Cuts:
Gay Masculinity in
Queer Horror Film and Television
since 2000

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Abstract

This thesis highlights the limits of a metaphorical understanding of homosexuality in the horror film in an age where its presence has become explicit. Extending on Harry M. Benshoff's work on homosexual representation in *Monsters in the Closet* (1997) this thesis argues that, post 2000, the horror genre has developed to include representations of gay masculinity that point to a queer horror aesthetic where homosexuality is often unequivocally referenced. My hypothesis is that queer horror and its representations of gay masculinity reveals more about gay male anxieties in the early twenty-first century than heterosexual ones. Queer horror focuses on gay men's anxieties about their judgement by heteronormative standards and often encourage a homo-normative apeing of heterosexual culture, feeding further anxieties surrounding the cultural conflation of gay masculinity with a shameful femininity. In departing from the analysis of the queer monster as a symbol of heterosexual anxiety and fear, this study moves the discussion forward to focus instead on the anxieties *within* gay male subcultures.

Queer horror designates horror that is crafted by male directors/producers who identify as gay, bi, queer or transgendered and whose work features homoerotic, or explicitly homosexual, narratives with 'out' gay characters. The thesis considers video art horror (*Indelible* (Charles Lum, US 2004)); independently distributed exploitation films; direct to video, low-budget slashers (*Hellbent* (Etheredge-Outzs, US 2007)); pornographic gay zombie films (*Otto, or; up With Dead People* (Bruce LaBruce, CA/GE 2008)); and art house horror (*Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, SE 2009)). Employing psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva), critical cultural commentary (Leo Bersani) as well as close readings of classic and cult horror, this

thesis argues that queer horror projects contemporary anxieties *within* gay male subcultures onto its characters and into its narratives, building upon the figurative role of gay monstrosity.

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Introduction

The horror film's representation of the 'Other' has long been understood to be a symbolic representation of social ills, anxieties and unease. Non-normative sexuality (bi- and homosexuality) is often chief among these concerns. Scholars including Robin Wood, Carol Clover, Richard Dyer, Ellis Hanson, Judith Halberstam and Harry M. Benshoff¹ have covered significant ground in their respective analyses of homosexuality in the history of the horror genre. Their findings suggest that much of its representation has been symbolic or implicit, whereby homosexuality must be teased out of its place in the shadows via queer interpretation. Academic studies of male homosexuality in horror have been focused on gay masculinity as sub-textual and symbolic in relation to the genre's presumed adolescent heterosexual male target audience, which Carol J. Clover suggests is made up of 'a preponderance of young males' (1992: 6). These considerations have often discussed the threat that queer, gay and lesbian sexualities pose to the assumed heterosexual spectator². Traditionally attributed to the monstrous, whether connoted, displayed or alluded to, homosexuality is presented as abnormal, predatory and evil, leading Benshoff to conclude that:

[...] until society at large begins to realize and understand the signs and signifying practices of the horror movie contribute to the social understanding of homosexuality, the construct of the monster queer [...] will continue to oppress many members of society. (274).

Conversely, the study of monstrous homosexuality in the horror film has also revealed the celebratory pleasures offered to queer, gay and lesbian viewers' oppositional identification with the very same monsters that threaten the norm. Yet, the vast majority of such studies have to first make the leap of reading the *symbolic* homosexual potential of the films' monsters; few consider the *explicit* presentation of gay villains and victims alike.

The purpose of this thesis is *not* to reiterate the argument that homosexuality is a key element in the study of the horror genre; rather, it highlights the limits of a metaphorical understanding of homosexuality in the horror film in an age where its presence has become more explicit. It extends Benschoff's substantive work in *Monsters in the Closet* (1997) beyond his study's conclusion in the late 1990s. Benschoff's study proves that while homosexuality may indeed be symbolically present in horror film, it still 'dare not speak its name'. Homosexuality either bleeds into the film extra-textually via the authorial expressivity of their gay and lesbian directors, writers or producers (such as F.W. Murnau, James Whale, Joel Schumacher or Stephanie Rothman) or it is read into the film via subversive, ironic reading strategies or a camp appreciation of the films themselves. Though this study acknowledges both the continuing appropriation of the 1976 classic horror film *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, US) by the gay community and horror fans and lastly on Tomas Alfredson's queer-infused vampire film *Let the Right One In* (2009) (both

heterosexual-identified directors), its main focus rests on representations of masculinity and *gay* male spectatorship in queer horror film and television post-2000. In titling this sub-genre 'queer horror', I am designating horror that is crafted by male directors/producers who self-identify as gay, bi, queer or transgendered and whose work features homoerotic, or explicitly homosexual, narratives with 'out' gay characters. This thesis will consider video art horror (*Indelible* (Charles Lum, US 2004)); independently distributed exploitation films (such as those directed by David DeCoteau); direct to video, low-budget slashers (*Hellbent* (Etheredge-Outzs, US 2007)); pornographic gay zombie films (*Otto, or; up With Dead People* (Bruce LaBruce, CA/GE 2008)); and queer-infused art house horror (*Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, SE 2009))³.

My hypothesis is that queer horror and its representations of gay masculinity (whether it be via their monsters, victims or their victim-hero figures) reveals more about gay male anxieties in the early twenty-first century than heterosexual ones. More specifically, this thesis will argue that queer appropriations of horror conventions foreground gay men's anxieties about their judgement by heteronormative standards. These anxieties encourage a homonormative apeing of heterosexual culture which, in turn, feeds further anxieties surrounding the cultural conflation of gay masculinity with a shameful femininity. In departing from the analysis of the queer monster as a symbol of heterosexual anxiety and fear, this

study moves the discussion forward to focus instead on the anxieties *within* gay subcultures. Close textual analysis and the application of key psychoanalytic theories to particular examples will reinterpret the conceptual language of horror film theory to highlight certain pervasive gay male anxieties. Furthermore, this study investigates the effects of contemporary queer horror's foregrounding of sexual difference in its 'out', but not necessarily proud, portrayal of gay and bisexual masculinity. When monstrousness as a metaphor for the threat homosexuality poses to heteronormativity ceases to be coded and instead becomes open, then what does it *mean*?

Gay and Lesbian Theory/Queer Theory

In regard to this thesis's critical approach, I want to draw a distinction between gay and lesbian studies and queer studies, both interrelated and divergent approaches to cultural studies. Whitney Davis suggests that, as a project, gay and lesbian studies endeavours '[to present and rectify] important but little known or new evidence' (1994: 2) of gay and lesbian visibility which investigates artistic and cultural texts and imagery in order to amend a historical account which has largely excluded homosexuality from study. Davis continues that the large majority of art history has been 'so constructed, arranged and published that materials of direct interest to lesbian and gay studies have often literally dropped out of immediate view or have completely disappeared' (2). Gay and lesbian studies seeks

to restore the visibility of a gay and lesbian social group to culture and is inclusive and reparative in its intent.

Queer theory takes an alternative path, focusing instead on the stigmatisation of non-normative sexualities (including, but not exclusive to, same sex desire) and views the project of their integration and inclusion into the mainstream as a process of cultural normalisation or assimilation.

I want to define queer along the same lines as Benschoff (1997), in that it represents:

an oxymoronic community of difference [...] unified only by a shared dissent from the dominant organization of sex and gender [...] homosexuality should be understood as part of a continuum of human behaviours, not as a monolithic, preformed, static identity.
(256)

Queer theory then, seeks to investigate, and therefore trouble, the ways in which the structures of heteronormativity pervade culture. Instead of attempting only to address the imbalance of scholarly attention through revisionist acknowledgement of gay and lesbian artists and filmmakers, queer theory questions the broader regulation of sex and gender. In terms of this dissertation's approach towards a consideration of homosexuality in the horror film, taking a gay and lesbian approach would involve analysing and charting gay horror as an independent set of aesthetic conventions and visual language. This would suggest a sub-genre specifically designed *for* gay male spectators whose project would be the introduction of gay characters, plots, themes, actors, directors and producers into a mainstream horror genre. Conversely, a queer approach

aims to engender an understanding of the visual field and themes of heteronormative film and, with it, the assumptions through which compulsory heterosexuality is re-secured.

Compulsory heterosexuality is understood by Adrienne Rich in 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980) as the assumption of heterosexuality as the innate and natural form of human desire. This assumption compounds the inequality of power that is perpetuated between the sexes and, further still, between heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality. A queer approach allows for an investigation into the role that the stigmatised gay male subject plays in the construction of this heteronormativity and, more specifically, the ways in which homosexuality's stigmatisation is visualised both from within and without its sub-culture. Admittedly, the focus on gay men in this study is more identarian than the term 'queer' might suggest; however, the texts under consideration extend beyond gay cultural identity to represent their protagonists as, variously, 'men', 'bisexual men' and 'gay men' and present their sexuality as fittingly fluid. My use of queer theory emphasises that the use of horror by queer directors and spectators alike allows for a fluid experience where viewers are able to take up positions of desire and undergo identificatory processes which are either unavailable or denied to them in heteronormative cinema.

Throughout this thesis I will refer to the terms normative/non-normative and heteronormativity (and later homonormativity) frequently. My adoption of these terms refers to the regulating effect of the assumption that biological sex dictates gender roles and sexual desire. Robert Corber and Stephen Valocchi define heteronormativity as ‘the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organise homosexuality as its binary opposite’ (2003: 4). Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner suggest further that heteronormativity can be understood as ‘the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is organised as a sexuality – but also privileged’ (1998: 565). Traditional gender traits feed into heteronormative structures, ensuring the continuance of heterosexuality along binary oppositions of active-male/passive-female. Heteronormativity positions the gay man as feminine, as the ‘abnormality’ of his gender (perceived as feminine-masculine) seems to uphold the assumed deviancy of his sexuality and gives credence to the heterosexual man’s performance of masculinity.

In *Responsibilities of a Gay Film Critic* (1978), Robin Wood’s comments on the conditional acceptance of homosexuality into mainstream culture are relevant for this thesis’s understanding of homonormativity. He maintains that the norms of Western culture in relation to heterosexual love are marriage (legal, heterosexual monogamy) and the nuclear family and that ‘the possibility that people might relate freely to each other on a non-pairing basis’ is determined as ‘promiscuity’. He goes on to state that

the choices offered to homosexuals as 'acceptable' are 'the apeing of heterosexual marriage and family (with poodles instead of children) or l'amour fou, preferably culminating in suicide or alcoholism'. Yet Wood continues that 'acceptance of the homosexual by society has its obvious corollary and condition: acceptance of society by the homosexual' (1978: 13).

In *Homos* (1995), Leo Bersani also considers the effects of homosexuality's increased visibility and cultural acceptance in more recent years and the impact this has had upon gay male representation in Western society. The exultant claim of gay protest groups that 'We are everywhere' (1995: 32) has been contradicted by cultural assimilation, resulting in a destruction of gay identity: 'We are nowhere'. In acquiring social acceptance, homosexuals are argued to have 'degayed' their culture, risking a form of 'self-erasure [that] reconfirms the inferior position within a homophobic system of difference' (1995: 43). Bersani's consideration of this 'gay absence' is useful for this thesis's analysis of the queer use of horror in recent years, together with Lisa Duggan's critique of the recent rise of a more assimilative homonormativity, which she defines as:

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a...gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (2003: 179)

Duggan argues that this process constitutes to the 'good gay subject', whose relationships are built upon 'monogamy, devotion, maintaining privacy and propriety'. The consequence is a hierarchy of 'worthiness' with those that identify as transgender, transsexual, bi-sexual or non-gendered deemed less entitled to legal rights than those in relationships that mirror heterosexual marriage. According to Duggan, within the male homosexual community, homonormativity idealises homogenous 'straight acting' stable relationships founded on shared property. In relation to this, I will argue that the representation of gay masculinity, in what I term 'Gaysploitation horror', is curiously chaste, non-confrontational and assimilative, where homosexuality remains incidental to plot, and where characters' sexualities are secondary to genre conventions. This is also achieved by the same gay characters' adoption of macho performance (coded heterosexual), which replaces stereotypical femininity with an equally stereotyped gay masculinity.

Judith Butler's concept of the 'performative' nature of gender is entirely relevant to this thesis's consideration of an excessively theatricalised gay masculinity. Butler argues that the supposed biology of binary gender is constructed via the repetition of acts and behaviours where social performance creates gender, a performance which imitates culturally prescribed and impossible ideals. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), she exemplifies this performativity in:

[...] acts, gestures and desire [that] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the

body...such acts, gestures, enactments generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (Butler, 1990: 173)

Focusing on the fragility of gender performance, she asserts that the possibilities for a transformation of gender are found in a 'failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition' (1990: 141). In queer horror, the fragmented and parodic⁴ qualities of gay masculine and feminine performance clearly highlight gender's imitative elements. Queer horror's gender play can challenge supposedly natural gender binaries but can also function to repress and *cover up* anxieties about failed masculinity and the stigma attached to homosexual desire.

Cinematic masculinity is conventionally *impenetrable* in a physical and sexual sense, as opposed to the patriarchal view of the feminine subject as penetrable. Heteronormative culture demands the gay man's penetrability in order to place him within the symbolic phallic order. The valorisation of impenetrability is traced back by Kenneth Dover in *Greek Homosexuality* (1978) to the norms of classical Greek masculinity.

Dover's study of homosexuality in ancient Greece concludes that sex between an active male lover (erastes) and a younger male lover (eromenos) was accepted and, furthermore, often celebrated as an alternative to sexual contact with noble women outside of marriage. Yet even the acceptance of the male/male relationship would often emphasize the triumphant masculinity of the penetrating partner, while

clearly stigmatising what Dover calls 'homosexual submission' ([1978] 1989: 106). In these circumstances, according to Dover, 'Greek sex' (where the active male would seemingly 'penetrate' the closed thighs of the younger male in a standing position) would ultimately be preferred over the more culturally subordinated 'adoption of a bent or lowered position, reception of another man's penis in the anus or mouth'. Dover concludes, specifically in relation to sodomy, that:

homosexual anal penetration is treated [...] as an aggressive act demonstrating the superiority of the active to the passive partner, to choose to be treated as an object at the disposal of another citizen was to resign one's own standing as a citizen. ([1978] 1989: 104)

In a culture in which conventional masculinity was still highly prized, graphic depictions or imaginings of 'wanton' homosexual anality or orality support the active-passive binary of normative gender relations.

The association of femininity with homosexuality need not be bound to penetration since many gay men choose not to partake in it. Merely *desiring* other men opens up the male subject to a shameful conflation with femininity regardless of sexual practice. Yet gay men may also dis-identify with femininity and resist association with the cultural denigration of passivity and powerlessness that women are made to bear. As such, gay masculinity is situated somewhere along a socially-constructed binary of femininity and masculinity, with anal receptivity marking an extreme submission, which Leo Bersani remarks as akin to 'being a woman' ([1987], 2010: 29). In *Disidentifications* (1999), Jose Muñoz

explores the practice by which subjects outside of a racial or sexual majority negotiate with dominant culture by transforming, reworking and appropriating ideological impositions from the mainstream:

Disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology...It is a reformatting of self within the social, a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification. (1999: 91)

In terms of gay male identification, the subject simultaneously recognises himself in the image of an unattainable phallic masculine ideal (symbolised in the heterosexual male) but also acknowledges that it is different *from* his homosexual self. Of particular interest are the anxieties that arise from gay men's negotiation with the phallus as a symbol of idealised masculinity. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (1988) define the phallus in psychoanalytic terms as that 'which underlines the symbolic function of the penis in the intra- and inter-subjective dialectic, the term "penis" itself tending to be reserved for the organ thought of in its anatomical reality' (312). Here they take a Lacanian approach to the understanding of the phallus as that which 'lays emphasis on the symbolic value of the penis' (312). Jacques Lacan argues that the penis is not the phallus and rejects the phallus's biological base, reconsidering it as the 'signifier of desire' ([1958] 2001: 216) in relation to the formation of subjectivity through language. For the purposes of this thesis, I wish to define the phallus as an ever-elusive signifier of authority within the symbolic patriarchal order that defines language, society and subjectivity.

According to Leo Bersani (1987), in the adoption of the gay-macho style, the gay man ([1987] 2010: 13) aspires to an idealised image of masculinity, that in its purest sense, is symbolised in phallic masculinity that is coded macho and heterosexual . I want to define this as hypermasculinity, that is, the exaggerated performance of manliness or machismo. Across the thesis, examples of such gay masculine parade include: the exaggeration of macho traits (as seen in Joe Gage's pornographic films like *LA Tool And Die* (US 1979), referenced in Charles Lum's *Indelible*, *Hellbent's* parody of Tom of Finland stereotypes; the 'straight-acting'⁵ characters featured in DeCoteau's Rapid Heart cycle; and the skin-head influenced gay zombies in LaBruce's *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* (2010)). In reply to Jeffrey Weeks' (1995) claim that the adoption of the gay macho style 'gnaws at the roots of a male heterosexual identity' (191), Bersani argues that the gay male who adopts this demeanour, 'intends to pay worshipful tribute to the style and behaviour he defiles'. He continues that if 'gay men gnaw at the roots of male heterosexual identity', it is not because of the parodic distance that they take from that identity, but rather that, from 'their nearly mad identification with it, they never cease to feel the appeal of its being violated' (15).

Bersani's consideration of the gay obsessive worship of masculinity, so often represented in the form of straight machismo, together with the disavowal of femininity, is useful for this thesis's analysis of the gender

anxieties evident in the queer horror film. Though this thesis focuses on the representation of homosexuality that is, for the most part, explicitly declared, that is not to suggest that the type of gay male subjectivity depicted is unapologetic, confident and proud. HereTV!'s gay Gothic horror soaps, *Dante's Cove* and *The Lair* (US 2005-2010) and gay slasher *Hellbent*, for example, present gay protagonists who are unmistakably queer, yet their dialogue often shies away from explicitly announcing itself as 'gay' or 'queer', and straight-acting performance styles pervade these texts. This would seem to support Bersani's acknowledgement of a parodic, 'worshipful tribute' to a macho masculinity that, he argues, is defiled. However closer analysis shows that the satirical potential of the macho performance in queer horror is often overwhelmed by the erotic potency of its portrayal of machismo, which seems to function as a masquerade-like disavowal of shameful feminine association. In queer horror gay subjectivity is often fashioned by dis-identifications with both female *and* male subjectivity.

Psychoanalysis and Horror

Psychoanalysis can shed light on the aesthetic experience that queer horror offers the gay spectator. This thesis re-reads the psychoanalytic concepts of trauma, masochism and the primal fantasies alongside two of Sigmund Freud's case studies ('The Wolf Man' in *A History of Infantile Neurosis* [1918] and 'Little Hans' in *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year*

Old Boy [1909]) while also taking in Julia Kristeva's concepts of abjection. The subject and object of analysis are constructed through these psychoanalytic theories, later Laplanche and Bersani's own critical and cultural commentaries on these works will be investigated alongside the application of psychoanalytic concepts such as masochism by horror film theorists Carol Clover, Peter Hutchings and Barbara Creed. But here it is important to acknowledge the difficulties of interpreting unconscious investments in gender and sexuality, where homosexuality does not remain at the margins of symbolism and metaphor but is rendered explicit. As such, this thesis is not bound to an uncritical reliance on psychoanalytic readings of the films and their representations of gay masculinity.

In the foreword to *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmares* (2004), Robin Wood acknowledges the criticism lodged against his own application of psychoanalysis to the horror genre when he states:

Freudian theory is vulnerable to attack on many points, but not, in my opinion, on [...] the theory of repression and the 'return of the repressed.' (2004: xv)

Furthermore, he suggests that psychoanalysis 'continues to have great resonance in relation to the horror film but only insofar as it is melded with a political awareness' (2004: xv). Steven Jay Schneider concurs with Wood in recognising the usefulness of psychoanalysis to an

understanding of horror, while also acknowledging the same complications:

Psychoanalysis nevertheless succeeds in providing insight into many of the figures of horror – not so much into what they metaphorically mean as into what they literally say, or at least suggest, in terms taken from the language of Gothic fantasy, childhood nightmare, popular culture and the cinema itself. (Schneider, 2004: 9)

Psychoanalytic readings of the selected films in this thesis will assist in offering an explanation as to the symbolic function of the horrors and anxieties at work within the complex symbolism of the film text. However, these readings will also rely on close textual analysis and interviews with the directors and producers of these films, who themselves invest⁶, to a varying degree, Freudian theory in relation to the horror film into their work. Accordingly, each detailed film analysis illuminates and tests the limits of the psychoanalytic and critical concepts that it draws upon.

a) Sexuality and Trauma

Trauma, here understood psychoanalytically as an influx of excitation that exceeds the physical subject's capacity to tolerate (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2004: 415), can be considered in relation to the suffering depicted in queer horror and in the traumatic witnessing of eroticised violence exhibited on screen. Such 'traumatic' experiences find expression in queer horror films in relation to the apprehension of sexual difference and the stigmatisation of gay sex as deviant and, in the case of

anal sex, physically and psychically painful⁷. The horror genre's visual conflation of traumatic suffering and death with sex supports the masochistic pleasures of horror spectatorship and, as such, resonates with the seemingly traumatic qualities of sex and sexuality as outlined in psychoanalysis.

In *Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality* (1968), Laplanche and Pontalis state that Freud was 'concerned theoretically to justify the connection he had discovered between sexuality, trauma and defense: to show that it is in the very nature of sexuality to have a traumatic effect' (4). They define psychological trauma as relating to 'an event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's inability to respond adequately to it and by the upheaval and long lasting effects that it brings about in psychological organisation' (2004: 465). This need not refer to sexual abuse: in its normal handling by parents and caregivers, the infant can experience an influx of physical excitations that are excessive and perturbing. Unable to process them, the subject can experience a permanent disturbance (1968: 2-4).

In relation to this processing of infantile trauma, Freud's early works on the seduction theory in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896) maintain that his female patients' hysterical symptoms resulted from recollections of early childhood sexual abuse. In his 1896 study he concludes that the elements of excitation suffered by the infant

in the its early life were initially experienced as perturbing rather than arousing, and were only sexualised in retrospect through association with conscious excitation ([1896] 1994: 204-5). In 'A History of the Psychoanalytic Movement' (1914), Freud concludes that, 'If hysterical subjects trace back their symptoms to traumas that are fictitious, then the new fact which emerges is precisely that they create such scenes in fantasy' ([1914], 1957: 17-18). This revision led Freud to develop his work on fantasy in his later theories of infantile sexuality. Laplanche and Pontalis understand fantasy as deriving from the German 'Phantasie', which they define as a term 'used to denote the imagination' (1968: 1). They continue that 'there are three kinds of phenomena: material reality, the reality of intermediate thoughts...and the reality of unconscious wishes and their "truest shape": fantasy' (1968: 3). In *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, they later define it as an 'imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes' (2005: 314). The seduction fantasy is later reworked in Freud's 'A Case of Paranoia' (1915) to incorporate a scene whereby the child desires to seduce or be seduced by the parent. Here Freud mainly outlines the importance that seduction plays in the care of the infantile subject by the mother during the pre-Oedipal period. Laplanche and Pontalis define the pre-Oedipal as 'the period of psychosexual development preceding the formation of the Oedipus

complex; during this period attachment to the mother predominates in both sexes' (2005: 328).

In 'On The Sexual Theories of Children' (1908), Freud outlines the importance of trauma in the child's interpretation of certain events which informs the emergence of sexuality including: the difference between the sexes as construed by the child's perception of genital divergence; an understanding of how children are conceived; and thirdly, an understanding of the sexual relationship between mother and father as a violent and 'sadistic theory of coitus' ([1908], 1991: 199). In 'A Case of Paranoia' (1915), these theories are developed further and set as primal fantasies, implying that they are fundamental to human subjectivity.

These comprise: the fantasy of seduction (related to the origin of sexuality); the fantasy of the primal scene (the origin of the individual); and the fantasy of castration (the origins of sexual difference). The primal scene centres upon the infant's witnessing of sexual intercourse between its parents. Whether or not this 'witnessing' is based on actuality (a real event) or a fantasy (based on a fiction) is never fully outlined by Freud. In 1908, he first mentions 'extremely obscure memories of parental intercourse, for which the child had obtained the material – though at the time he had made no use of it' ([1908] 1991: 199). As a consequence, the child understands the act of sexual coition with a 'sadistic view', later comparing it to aggressive playground play in which the stronger child overpowers a weaker one. As a result, the infant interprets 'the act of love

as an act of violence' ([1908], 1991: 198), whereby the scene is construed as an attack on the mother by the more powerful father.

The primal scene also gives rise to the understanding of sexual difference via the castration complex. It is notable that Freud first discusses the castration complex in his 1908 essay suggesting that:

the child having been mainly dominated by excitations in the penis, will usually have obtained pleasure by stimulating it with his hand; he will have been detected in this by his parents or nurse and terrorized by the threat of having his penis cut off. The effect of this 'threat of castration' is proportionate to the value set upon that organ and is quite extraordinarily deep and persistent [and gives rise to] the upheaval in the child's emotional life and to the horror which is linked with the castration complex ([1908], 1991: 195).

In regard to castration, Freud explicitly references the issue of homosexuality, firstly around the configuration of the phallic mother:

If this idea of a woman with a penis becomes 'fixated' in an individual when he is a child [...] making him as a man unable to do without a penis in his sexual object, then [...] he is bound to become a homosexual and will seek his sexual object among men who [...] remind him of women [...] Real women, when he comes to know them later [...] remain impossible as sexual object for him [...] they may even become abhorrent to him. ([1908], 1991: 194)

Freud claims that, 'the woman's genitalia, when seen later on [may] recall this threat [of castration] and they therefore arouse horror instead of pleasure in the homosexual.' ([1908], 1991: 195).

For Freud, responses to the trauma of sexual difference also remain different *between* the sexes. In his later work 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes' (1925), Freud argues that that the boy initially fears castration as a paternal

punishment for his burgeoning sexuality. The girl, on the other hand, understands castration as an existing injury, a wrong visited on her at a younger age, which she attempts either to compensate for or deny and which 'develops, like a scar [giving rise to] a sense of inferiority.' ([1925], 1991: 337). The male child experiences this sexual difference as castration anxiety fearing the same punishment may be exacted upon him. This informs his understanding of a monstrous femininity both castrated and uncastrated and, consequently has a detrimental effect on his relations with women.

Freud revisits castration anxiety throughout his subsequent case studies *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year Old Boy* (1909) and later in *A History of Infantile Neurosis* (1918), which represent the father as the chief castrating threat. In summary, Freud suggests that the boy surrenders his erotic desire for the mother, whom he understands to be castrated, as a result of the father's confirmation that women do not possess a penis. In the 1918 case of 'The Wolf Man' (discussed in chapters four and six), the castration anxiety brought on by the patient's witnessing of the primal scene as a child (from which he initially deduces his mother's castration) results in a recurring dream in which he sees a tree outside his bedroom window, in the branches of which sit many white wolves that threaten to devour him. In a lengthy case history, Freud charts his patient's defence of his own masculinity against his desire to be penetrated like his mother by his father:

His relationship with his father, which should have led from the sexual objective of being punished by him to the next objective, that of being taken in sexual intercourse by his father, like a woman, was thrown back onto a more primitive level still by the protest of his narcissistic masculinity [...] From the time of his dream onwards he was unconsciously homosexual. ([1918], 2002: 263)

Here Freud suggests that the Wolf Man's suppressed 'negative' Oedipus complex, his 'wish for coitus with the father' ([1918], 2002: 240), masochistically identifies him with his 'castrated' mother during the dream. The intricacies of the castration complex, particularly in relation to the feminine masochism implied in identification with the castrated mother and the subject's repressed homosexual love for the father, can be seen to recur in queer horror

b) Sexuality and Masochism

Laplanche and Pontalis define masochism as: 'a sexual perversion in which the satisfaction is tied to the suffering or humiliation undergone by the subject' (2004: 244). Through his initial discussions in 'Three Essays on Sexuality' (1905) and 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915), Freud ties masochism closely to what he terms 'primary sadism' ([1915] 1984: 124-126). This initial form of sadism is defined as non-sexual, a basic aggression that is not attached to any sexual function or associated with an enjoyment of suffering. It is directed outwards by the subject in order to achieve individuation via the instinct to master, to gain control over other objects and situations. As for masochism, Freud initially argues that it is the 'turning around [of sadism] upon the subject's own self', whereby the aim of the instinct changes from desiring to control into desiring to be

controlled. Only with the emergence of masochism does this desire become sexual. Activity is turned into passivity in the instinct's reversal into its opposite and 'the masochist shares in the enjoyment of the assault upon himself'.

Freud goes even further to state that the two perversions are bound together in the subject's own enjoyment of suffering, either inflicting it or having it inflicted upon themselves:

When one's feeling pain has become a masochistic aim, the sadistic aim of causing pains can arise retrogressively, for while these pains are being inflicted upon other people, they are enjoyed masochistically by the subject through his identification with the suffering object. ([1915] 1984: 126)

In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), Freud begins to explore the idea of a 'primary masochism' and, as he does so, he articulates its relationship to the death instinct. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, the death instincts are opposed to the life instincts because they, 'strive towards the reduction of tensions towards a zero point [...] to bring the living being back to the inorganic state' (97). At first Freud states that this death instinct is directed inwards towards the self and takes the form of a self-destructive impulse. According to Freud the libido tackles these urges by rendering them less harmful for the subject. It does this by projecting aggressive energies and the 'destructive instinct' outwards onto external objects. It is when this act serves the purpose of a sexual instinct that Freud considers it to be 'sadism proper'. Primary erotogenic masochism, on the other hand, arises from the quotient of death instinct that is not

projected outwards; it remains within the subject and is libidinally bound there. Freud further elaborates this understanding of masochism in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924) by defining three types of masochism: (1) erotogenic masochism as 'a condition imposed on sexual excitation...which lies at the bottom of the other two forms'; (2) feminine masochism as an 'expression of the feminine nature' including a feminisation of men which places the subject in 'a characteristically feminine situation' and (3) moral masochism, an 'aspect of behaviour' which is not necessarily sexual in basis but whereby 'a sense of guilt finds expression in the manifest context of masochism phantasies'. This 'unconscious sense of guilt' is more easily and clearly represented by the term 'need for punishment' ([1924] 1984: 421). He further states that 'even the subject's destruction of himself cannot take place without libidinal satisfaction' (421). The logical solution to the masochistic urge is the destruction of the self, be it either in literal or symbolic terms, and it has to be sated with an erotic satisfaction.

Leo Bersani grounds his theory of sexuality in the unbearable, frightening and inassimilable stimuli that cause infantile trauma, concluding that all sexuality is a 'tautology for masochism' (1986: 39). In *The Freudian Body* (1984), he suggests, by way of Laplanche's re-reading of Freud in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1985), that the infantile experience of physical excitation as invasive (and at the time of initial pre-sexual experience, meaningless) causes:

A pleasurable unpleasurable tension which occurs when the body's 'normal' range of sensation is exceeded, and when the organisation of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations, somehow beyond those compatible with psychical organisation. (Bersani, 1984: 38).

Bersani asserts that sexual pleasure enters the Freudian scheme allied with suffering. Masochism is the ecstatic pleasure or *jouissance*⁸ experienced when the body is temporarily pushed beyond its thresholds of intensity. Bersani then goes on to eroticise this aggression and dominance, referring to it as a 'shattering of the self' (38).

Later, in 'Is the Rectum A Grave?' (1987), Bersani acknowledges the devastating effects of the AIDS epidemic to gay culture and begins to formulate his account of gay sex as particularly masochistic. For Bersani, gay sex possesses a shattering potential that offers the *jouissance* of exploded limits and provides a powerfully rapturous ecstasy found in 'that sexual pleasure which occurs whenever a certain threshold of intensity is reached' (38). Bersani's article is influential in relation to this thesis's investigation of the appeal of horror – where sex and death are perpetually conflated symbolically and literally, and in which fucking and killing are masochistically coded. Bersani's feminisation of the gay subject, and its later re-masculinisation, connects with this thesis's analysis of queer horror's anxieties around masculinity. Bersani's polemic attempts to question the options available to gay men during the early 1980s' AIDS epidemic, when gays were widely stigmatised as carriers of disease. He questions whether the traumatic exposure to AIDS will lead either to a

new era of gay liberalism which will valorise pair bonding and community or, whether it reaffirms the liberating potential of gay male promiscuity as 'anticonmunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving' (22). Gay men's overwhelming 'idolatry of the cock' (29) is said to lead to a traumatic conflation of sex and death.

In contrast to his earlier positing of all sexuality as traumatic in *The Freudian Body*, Bersani (1987) now argues that gay anal sex is even more 'self-shattering' since the gay man's 'powerless' submission enables endless penetrations. Bersani chooses to revere the revolutionary and liberating aspects of receptive gay anality over that of the woman's, or straight male's, but not before he connects the infectious gay man with the figure of the syphilitic Victorian female prostitute discussed in Simon Watney's *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (1987), from which he also takes his title in Watney's questioning of the homophobic description of the gay rectum as a grave. Associating gay male penetrability with the supine position of the female prostitute, Bersani draws parallels between their Victorian representation as nihilistically infectious, concluding that gay men too share this 'unquenchable appetite for destruction' ([1987] 2010: 18). Both the fatal prostitute and the infected gay man are linked to masochism via an 'infinitely more seductive and intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman'. That same masculinity is shattered in the act of anal penetration, which he

links, by analogy, to the feminine supine position. The 'lustful self abolition' ([1987] 2010: 29). of gay penetrability results in the traumatising annihilation of proud masculinity, but the heroism of this ordeal is not granted to heterosexual or lesbian penetration, whether vaginal or anal.

Essentially, Bersani's argument reinforces the heteronormative association of male anality with the self-annihilation attributed to cross-gender identification with female sexuality. Yet he also asserts gay men's 'almost mad identification' with the phallus (or idealised masculinity in its symbolic form) as another method of self-immolation. For Bersani, the phallus is a symbolic feature that only macho men are able to access; the 'identification' is troubled, as the argument relies on an idealised straight masculinity that the gay subject fetishises as similar to, yet different, from himself.

In summary, Bersani defines the gay male sexual position as an inherently passive and masochistic one. He conflates an anally receptive or penetrated sexual position with a subordinated cultural and political position, where 'to be penetrated is to abdicate power' (1987: 19).

Replying to Watney's questioning of the 'rectum as a grave', Bersani reinterprets its morbid potential as liberating:

If the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal [the phallus symbolized by heterosexual masculinity] (an ideal shared differently by men and women) of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death. (1987: 29).

His argument concludes that 'male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self dismissal, of *losing sight* of the self, and in doing so it proposes and dangerously represents jouissance as a mode of asceticism' (1987: 30), that is, as an ecstatic means towards self-denial.

This thesis argues that the masochistic spectatorial experience offered by the horror film offers a comparable loss of self, with the pornographic display in queer horror strengthening the parallels between eroticism and death.

Despite Bersani's claim that proud male subjectivity is buried in the honest acceptance of the gay man's masochistic desire to be fucked and to worship the phallus, his assertion is inevitably linked to heteronormative sexual polarities and serves to constrain his understanding of gay masculinity. Bersani's theory is based upon the inevitability of 'top' and 'bottom', and the power relations that are inherent in these positions. His argument is directed only at anal penetration; he dismisses other forms of sexual relations, including oral sex and mutual masturbation, as merely delaying the penetration of the gay body.

In 'Savage Nights' (2000), Mandy Merck critiques Bersani's essay and argues that his previous consideration of all sexuality as masochistic is now altered to attribute a greater masochism to homosexuality, and, even more so, to male homosexuality. According to Merck, Bersani's paralleling of heterosexual women and homosexual men seems to suit his argument, yet he nevertheless ascribes a sacrificial and heroic

rhetoric to gay anal sex - leaving aside any of the same value in vaginal sex. She asks whether Bersani's championing of rectal sex as destructive may, in fact, be based on a presumption that the 'male "femininity" is butcher than its female equivalent, precisely because the subject's masculinity is at stake?' (157). Merck reads Bersani's celebration of gay promiscuity in wanton, anal abandonment as a means through which gay 'femininity [can] attain to the condition of its opposite, allowing the gay subject both his horror *feminae* and his de-gendering adoration of the phallus' (158). She offers a counter reading informed by Bersani's own understanding of penetrative sex as 'self-hyperbole' that offers a 'psychic tumescence'. (218). Merck sees Bersani's argument:

not as the funeral of the phallus, but rather as its resurrection...Nothing in the anal receptivity of the penetrated male precludes its possession in actuality, let alone his identification with its potency. For what is all this talk of its 'shattering' and 'annihilating' powers but phallic narcissism by other means? (165).

Thus Bersani's self-annihilating fusion of sex and death is understood by Merck as 'the author's expression of love for those he suffers with, the victims of the epidemic, the dead he would have rise again...' (174), and she sees beneath his fatalistic language conversely as 'a wish for life' (165). This thesis will examine the disavowal of shameful femininity present in Bersani's work and apply it to an analysis of queer horror. This application will test Bersani's valorising of the homoerotic threat to 'proud male subjectivity', paralleling it with the 'loss of self' offered in the masochistic (and remasculinising) spectacles of queer horror. Here Merck's critique of Bersani's work, with its own evocative rhetoric of the

risen dead, invites parallels with the eroticised depictions of revenant and undead figures in horror.

In horror film criticism, masochistic spectatorship is considered a passive mode of looking that emphasises moments of shock, fear and terror, which is in contrast to other theories of sadistic and active looking associated with the masculine gaze. The horror film offers a 'safe' way to experience terror via identification with the suffering character on screen before returning to actuality. Masochism lies at the heart of the (un)pleasures felt by the gay spectator of queer horror. Clover's study of the slasher film in the late 1970s to 1980s, *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992), addresses the (implicitly straight) adolescent male's connection with horror film spectatorship to suggest a subversively radical element in his relationship with the female victim-heroine: the Final Girl (discussed in chapters one and four). She suggests that the male viewer escapes his biological sex to identify with the screen female where 'the boy can simultaneously experience forbidden desires and disavow them on grounds that the visible actor is, after all, a girl' (1992: 18). Since even the Final Girl is terrorised in these films, this identification is posed as masochistic. Clover draws on Freud's theories of feminine masochism in order to explain the young male spectator's identification with the heroine's experience of fear and pain:

we are, as an audience, in the end 'masculinized' by and through the very figure by and through whom we were earlier feminised. (1992: 59)

Clover concludes that feminine masochism refers not to 'masochism in women, but to the essence of masochistic perversion in men [which becomes...] mixed up with a sense of degradation' (1992: 215-6).

Clover's analysis of the horror film's shameful association with feminine masochism extends mainly to straight slashers such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Tobe Hooper, US 1986) and rape-revenge thriller horrors such as *Deliverance* (John Boorman, US 1972), which, she states, often code certain male characters as feminine and thus feeds into their portrayal of homosexual panic. Her study contains only brief considerations of the stigma attached to 'effeminacy' (which for Clover stands in for 'receptive homosexuality') for the presumptively straight male spectator:

feminine masochism also makes remarkably good sense of the figuring for a predominantly male audience, of horror spectatorship itself as a feminine or feminizing experience [...] just why is it that male viewers would choose to 'feel' fear and pain through the figure of the female? (217-224)

Her discussion of homosexuality does not extend beyond a footnoted reference to Bersani's 'Is the Rectum A Grave?' where she admits to her study's limitations in terms of homosexual masochism professing to 'leave the psychoanalytic validity of these claims to others...nor am I prepared to comment on cultural practices over the broad range' (225). Though Clover's study continually praises the radical nature of slasher horror for its potential for transgender identification, and its denaturalising of fixed gender binaries, it fails to discuss how the gay spectator is positioned in relation to the films that she analyses.

In 'Masculinity and the Horror Film' (1993), Peter Hutchings agrees with Clover that the traditional view of the slasher horror film as a misogynist text is inadequate. The male spectator is claimed to be capable, at an emotional/psychical level, of 'shifting back and forth between victim (conventionally feminine) and victimiser (conventionally male)' (1993: 86). This oscillation opens up space for the patriarchal male to empathise with the victim's trauma and disempowerment and the suffering of the monster. The excitement experienced by the male spectator of the horror genre is understood as masochistic, and, further still, the spectator exhibits a 'willing subjection' to being scared. This understanding of the masochistic position, whereby the spectator submits to cinematic fright, is useful for this thesis's interpretation of the pleasures in temporary passivity that are offered to the gay male spectator of the horror film. But Hutchings' discussion is somewhat limited to a conventional depiction of the victim-as-female and the straight male viewer's (over any significant discussion of gay spectators) experience of a temporary feminisation. Since femininity is identified as 'powerlessness' (and, by extension, homosexuality is associated with femininity), the male spectator must also suffer horror as 'a feminising experience' (91). Despite the usefulness of his approach for this thesis's undertakings, Hutchings' view maintains the well-trodden binary opposition of female/victim versus male/monster and continues to suggest that the male subject identifies with the victim in taking the feminine position. This thesis questions

whether Hutchings' and Clover's masochistically-infused approaches still apply in queer horror, where the female/victim conflation is instead supplanted by the gay male/victim, and asks if the dynamic is altered.

c) Horror and Abjection

This thesis also appropriates key elements of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), she considers rituals of defilement that determine the cultural boundaries between nature and society, bringing together the anthropological works of Mary Douglas (1966) with psychoanalysis and the semiotic and linguistic works of Saussure and Lacan. Kristeva posits abjection as the expulsion of a part of the self in the pursuit of identity and subjectivity:

The object has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to the I [...] What is object [...] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded. (1)

The primary border separating the subject, the 'I', from the 'other' is the body itself. Kristeva focuses upon the abjection of the body's own fluids - the blood, urine, saliva and excrement which threaten the border between inside and outside and present the subject with a reminder that it is 'lacking its own and clean self' (63). Viewed externally, such body fluids represent potential infection and it is their *visibility* that indicates their status as expelled or wasted, as polluting or toxic. Kristeva tends to identify abjection with women and, more specifically, with the maternal in opposition to patriarchal law. The 'border' in question may be that between normal and abnormal: man and beast, human and inhuman,

good and evil, hetero- and homosexuality. Kristeva argues that abjection threatens this border as a liminal space, as 'abjection preserved what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship' (10). Here pre-objectal is understood as the time prior to the establishment of the subject's relationship to its objects of desire and therefore of representation, before a comprehension of unconscious/conscious and of any opposition between human/animal. In the subject's experience of the 'immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be' (10) abjection plays upon the subject's fear of the maternal – the feminine.

Kristeva's argument contributes to this consideration of the gay subject of the heteronormative patriarchy that imposes femininity on him, and who is also often configured either as abject or facing abjection. Barbara Creed's application of Kristeva's concept of abject in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) to horror films such as *Carrie* and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, US 1979) is discussed in the early chapters of this thesis. Creed's work is used to explore the oscillation of identification experienced by the gay male subject, who longs for access to the potency of the feminine abject but simultaneously desires distance from its shameful associations. Yet, in relation to male masochism in the horror genre, Creed does not draw parallels between the male viewer and female victim; instead she equates the monstrous entirely with the feminine, arguing that:

...whenever male bodies are represented as monstrous in the horror film they assume characteristics usually associated with the

female body: they experience a bloody cycle, change shape, bleed, give birth, become penetrable, are castrated. (1993: 118).

This follows Clover's suggestion that being physically opened, or penetrated, is gendered feminine. Her association of penetration with not only femininity, but also feminine masochism, may shed light on homosexual masochism. In this thesis, Kristeva and Creed's discussion of the abject is applied to queer horror's representation of abject bodily fluids, notably the fusion of blood and semen, and helps us to gain an insight into how gay men produce abjection.

The queer horror texts discussed in this thesis depict and confront gay men's traumatic associations with the abject, with penetrability and castration. The gay male spectator is arguably interpellated by queer horror's oscillation of sadistic and masochistic viewing positions, through its mapping of active and passive power play via identification. As Clover and Hutchings point out, the pleasure of horror films for the (assumed heterosexual) adolescent male spectator lies not only in the symbolic temporary loss of the self in a passive identification with the female hero-victim, but in his re-empowerment (a re-masculinisation of sorts) when the surviving girl adopts masculine traits in order to defeat the monster. For the gay male, the spectatorial experience of the horror film also offers this disavowal, via a re-masculinisation after trauma or via a hyperbolising of masculine traits that serve to guard against any suggestion of femininity.

Homosexuality in the Horror Film

There is little doubting the wealth of existing academic materials that contemplate the *symbolic* representation of homosexuality in horror, and the overview of the theorists that follows will situate the relevant works' comprehension of coded homosexuality within the genre. In 'Introduction to the American Horror Film' (1985), Robin Wood offers a reading of the monstrous metaphors that represent the cultural repression of alternative sexualities. Borrowing from Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Wood defines basic repression as that which is 'universal, necessary and inescapable' to construct a civilised society. Wood continues that surplus repression provides a means by which a culture conditions its people into taking up 'predetermined roles' that eventually demand assimilation and, 'If it works...makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists'. If it does not, those maladjusted individuals become neurotics or revolutionaries, or both. Wood goes on to question exactly what is repressed within Western culture. Whereas oppression indicates subjugation from an external, tangible force, repression, he suggests, is 'not accessible to the conscious mind' since it is 'fully internalized'. Conversely, in relation to the cultural oppression of homosexuality, 'what escapes repression has to be dealt with by oppression' (197).

Wood's discussion of sexuality (himself a gay film critic) strongly influences his analysis of horror's preoccupation with issues of non-normative sexuality. Initially, Wood focuses on the surplus sexuality that does not fulfil the procreative demands of 'monogamous heterosexual union' (198) that reproduces labour for capital. Further examples of this non-procreative desire include bisexuality as an 'affront to the principle of monogamy' and a 'threat to the ideal of family'; female sexuality that does not adhere to archetypes of passivity, subordination and reproduction; and lastly, sexuality in children. Wood argues that horror offers the most 'clear-cut and direct' (200) example of the depiction of 'the Other' in the figure of the monster: 'One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses' (201). The monstrous 'Other' represents 'that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with in one of two ways: either by rejecting and, if possible, annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself' (199). The 'Other' serves not only to symbolise that which either the individual or culture determines as different, it also represents 'that which is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self' and, subsequently, is then 'projected outwards in order to be hated or destroyed' (199).

Of the types of 'Otherness' represented in the horror, Wood argues that homosexuality and bisexuality are clearly evident in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie Des Grauens* (GE, 1921) and in James

Whale's *Frankenstein* (US, 1931), both of which suggest the repressed homosexuality of their monsters (201). Focusing mainly on this implied homosexuality as representative of heteronormative anxieties, Wood's analysis of *homosexual* anxieties is fleeting. His discussion of homosexuality in the horror film, like that of many film scholars, remains limited to a critique of the monstrous metaphor for homosexuality. This limits gay spectatorship to a simplistic negotiation of identification between normative (straight) protagonists and the non-normative (queer) monster, overlooking the relevance of protagonists or peripheral characters that may be coded or even explicitly represented as gay.

Wood's analysis of monstrous metaphors in the Horror genre in the 60s and 70s can be understood to provide three variables: 'normality, the Monster and, crucially, the relationship between the two.' (204) His understanding of 'normality', however, is limited to heterosexual monogamy, to the nuclear family and social institutions such as religion, law, education, the military. For Wood, the Monster operates as a 'return of the repressed', reflecting societal contradictions and hypocrisies. However, Wood points out that the Monster is a 'protean' symbol that changes from 'period to period as society's basic fears clothe themselves in fashionable or immediately accessible garments' (204), thus paving the way for this thesis's discussion of more contemporary horror films that depict homosexuality explicitly and do not limit its representation to monstrosity alone.

Richard Dyer considers the metaphorical representations of the vampire as homosexual within literature and film in 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism' (1988) and in his analysis of Anne Rice's series of homoerotic vampire novels in 'Vampires in the (Old) New World: Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles' (1994). He argues that gothic literature and film since John Polidori's short story *The Vampyre* (1819) reflects social attitudes towards nineteenth and twentieth-century gay and lesbian identities. For Dyer, the figure of the vampire allows for a symbolic projection of 'how people thought and felt about lesbians and gay men – how others have thought about us, and how we have thought and felt about ourselves' (1988, 51). His reading of the vampire identifies 'tell-tale signs' or 'gay resonances' (57) that point to symbolic queerness rather than explicit homosexuality. These signs include the vampire's private double life, the concealing of a monstrous secret and night stalking. On the one hand vampirism (sexual orientation) 'doesn't show, you can't tell who is and who isn't by just looking, but on the other hand there...are tell-tale signs that someone "is" and usually this leads to the vampire's/homosexual's painful outing and eventual destruction' (Dyer, 1988: 57).

In 'Undead' (1991), Ellis Hanson underscores the vampire's longstanding affinity with homosexuality and its provocation of 'homosexual panic' (1991: 324). He argues that the potency of the figure was rearticulated

with the onset of the AIDS crisis and in the search for symbolic indications of infectious queerness (such as wasting and pallor). According to Hanson these are but new additions to a taxonomy of gay men 'as sexually exotic, alien, unnatural, oral, anal, compulsive, violent, protean, polymorphic, polyvocal, polysemous, invisible, soulless, transient, superhumanly mobile, infectious, murderous, suicidal, and a threat to wife, children, home and phallus' (1991, 325). Hanson's list of queer tropes clearly fix the vampire as a liminal, ambiguous and elusive creature that simultaneously presents a recognisable set of behaviour traits. Due to the associations between queer monstrosity and AIDS, it is understandable then, that potential for positive counter identification with such infectious and traumatised Otherness in Hanson's discussion remains limited. In 'Lesbians Who Bite' (1999), Hanson also discusses the lack of identification offered to the gay male spectator in vampire horror. The softcore lesbian vampire cycle produced by Hammer and Tigon Pictures in the 1970s, such as *The Virgin Witch* (Ray Austin, UK 1972) and *Twins of Evil* (John Hough, UK 1971), is said to provide a 'heterosexualised' space in which the male 'revenant as sexual deviant is neither to be identified with nor desired.' (1991: 330).

In *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), Judith Halberstam considers monstrosity in the post-modern horror and in Gothic fiction as a technology of subjectivity in which the queer threat of 'meaning itself runs riot' (4). In her analysis of films such as *The Texas*

Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, US 1974) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, US 1991) she argues that that they clearly show ‘the making of deviant sexualities and gendering’ (4):

the queer tendency of horror film [...] lies in its ability to reconfigure gender not simply through inversion but by literally creating new categories. (139)

Like Halberstam, I understand the monster in horror as ‘the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity into sexual identity through the means of failed repression’ (9). Her study highlights the horror film’s obsession with skin (torn, broken, penetrated, rotting) as a metonym for the human, and thus also as a symbol of sexual identity within monstrosity. But despite her call for feminist and queer readings of horror in order to make a ‘claim for the positivity’ (26) of the genre, her study remains bound to a deciphering of its coded homosexuality⁹.

More centrally, Harry Benshoff’s work considers several ways in which (mainly male) homosexuality ‘intersects with the horror film’ whereby ‘monster is to “normality” as homosexuality is to heterosexual’ (2).

Monsters in the Closet (1997) includes an analysis of gay and lesbian representation within the genre; a discussion that yet again centres on the monster figure as a queer metaphor; a consideration of whether the queer auteur (with James Whale as his prime example) infuses his/her sexuality into the text explicitly or implicitly and finally, and perhaps most importantly for Benshoff, the associational function that homosexuality adopts within the ‘closeted text’ (the text in which homosexuality does not

make itself explicitly known but can be read or alluded to). It is this last function that Benshoff's study seems to dwell upon, in that the representation of homosexuality in horror is historically 'allusive...it lurks around the edges of texts and characters rather than announcing itself forthrightly' (15). Benshoff's work again is largely confined to the problematic of the symbolic and connotative 'representation' of alternative sexuality and draws on Alexander Doty's reservations that:

connotation has been the representational and interpretative closet of mass culture queerness for far too long [...] this shadowy realm [...] allows straight culture to use queerness for pleasure and profit in mass culture without admitting to it. (1993: 15).

Benshoff's argument builds on Dyer's and Wood's understanding of the pleasures that oppositional identification with monster figures can offer the gay spectator. Benshoff's analysis extends from the mere recognition of the negative portrayal of a homosexuality that is bound up with monstrosity, to the potential that such monstrous icons such as *Nosferatu's* (FW Murnau, GE, 1922) Count Orlok (Max Schreck), James Whale's creature in *Frankenstein* (US 1931) offer for positive queer identification. Yet while Benshoff's study makes pains to celebrate these moments of oppositional identification for the gay spectator, this same powerful connection with the Other never emerges from the symbolic realm of suggestion. Such identifications with coded homosexuality could be argued to run the risk of perpetuating the exchange of non-normative sexual representations that remain implicit according to heteronormative standards.

Benshoff's line of analysis is also indebted to Linda Williams' article 'When the Woman Looks' (1984), which considers the woman as a symbiotic double for the horror monster, as victim, object of spectacle, and 'Other' in her difference from the uncastrated male. Discussing early horror cinema such as *The Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian, US 1925) and later Universal horror films like *Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, US 1935), Williams maintains that the female gaze is punished via narrative dynamics that transform curiosity, the desire to see, into masochistic fantasy. The woman's look of horror at the spectacular image of the monster temporarily paralyses her, momentarily shifting attention away from her own body as object of spectacle. The monster's power is related to an Otherness that resembles sexual difference in the eyes of the traumatised male. The woman is, like the monster, 'a biological freak' (20). Williams argues that the frightened woman recognises the sense in which the monster's potent freakishness is similar to her own in its exclusion from the phallic world:

she not only sees a monster, she sees a monster that offers a distorted reflection of her own image. The monster is thus a particularly insidious form of the many mirrors that the patriarchal structures of seeing hold up to the woman (22)

These moments of monstrous display, such as the Phantom's (Lon Chaney) revealing of his mutilated face to Christine (Mary Philbin), are compared to the moment when the male child first sees, as he later understands it, the 'mutilated' body of his 'castrated' mother (23). For the

female spectator, the annihilation of the monster produces sympathetic identification with his plight and also 'a recognition of their similar status as potent threats to a vulnerable male power' (23).

Adapting Williams' theory of sympathetic identification with the Other, Benshoff applies it to the gay spectator's recognition of his own 'sexual difference' from the heterosexual male and his identification with the cinematic monster's subject position 'outside a patriarchal heterosexist order' (12). He argues that this identification provides a source of joyful self-recognition, a 'powerful pleasure [and] wish-fulfillment fantasy for some queer viewers' (14). The viewer may consciously recognise tropes of homosexual behaviour that may be coded in such a way as to conceal themselves¹⁰. Benshoff also recognises that, gay and lesbian authorship aside, immense pleasure is also available in offering a queer reading of seemingly 'normative' horror texts, 'which have no openly homosexual input or context' (16). In such examples, the gay male spectator re-reads the text's intricacies by way of an already present historical conflation of monstrosity with homosexuality.

Yet Benshoff recognises that horror film, in itself, also holds similar appeal for the heterosexual viewer as a joyously grotesque experience, whereby "'normal" people [indulge in] the pleasures of drag or monstrosity, for a brief but exhilarating experience' (13). Yet he goes on to understand that the thrill is rendered safe via the narrative trajectory of the horror film,

which demands the ejection and destruction of the monster and a realignment of identification with non-monstrous subjects. On the other hand, the gay and lesbian spectator are eventually encouraged to 'suffer with' the monster in its destruction or have to realign themselves with a heteronormative object (usually depicted as the survivor/s). Despite the potentially radical pleasures that the horror film may offer to its queer spectators, he concludes that, 'both the monster and the homosexual are permanent residents of shadowy spaces.' (13)

Benshoff's study provides a significant discussion of important classic and cult horror films that are both infused with homosexuality at the site of production (where meaning is encoded) and from the perspective of audience reception (where meanings are decoded). Despite his initial understanding of the potentially progressive utilisation of countercultural reading and identification strategies, his concluding argument quickly returns to a rather cautious standpoint. Notwithstanding the pleasures of queer appropriation, the perpetual revering of queer monstrosity simply reinforces the 'ongoing monsterization of homosexuality' (274), Benshoff then calls for a critical understanding, and perhaps rejection, of the symbolism of the 'monster queer' in order to obviate the negative representation of homosexuality. Due to the time of its publication, his study is limited by the absence of more recent depictions of the 'monster queer' (or indeed any other homosexuals) in films that foreground overtly queer, gay and lesbian identity and do so with a critical awareness. Such

films exhibit an understanding of a cinematic discourse that demonises homosexuality as monstrous, instead offering up a parody of traditional horror conventions or transposing gay male identities and anxieties onto existing generic character types and narrative forms.

Despite the closing chapter's discussion of more recent queer-oriented titles such as *The Curse of the Queerwolf* (Mark Pirro, US 1988), Benshoff's study of 1997 is time-limited to the metaphoric homosexual monsters of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Jack Sholder, US 1985) and Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* (US 1990). His projection of how homosexuality will be treated in future horror film remains bound up with a reading of evocative gayness. With so few films that feature explicit male homosexuality produced at the time, it is telling that Benshoff's prediction for the future remains inconclusive:

since there are so few 'normal' homosexuals on screen in any of these horror films [...] The exploration of how homosexuality might be figured within the genre (or how 'real life' homosexuals might look and behave) remains a closeted topic. (239)

Conversely, this thesis focuses on the developing subgenre of queer horror - which largely dispenses with the monstrous metaphor of homosexuality, instead acknowledging it explicitly from a gay male perspective. The recent surge in horror films that are directed by, produced by and feature gay men raises the question that Benshoff's study does not fully address: what is the appeal of a queer horror

aesthetic for gay male audiences and filmmakers and, furthermore, what anxieties do *their* horror narratives play upon?

Methodology:

This project is conducted via the analysis of specifically chosen film and video texts, plus related literature, television and theatrical work; the application of psychoanalytical theory to the horror genre; a consideration of the appropriation of both literary and moving image forms; and the analysis of primary and secondary data samples, including print and online reviews, blogs and interviews. The horror texts selected for close study here range from thinly veiled homoerotic horrors and exploitation titles to more explicit films that foreground erotic and pornographic violence featuring 'out' gay characters. I also consider film and video shorts, video art and experimental digital works, television serials, theatrical parody and gay pornography. All of these either feature erotic horror narratives with gay male content or are aimed at a gay male audience. Close textual analysis is performed on each title, drawing out key words, recurring themes, character types, visual motifs, narrative preoccupations and allegorical readings in order to identify not only a recognisable style, but a unifying set of tropes and conventions that can be understood to formulate a queer horror aesthetic.

Textual Analysis and Sample Collection:

Textual analysis is an approach that attempts to understand and describe the various methods aimed at comprehending the ways in which texts produce meaning. This is achieved via the application of linguistic theories to the creation of meaning in a text, via semiotics or critical discourse analysis, the deconstruction of narrative form, and via the analysis of the textual conventions and characteristics of generic forms. In this thesis horror film and television texts are analysed in order to develop a better understanding of a queer horror aesthetic and distinguish the emergence of a sub-genre. Klaus Jensen and Nick Jankowski (1991) argue that textual analysis is a vital tool through which to draw out information from a text via interpretation across a sample, Alan McKee (2003) argues that textual analysis is also a key research method which can aid in developing an understanding of interpretations of a particular sub-cultural group, in this case gay men as producers of moving image texts that feature representations of gay subjectivity. He continues that via textual analysis the researcher should be able to view the body of work and make note of similar characteristics (here meaning film style, recurring motifs, characters, themes) in each text while recognising that they are individual works within a larger group (here, the horror genre).

During the close readings of the selected film, television, magazine articles, blog sites and interview texts included in this study, I was aware of the complexities that can arise when drawing out elements of value from individual examples in order to make more general conclusions. These involve moving from the description of a text, to an interpretation and, finally, to a commentary on it. Bauer et al (2002) argue that detailed textual analysis is often subject to two main limitations, the first of which is based on representation. Should a study wish to put forward an historical overview of the cultural production of a particular text over a given period then the sample should be widely representative of it. However such an attempt runs the risk of obtaining a sample that is too large and relatively unmanageable, whereby the benefits of close textual analysis may be lost. Secondly, the translation of sample texts is unavoidably subjective and, in the process of interpretation, involves the transformation of cinematic and televisual language into another form. These processes of translation can often lead to finer detail and nuance being overlooked or misinterpreted and, as such, the conditions and aims of textual analysis have to be tightly organised (Bauer et al: 2002: 247).

To minimise these failings, the application of textual analysis in this study is firstly built out of the sampling horror film texts for initial analysis. Furthermore, during the collection and analysis of queer film and television horror the findings are then used to test the attitudes and positions of the filmmakers and scriptwriters that are also collated via

interview, and to examine the various trends in theme and representation that are revealed through the examination of content. Moreover, detailed textual analysis can also help to outline the interactions between producer intention and textual result. Finally, fan websites, published fanzines and other online responses¹¹ to several films in this study have been monitored to compare these textual interpretations with those articulated by members of the viewing public.

My initial research began with the recognition of the increased visibility of homoerotic elements in horror film and the identification of the films included in this study. American and Canadian director David DeCoteau's post-2000 films include significant scenes which feature young, white, gym-toned men as the erotically objectified victims of slasher horror conventions, at the expense of an almost complete exclusion of female characters. DeCoteau's works have been marketed as 'horror films for girls', their closeted presentation of homoeroticism safely (but somewhat subversively) packaged as heterosexually-oriented, derivative slasher horror. DeCoteau's horrors such as *The Brotherhood* (US, 2001), *Voodoo Academy* (US, 2000), *The Wolves of Wall Street* (US 2002), *Leeches!* (2003), *Speed Demon* (US 2003) and *Beastly Boyz* (US 2006)¹² set the template for homoerotic slashers in their erotic protraction of male murders over those of the female victims, who are marginalised via framing, editing and narrative contrivance. Alex Pucci's series of equally imitative slasher horrors with *ScreamKings* including *Beef (You Are What*

You Eat (US 2007) and *Frat House Massacre* (US 2008) follow the same lines as DeCoteau. The independent studio's pun on the horror cliché 'scream queens' (vocal female victims) jokingly butches up its name.

Those queer horror texts which feature explicit gay characters and narratives stem initially from the art-horror subgenre and the gay film festival circuit of short films. JT Seaton's *NightShadows* (US 2004) depicts a nightmare cruising session for a young man who brings home a murderous ghost of another man; Charles Lum's *Indelible* (US, 2004) is another experimental short that fuses mainstream horror with gay pornography; Jeff Erbach's gay zombie tale *The Nature of Nicolas* (CA, 2002) considers internalized homophobia manifested in its undead characters. Independent distributors such as Sneak Preview Entertainment (*Hellbent* (Etheredge-Outzs, US 2004)), Tempe Entertainment (*October Moon* (Collum, US 2007) and *November Son* (Collum, US 2009) and South Paw Productions (gay director Alan Rowe Kelly's *A Far Cry From Home* (US 2008)) also deliver low budget horror films to the gay market. Gothic television soaps such as *Dante's Cove* (Here! TV, US 2005- present) and *The Lair* (Here! TV, US 2007-2009), both produced by HereTV! a LGBT-run US cable channel, are camp takes on horror tropes that interweave the love lives of their gay and lesbian characters into supernatural storylines. Alongside these are independently directed and produced horror such as Sean Abley's *Socket* (US, 2007), a Cronenbergian sci-fi horror take on gay penetration and

Jaymes Thompson's *Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror* (US 2007). *Otto; or Up with Dead People* (CA/GE, 2009) marks satirical gay director Bruce LaBruce's first explicit foray into horror involving a young gay zombie and his endeavour to find other like-minded zombies in contemporary Berlin. Finally, parodies such *Creatures from the Pink Lagoon* (Chris Diani, US 2006), *Gay Zombie* (Michael Simon, US 2007) and *I Was A Teenage WereBear!* (Tim Sullivan, US 2011) highlight the frequent merging of horror and comedy across the sub-genre.

During the gathering of initial data, I also noted the emergence of catalogue and review websites such as www.queerhorror.com (established 2000), a site that claims to be 'devoted to exploring the horror genre and its inclusion of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgendered' and, more recently, horror film blog www.campblood.com. Both websites concern themselves with the horror genre in its entirety, but the former focuses more specifically on cataloguing and reviewing horror film and television shows that have gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender appeal. Gay horror director Sean Abley's regular column 'Gay of the Dead' in horror magazine *Fangoria* also acknowledges queer fandom.

Designating a sub-genre as queer horror raises a problem of definition.

As American director Paul Etheredge-Outzs asks:

What is Gay Horror? Is it any different to straight horror, what is straight horror? Why do we need gay horror? What does Gay

Horror do to straight horror? Does it queer it? Isn't horror queer enough? (2008)

QueerHorror.com further suggests that the sub-genre is a 'difficult area to pin down'. The site offers its own attempt to explain horror's appeal for queer audiences:

Horror deals with fear and the overcoming or succumbing to it. Queers are people who do not have a traditional 'straight' orientation of identity. This site is not dedicated to understanding what is and isn't queer horror, rather, it is a place to explore any connection between these two fields that people can think of (QueerHorror.com, 2012)

In my own attempt to answer these questions in regard to films released post-2000, I have identified specific subsets of the queer presentation of horror tropes. These include texts that foreground the erotic and sadomasochistic treatment of the male body, and texts whereby this male eroticisation appends the explicit or implicit discussion of queerness. Finally queer horror texts that also represent the queer male body as 'degayed', though often not in any transgressive move towards sexual difference, but rather in a homosexual masculinity that is often de-politicised and straight-acting.

Interviews:

A considerable amount of primary data for this thesis is drawn from my own interviews with emerging and established filmmakers involved in producing, writing and directing films with a significantly queer use of horror film aesthetics, conventions, themes and iconography. Interviews were also conducted with playwrights and theatre directors whose work

involves the queer adaptation of horror films. These included face-to-face interviews and correspondence via email, telephone and social networking sites with follow-up correspondence to clarify and update information. Only filmmakers, artists and screenwriters quoted directly are referenced as primary sources (see Appendix 8.3). In utilising the information gathered via this approach, I want to stress that while these practitioners' intentions are relevant to my textual analyses, they do not wholly determine them. While a significant number of these directors, writers and producers are versed in academic media study and critical theory, they may also make investments in aesthetics and ideologies of which they are unaware.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one sets out to simultaneously identify the gay anxieties symbolised in the horror film, whilst also recognising the appeal for gay spectators. It does so via the textual, psychoanalytic and cultural analysis of a classic horror feature that continues to engage gay men, namely *Carrie* (1976). A key text in this thesis's analysis of gay male anxiety, *Carrie's* depiction of a shameful and abject femininity captures moments of deep trauma that, for gay spectators, resonates with feelings of conspicuous difference, physical ugliness and social exclusion from an assumed heteronormative culture. Read by gay men as a variation on the 'coming-out' tale, *Carrie's* plight as a ridiculed, bullied and self-hating adolescent offers a strong focus of identification for gay spectators.

The Grand Guignol¹³ excesses of *Carrie*, that extend from the prom scene's grotesque reference to abject bodily fluids and its use of canted camera angles, saturated colours and split-screen editing to its excessive female performance, have stimulated an explosion of queer appropriations of the film in theatre, film and video art. The stylistic excesses of *Carrie* are celebrated and intensified in cross-dressing theatrical parodies of the film, in which the female parts are played by male actors in drag. *Carrie's* depiction of a monstrous femininity presents a potent 'Other' with which the gay male spectator dis-identifies in order to disavow the possession of shameful femininity. He achieves this via the structures of the 'masquerade' (Doane: 234) already evident in De Palma's film. The chapter reads across from Stephen King's original novel *Carrie* (1974) to De Palma's film version and, finally, to a collection of theatre productions ranging from the mainstream, *Carrie – The Musical* (1988, and recently revived in 2012), to drag-parodies such as *Scarrie – The Musical* (2005) and *Carrie – A Period Piece* (2006-7). These queer reworkings of *Carrie* exploit the excesses of De Palma's film to create ironic readings and reinterpretations in which the cultural stigma of male homosexuality's association with feminine masochism is confronted.

Chapter two continues the queer appropriation of De Palma's *Carrie* with a deconstruction of the film in a piece of experimental video art by Charles Lum. *Indelible* (US, 2004) shatters the text (via its editing process) and fuses it with hardcore gay pornography. The result is a

rumination on the appeal of eroticism and death for the gay horror fan. Julia Kristeva has commented on the abjection of particular body fluids – pus, spit, urine, menstrual blood and semen in the subject’s maturation from infant maternal departure. Lum’s work draws parallels between *Carrie*’s shameful menstrual blood and with gay pornography’s own body fluid, semen. Lum’s video works through an erotic fascination with semen and its abjection as a potential transmitter of AIDS. As an HIV positive filmmaker, Lum combines *Carrie* with various other horror hardcore gay porn films to consider the trauma and anxiety experienced by gay men in an era defined by AIDS. *Indelible* explores the generic conventions of horror and gay pornography and discovers a shared eroticism, imagery and experiences of desire, shame, humiliation and trauma. *Indelible*’s eroticisation of horror provides a means of revisiting, recollecting and replaying cultural notions of trauma and enables a clearer understanding of the emerging sub-genre and its appeal to gay men.

Chapter three begins to chart and analyse queer horror via a sub-genre which I term Gaysploitation horror. Deriving from exploitation cinema which Ephraim Katz defines as ‘films made with little or no attention to quality or artistic merit but with an eye for quick profit, usually via high-pressure sales and promotion techniques emphasizing some sensational aspect of the product’ (2001: 446). Gaysploitation horror flaunts the eroticised male body, while almost completely excluding the woman’s. Yet further investigation reveals this particular derivation of the exploitation film as curiously chaste in its presentation of nudity, violence

and, above all, horror. Largely satirical in nature and leaning towards soft-core erotica, Gaysploitation horror eludes defined horror conventions. Furthermore, its representation of its protagonists as straight-acting and macho 'men who sleep with men', troubles the identification of easily recognisable gay characters and often suggests a contingent practice of bisexuality rather than homosexuality. Evading definition as either gay or horror, Gaysploitation horror is thus a sub-genre that paradoxically can be defined, not by those conventions it (ironically) possesses, but by those it eludes. The chapter investigates the lure of macho performance for the gay man, which simultaneously encourages a powerful, and shameful, erotic dis-identification with gender while also highlighting its 'performative' qualities.

Chapter four extends the Gaysploitation aesthetic in its consideration of a gay variation of the slasher horror, *Hellbent* (2004). Etheredge-Outzs' film trades in the same stereotypically 'straight-acting' gay masculinities, taken to the extreme in their adoption of macho masquerade in performance and costume, here seen in their appropriation of gay comic-artist Tom of Finland's erotic archetypes: the Cop, the Biker, the Cowboy and the Leather Daddy. This parodic trade in gay macho dress and the eroticisation of the Gay Daddy type (seen throughout queer horror) again highlights macho homosexuality and renders invisible those 'shameful' feminine associations. The chapter questions whether *Hellbent's* satirical depiction of gay machismo works to subvert the assumed authenticity of masculinity via parodic distance or whether it simply reasserts the same

oppressive structures. The analysis also extends to a reconsideration of Clover's formulation of the Final Girl survivor in slasher horror, here replaced by the Final Boy, and asks whether Clover's conventions are still applicable when the gender, and sexuality, of the survivor figure is switched.

Chapter five argues that, while there is a glut of theoretical and textual writing on the queer vampire, the gay zombie is largely overlooked. This chapter not only suggests that the zombie is a most fitting metaphor for homosexuality in the horror film but, more recently, becomes a figure with which to critique Western gay male sub-cultures that are presented as assimilative, homonormative, bourgeois and 'dead'. Gay zombie narratives, with their depictions of amorphous hordes of the undead, foreground differences *within* gay cultures, playing down the symbolism of infection (and its obvious connection of AIDS to the gay community) and, instead, focus on sub-cultural tensions, stereotypes and the trauma of 'fitting in'. The chapter focuses on Bruce LaBruce's *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* (2008), a faux-documentary, horror-comedy featuring hardcore sex. Set in contemporary Berlin, it stages a 'scene' in which gay zombie actors mingle with actual zombies. LaBruce's self-reflexive presentation of the gay zombie highlights the figure as another agent of parody. Zombie drag (like *Carrie* drag, Tom of Finland parody and the 'straight-acting' performance of Gaysploitation horror), becomes yet another example of gender performance that highlights the gay male

subject's humorous, if anxious, negotiation with femininity and hypermasculinity.

Chapter six concludes with a film adaptation of a transgressively queer horror novel that sees its references to homosexuality all but completely excised and its representation of transsexuality masked. I argue that Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In*, with its oblique art-horror aesthetic, enacts a textual repression of its queer source material rendering queerness and homosexuality almost 'unlocatable'. The analysis centres on the novel's treatment of its central vampire protagonist's literal castration, which in Alfredson's film is replaced by symbolic castration both diegetically and non-diegetically. This elision is also perceptible in the removal of homosexuality from both Alfredson's version and more specifically in Matt Reeves' more conservative American adaptation *Let Me In* (2010). In what seems to mark a reversion to the implicit association of homosexuality with the vampire, does unspecified gayness now become more potent in its invisibility? Conversely, does *Let the Right One In's* occlusion of homosexuality realise Leo Bersani's warning that contemporary liberal culture is merely 'reconfirm[ing] the inferior position within a homophobic system of difference' (1993, 43). Subjecting Alfredson's film to a queer paratextual reading, I attempt to restore the oppositional elements of this heteronormatively-castrated film.

Employing psychoanalysis as well as close readings of classic and cult horror, this thesis argues that queer horror projects contemporary anxieties *within* gay male subcultures onto its characters and into its narratives, building upon the figurative role of gay monstrosity. The thesis concludes that queer horror turns the focus of fear upon itself and its own communities and subcultures.

¹ See: Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992); Sue Ellen Case, 'Tracking the Vampire' (1991), Richard Dyer, 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism' (1988), Ellis Hanson, 'Undead' (1991) and Judith Halberstam's *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995)

² For the purposes of this thesis, 'homosexual' should be understood as a subject who is 'sexually attracted to people of one's own sex' (*Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, Second Edition 2003: 717). Previously used in a derogatory sense, the term 'gay' began to be used in the 1960s by gay men as a counter-cultural celebration to the existing sexual categorisations that demonised homosexuality and naturalised heterosexuality. After the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, the personal declaration of being 'gay' became an observance of pride and thus more liberating. The *OED* defines gay in adjectival terms as 'related to or used by homosexuals', but also refers to a more antiquated definition as 'light-hearted and carefree'. As a noun the definition is more specific, 'a homosexual, especially a male homosexual' (832), I also want to understand 'gay' as referring implicitly to gay *male* but recognises that in some wider contexts it can be used of both homosexual men and women. Queer has multiple definitions, the *OED* lists the definitions from 'strange; odd' to 'slightly ill' with its origins deriving from the sixteenth century German 'quer' meaning oblique or perverse (1442). In recent adage, queer was not used colloquially to define homosexuality until the late nineteenth century and has moved from a pejorative term to a re-appropriation of it as a more celebratory term of identification to non-normative sexuality. It should be noted that its usage as a deliberately offensive term still exists concurrently. Currently, queer should not be understood as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identity, but more so as a politically infused rejection of

normalising structures that refuses to fix identity on a subject on the basis of biological sex and binary gender opposites.

³ Refer to Appendix 8.1 for all major film synopses.

⁴ The *OED* defines parody as ‘an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect [...] an imitation or version of something that falls short of the real thing’ (2003: 1281). As opposed to ‘pastiche’ which it defines as ‘an artistic work in style that imitates that of another work, artist or period’ (1287).

⁵ I refer to a gay sex advertisement term for traditional macho masculine behavioural traits that are typically attributed to heterosexual men. ‘Straight-acting’ serves to render homoerotic situations anodyne, and reinstate the homosocial alongside the homoerotic but, more often than not in queer horror, this ends up with an uncomfortable conflation of the two.

⁶ Bruce LaBruce and Jason Paul Collum both indicate in personal interviews the application of Freud’s *The Uncanny* (1919) to their respective films: *LA Zombie* (LaBruce, US 2010) in relation to ‘unheimlich’ sexual practices of the reanimating gay zombie figure; and in *October Moon* and *November Son*, Collum utilises his own understanding and teaching of Freud’s work (as a university lecturer in film theory at the University of Wisconsin) into the direction of his disturbing dreamscapes.

⁷ I am referring to the stigma of anal sex *per se* as painful (often thought of as so in heterosexual and homosexual culture), yet the sexual act need not necessarily be painful in a physical sense. The painfulness attributed to anal sex is something that Leo Bersani also utilises in his own readings of gay anality as masochistic.

⁸ Jouissance is defined as an increased enjoyment or pleasure that is connected to Lacan’s concept of desire and has sexual aspects. Lacan develops the concept in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960) where he discusses Freud’s *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930). He builds on Freud’s concept of a contradiction found in the pursuit of pleasure that separates out ‘on the one hand...an absence of pain and unpleasure, and on the other...the experiencing of strong feelings of pleasure’ ([1930]: 76-77). Whereas Freud sees desire as a drive where the subject seeks a reduction of tensions to a low level, Lacan, argues that the two elements of pleasure are diametrically opposed. His jouissance can be seen as connected to an increase in tension and the compounding of desire, a sexually based concept with potentially self-immolating consequences: ‘It starts with a tickle and ends up bursting into flames’ ([1969-70], 1991, 83). This influences Bersani’s own utilisation of the term throughout his works, ‘sexuality would not be originally an exchange of intensities between

individuals...a condition in which others merely set off the self-shattering mechanisms of masochistic *jouissance*.' (1984: 41)

⁹ Halberstam's study is largely given over to a queer reading of its symbolic potential (for example in Leatherface's (Gunnar Hanson) fluid gender in *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*). *The Silence of the Lambs* is one of the only films in Halberstam's book that makes a point of highlighting its monsters' bisexuality explicitly via the character of Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine).

¹⁰ The veiled, campy line, 'we belong dead' delivered to Dr Praetorius (Ernest Thesiger) by the creature (Boris Karloff) in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) is a tongue-in-cheek recognition of their shared monstrosity.

¹¹ A full list of these online sources are included in the Bibliography.

¹² See Appendices 8.2 for a full list and description of the Rapid Heart Pictures films relevant to this thesis.

¹³ Grand Guignol is understood here as a term referring to the foregrounding of gruesome or horrific spectacle via special effects-laden scenes of blood and evisceration that takes centre stage in a piece of visual entertainment and stems from the productions staged at the Theatre Le Grand Guignol in Paris during the late nineteenth century.

Part I:

Queer Deconstructions and
Appropriations of Horror

Chapter One

‘Queering *Carrie*’: Appropriations of a Horror Icon

1.1. Gay male spectator identification with *Carrie*

As an inspiration for charting the emergence of a queer horror film subgenre, *Carrie* (De Palma US, 1976) seems an atypical choice. Yet the cult of *Carrie*, from its origins in Stephen King’s novel through to De Palma’s initial cinematic interpretation, has accumulated a wealth of queer appropriations in both cinema and the theatre. Given *Carrie*’s simultaneous status as both victim and monster, alongside the narrative concerning her burgeoning sexuality and attraction to boys, she is situated as a powerful figure of identification for gay male spectators. However, I would argue that the gay male subject’s understandable empathy with the horror genre’s paradoxical passive/aggressive ingénue masks a wealth of unease and anxiety that ultimately longs for her death.

I want to build on *Carrie*’s current reception (prior to the release of queer-director Kimberly Pierce’s 2013 film remake) as a film that is enjoyed *retrospectively*. Its spectatorial pleasure is derived from: its excessive style and form, its prom-based narrative, the film’s canonical history and cultish influence, its ironic incorporation into queer *and* mainstream culture as a seventies-based ‘guilty pleasure’, and its extra-cinematic (and intra-cinematic) life post-De Palma, across varied cinematic and theatrical homage and adaptations of various queer involvement. The

cultural reception of *Carrie* as a re-viewed text from a contemporary perspective perhaps differs considerably from the original audience and critical responses to De Palma's stylistically excessive and reputedly misogynistic film. Queer interpretations of *Carrie* read the source text as a malleable, satirical, critically acclaimed and now seminal work with a fragmentary template that invites ironic reading, re-assemblage and reinterpretation.

Why *Carrie*? What is it about this specific horror text that holds such strong appeal for the gay male spectator and for artists and performers who have assimilated it into queer culture? *Carrie* solicits cross-gender identification for the gay male spectator and does so via its basic coming-of-age narrative. The film can be read by gay male subjects allegorically as a variation on the 'coming out' tale, both sexually and socially, and revolves around the awkwardness of revealing one's own sexuality to one's parents (especially one's mother). The film has also engendered a camp allure for the gay male spectator deriving mainly from its use of excess: in the overblown style and form of De Palma's direction in terms of lighting, colour-coding, melodramatic use of music and score and in its exaggerated melodramatic acting from the, largely female, cast. There is also a considerable empathetic appeal for gay men in identifying with the bullied Carrie. The adolescent ridicule by her peers, in regard to 'Creepy Carrie's' menstruation and family background, can be transposed by the gay male spectator into memories of being marginalised because of his

homosexuality. The gay subject finds pleasure in identifying with Carrie in the recognition of feminine traits or desires seen in her character, particularly in her emerging attraction towards boys. The film also provides for multiple identifications with a cast of strong female characters including Mrs. White (Piper Laurie), Miss Collins (Betty Buckley), Carrie, Sue Snell (Amy Irving) and Chris Hargensen (Nancy Allen).

These problematic structures of identification between gay male spectators (and fans of *Carrie*) and the film's female characters provide the basis for a study of its appeal as a text with potential queer readings. Yet this strong pull of identification implies a similarity between femininity and gay male sexuality and, in a sense, also provides the main source of tension for gay men. This close proximity also produces a need for distance born out of the dominant ideology's shameful association with the (equally constructed) negative connotations of femininity, which, in *Carrie*, are offered as monstrous.

1.2 Narratives working forwards: *Carrie's* mutable origins

Although the appeal of *Carrie* for the gay male spectator centres upon Brian De Palma's 1976 film version, *Carrie* as a cultural text does not originate with De Palma. In this thesis I will consider (to date) the *three* main incarnations of *Carrie* that have been produced by three men: Stephen King, De Palma, and in chapter two, experimental filmmaker

Charles Lum's appropriation of De Palma's film in *Indelible*, all of whom place their own authorial stamp upon it. In this chapter it is necessary to chart the treatment of *Carrie* by each author, from King as a highly successful writer in a popular genre largely read by male consumers, to De Palma, a director with a controlling, voyeuristic, and cinematically referential style, to the many queer appropriations of *Carrie* (theatrical and cinematic) to reveal why its narrative seems to invite parody and, in the most extreme sense, to invite the reader/spectator to review and reconstruct it. A brief structural analysis of the narrative's origins in King's novel will better inform an understanding of *Carrie's* continued metamorphosis within popular culture.

The inherent mutability and availability for appropriation of *Carrie* lies in the fragmentary nature of Stephen King's novel which is divided into three defined sections of narrative. PART ONE: Blood Sport (pp. 2 - 114) sets up the story of Carrie White: her torment at the hands of her fellow classmates after her very public and first menstruation; an introduction to her religiously oppressive home life with mother Margaret; the subsequent punishment of the high school girls' bullying by Ms. Desjardin, their PE Teacher (renamed Miss Collins in De Palma's film). PART TWO: Prom Night (pp. 115 - 231) contains most of the book's main narrative thrust: the rigging of the prom King and Queen voting; Carrie's humiliation on stage in a shower of pig's blood; and her furious telekinetic revenge upon the school, her classmates, the entire town and finally her mother. PART THREE: Wreckage (pp. 235-242) mulls over the events in

a largely formal presentation of quotations from Carrie's death certificate, news reports and the graffiti on the Whites' house in a brief conclusion which removes us from the first person narrative that provides much of the emotional identification with Carrie and Sue. This textual 'wreckage' is offered as evidence (albeit fictional) of the events that occurred on that prom night in Maine.

The narrative style that is so intense, brief and abrupt in PART THREE is not new to the reader at this point. King's entire story is a kind of pseudo-epistolary¹ novel made up of first and third person narrative, told from Carrie's, Ms. Desjardin's, Margaret White's, Susan Snell's, Chris Hargensen's, and Billy Nolan's (amongst others) points of view intermixed with various fictional extracts from journals, books and interviews which offer a sense of veracity to Carrie's experience. King presents the narrative at times via extracts from fictional news items (from *The Enterprise Weekly*, *The Lewiston Daily Sun*, and reports from the *All Points Bulletin Ticker Tape*), fictional dictionaries of psychic phenomena and other fictional autobiographical and investigative texts (*The Shadow Exploded: Documented Facts and Specific Conclusions Derived from the Case of Carietta White* by David Congress; *Telekinesis: Analysis and Aftermath* by Dean K. L. McGuffin; *My Name is Susan Snell* by Susan Snell) and via fictional post-prom night police interviews and scientific papers.

King's multi-perspective narrative fragments the events in Chamberlaine, Maine. Not only is the tale told from various characters' disorienting and disjointed points of view, but it is presented to us via a variety of forms of explanation. The horror tale then becomes insidiously relentless. When the writing style changes to factual documentary and transcription the reader expects the horror to cease due to a change in genre. However, its presentation continues in a realistic style; therefore it appears to ring true and the reader finds no relief. We could argue that from its literary origins to the inspired appropriations, *Carrie* makes its 'telling' a terrifying, multi-textual, cross-referential tale of horror and offers multiple sites of identification. King's reliance on a bricolage of styles, including journalistic and documentary sources, lends verisimilitude to an otherwise fantastical tale. *Carrie's* style references a literary history of such textual forms which stem from eighteenth and nineteenth century works².

Returning to King's narrative, the protagonist Carrie, having been showered with pig's blood and humiliated at the prom, returns to enact revenge by setting fire to the school with everyone trapped inside. The perspective then shifts from Carrie's first person inner monologue, to a third person narrative of the prom night's horrific events from within the hall, to Susan Snell's autobiographical first person account of events from within her family home as the school explodes. But then King sends us back, revisiting the pig's blood shower again for the reader, but this time from a different character's point of view:

She was already on her way to the closet to get her coat when the first dull, booming explosion shook the floor under her feet and made her mother's china rattle in the cupboards.

From *We Survived the Black Prom*, by Norma Watson (Published in the August 1980 issue of *The Reader's Digest* as a 'Drama In the Real Life' article):

...and it happened so quickly that no one really knew what was happening. We were all standing and applauding and singing the school song. Then - I was at the usher's table just inside the main doors...

All at once there was a huge red splash in the air, some of it hit the mural in long drips. I knew right away before it hit them, that it was blood. (164-165)

The multi-narrative, multi-perspective, multi-generic style that King adopts is, for the most part, lost in De Palma's retelling. His version of events is arguably told from his masculine, and therefore voyeuristic, view of how Carrie's life and the events that surround her are played out. De Palma's film takes into consideration the shifting perspective of narrative from Carrie, to Sue to Miss Collins, Chris and Billy Nolan. By allowing them scenes that do not involve Carrie, they forward the narrative themselves and provide for multiple point of view shots. However King's fragmentary and sudden shifts in perspective are not present in De Palma's film. Fragmentation, shock and disorientation are presented to the spectator via audio-visual means alone.



Fig 1. Carrie's gaze in split-screen.

De Palma makes use of subjective point of view shots, colour-filtered frames, split-screen techniques, highly stylised slow motion and extreme close-ups and high angle shots. His split-screen technique allows several objects to fill the screen. Carrie is allowed to return the gaze in the scenes of revenge at the prom night in the film's denouement but, as a consequence, is fixed in an even tighter frame within a frame (Fig. 1) and becomes doubly objectified. The use of split-screen, rapidly paced editing and subjective framing offers the spectator a multiplicity of events, with each screen showing a different angle, a different series of actions or horrors, a different subjective point of view, and a different object of gaze. Yet conversely it also serves to *contain* the action.

1.3 Carrie as 'Final Girl' and the Heterosexual Presumption

Carol Clover notes that De Palma's *Carrie's* themes and subject concerns (as opposed to the novel's) are decidedly 'feminine', referring to its dealings with menstruation, the mother-daughter relationship and a

cast that is largely female. Given this, she questions to whom the film appeals. Clover concludes that despite the film's feminine themes and cast, its place within the horror genre awards it a largely male spectatorship. She goes on to discuss Stephen King's explanation of his original narrative's popularity:

'Carrie's revenge is something that any student who has ever had his gym shorts pulled down in Phys. Ed. or his glasses thumb-rubbed in study hall could approve of...' Pulling gym shorts down and thumb-rubbing glasses are things that boys do to each other, not, by and large, *things that girls do to each other or that boys do to girls*. They are oblique sexual gestures, the one threatening sodomy or damage to the genitals or both - the other threatening damage to the eyes - a castration of sorts. (1992: 4)

Both King and Clover make reference to the film's appeal to male spectators. Despite its female protagonists and feminine themes, the forms of humiliation noted by King open the film up to allow the male spectator a cross-gender identification with the female protagonist which is eventually disavowed in Carrie's revenge and eventual demise. The film's and the original text's accessibility for gay male spectators lies in their potential malleability in terms of their formal structure and, more importantly, in the opportunities they provide for multiple, shifting identifications. Here I specifically refer both to De Palma's use of subjective framing and his introduction of varying subjective points of view via split screen and to King's multi-perspective literary style. As a consequence, *Carrie* can be re-viewed from various perspectives and also offers a transformative appeal. King's suggestion and implication is that the (straight) male spectator finds the act of sodomy and the 'threat'

of anal sex, with its inference of homosexuality, traumatic and shameful. Conversely, does the act of (or the implication of) penetrative anal sex also provide similar anxiety for the gay male subject?

Clover and King both assume that the audience of the horror genre, and in this case *Carrie*, is largely male and heterosexual. Indeed, this same heterosexist assumption complicates the male spectator's identification with the recurring surviving female protagonist of the slasher horror films, the 'Final Girl' that much of Clover's study focuses on. The heterosexual assumption placed upon the horror spectator limits the possibility of the gay male spectator identifying with the female Final Girl figure in a non-heterosexual way. Clover sees this cross-gender identification between the Final Girl and the (straight) male viewer as the slasher film's chief subversive element, but where does this place the gay male spectator within these supposedly transgressive identification processes?

Though Clover maintains the reactionary nature of the slasher film, she also argues that it has radical potential. This is largely due to the adolescent male spectator's shifting identification from the, albeit queerly coded, feminine masculine monster to the Final Girl figure, who is not without her masculine traits. For Clover, the slasher film refuses to parallel male/female with masculinity/femininity, thus championing the heroine's transgressive gender fluidity over a binary opposition of gender affixed to biological determinants, 'a physical female and a

characterological androgyne: like her name, not masculine, but either/or, both ambiguous' (106). The slasher film's countercultural potential lies in its break from mainstream narrative representations of gender, rather than demanding distance and rejection of the threatening female character. Instead, it allows for a re-gendering of the Final Girl, for 'We are, as an audience, in the end "masculinized" by and through the very figure by and through whom we were earlier "feminized"'. Clover's interpretation of the slasher film allows for the male spectator to temporarily experience cross-gender identification letting him feel 'like a woman for a while' (103), offering a transgressive queering of the (heterosexual) male viewer through cross-gender identification. For the gay male spectator however, whose masculinity is perpetually conflated with femininity within a heterosexist dominant ideology, the liberating and transgressive identification processes become less subversive.

This temporary feminisation of the male spectator is associated with feminine masochism, and it is this momentary experience of masochism that is often considered by theorists such as Peter Hutchings as the primary pleasure for the horror film spectator, which he again presumes to be male. Hutchings suggests that that men who view horror experience it as a temporarily disempowering occurrence, in their shifting identification from female characters and Final Girls to male victims and their struggle against an equally feminised, yet very *male* monster, 'the male spectator experiences horror cinema as a series of pleasurable

subjections, as multiple fantasies of disempowerment' (1993: 91). For Hutchings, horror film is simultaneously both alluring and repellent in its representation of death. It proffers a fantastic visual representation, whereby masochistic viewers can indulge their ultimate masochistic fantasy in safe images of symbolic death: 'death functions as the ultimate passivity of subjection: death becomes the fantasy solution to masochistic desire.' (90).

To reiterate, masochism is defined as pleasure taken from the subject's own pain, humiliation or submission. Laplanche and Pontalis summarise the Freudian perspective on masochism as 'a sexual perversion in which the satisfaction is tied to the suffering or humiliation undergone by the subject' (2004: 244). Hutchings sees (heterosexual) male spectators' temporary masochistic experience of horror as an opportunity to reaffirm their masculine identity and the power structures available to them in a patriarchal society. These momentary incidences of willing subjection and of uncomfortable yet arousing fantasies of the 'castration' of their power only serve to reconfirm their own status within a culturally gendered hierarchy. Thus, the return of power becomes another source of jouissance for the male spectator as a kind of re-tumescence of the phallus and the power it signifies after the temporary masochistic and flaccid moment:

Men who watch and enjoy horror are always already subjects of the patriarchy [...] it could be argued that male submission to disempowerment, that is a willing subjection made by someone who already has power is merely a way of confirming possession of that

power. In other words by temporarily 'feminising' the male spectator, horror emphasizes the 'normality' of masculinity, thereby reassuring a male spectator. (1993: 91-92)

How then does this work for the gay male spectator? Hutchings suggests that the idea of passivity, if taken to its sexual and horrific extreme of penetration itself (by extension from knife to penis), is not necessarily erotic for the heterosexual male subject. It is the return to this subject's perceived activity in displaying his control over his own submission that provides the *jouissance* and the 're-engorgement' of power. For the gay man, however, it may be precisely the willing submission or penetration (in sexual terms) that can provide erotic excitement. The gay male subject can be simultaneously aroused by his own penetrability; contrary to the masochistic fantasies of heterosexist male disempowerment, he may not experience the flaccidity of a supposed submission of power and a re-erection of power *after* the event. Instead, he may experience pleasure or stimulation *throughout* such an 'ordeal'.

What is the pleasure gained from a temporary disempowerment fantasy in the horror film within a heteronormative society that determines the gay (anal) sexual act as disempowering? In this sense, the only 'normal' masculinity that is returned and offered to the gay spectator is a heterosexual masculinity. Hutchings also finds this approach problematic, arguing that:

In as much as the man is the subject of patriarchy, then he has power [it] appertains to those institutional and ideological positions which the male individual occupies and through which he finds an identity. In this respect power takes on an alienating quality; it can be used but it can

never be owned [...] for male spectators, horror necessarily operates in this gap, this space between what might be termed the unrealizable ideal or symbolic ideal of masculinity and the real [it] serves to cover over the fact that this spectator's hold on power is structural and provisional rather than personal. (92)

Admittedly Hutchings' 'male subject of patriarchy' here is one without a defined sexual orientation – his consideration of the male spectator of horror is a general one which refers to the male spectator but implies heterosexuality. What I want to suggest is that the gay male spectator experiences both pleasure and jouissance in his disempowerment and *also* in the re-establishment of heteronormative power after the masochistic moment. However, many gay men may also experience (un)pleasure in penetrability, and in the masochistic moment and the disempowerment it supposes. Is this where the tension lies, not only in association with shameful feminine masochism *and* a parallel identification with the sadistic position in terms of the gay man's *committing* of illicit corporeal penetration? If so, how does the gay male subject and horror spectator rationalise this?

Klaus Rieser discusses Clover's theories on slasher horror and the Final Girl and argues that the sub-genre, rather than challenging mainstream representations of gender, eventually reinstates them:

the slashers' gender disruption is folded back in to the hegemonic mold [sic] it serves to reinforce the heterosexist matrix, despite – or even by way of – its break with mainstream gender forms.
(2001: 375)

Reiser further states that the identification between male viewer and Final Girl is essentially more complex and counter-productive than Clover argues:

I posit that the male spectator does neither straightforwardly nor entirely positively identify with the female victim-hero and thus does not necessarily embrace an antipatriarchal and/or passive position. (2001: 384)

I would argue that this is also the case for the *gay* male spectator, identification with passive female characters on screen may not imply his acceptance of his own passivity; by contrast it may offer a chance for a distancing and re-masculinisation of his own gay male subjectivity. Indeed Reiser too falls prey of the heterosexual assumption in his otherwise queer-aware consideration of the gay male spectator's identification practices in slasher horror:

the identification patterns offered to male adolescent viewers [is that the] Final Girl is served up less as a stand-in for the male viewer than as an imaginary potential partner ('my girl'). And indeed the Final Girl does not so much embody what a male adolescent would want to be *himself*, but how he would like *his girl* to be: not passive but not too active, and above all, turning down (indeed against) *that other man* who desires her, while at the same time fighting her way out of a somewhat too restrictive (read: parental) definition of girlhood (now we don't want her too chaste do we?). (388)

In describing the appeal of horror for adolescent males, Hutchings and Carol Clover also assume the heterosexuality of their male subjects. But the 'fraught and problematic' (Hutchings, 1993: 92-92) relation to masculinity they describe (in this case for all male spectators) is *also* experienced by gay men during puberty and, as the queer appropriations of *Carrie* will show, for *all* genders during such a turbulent time of

hormonal/bodily change and the development of sexual identity. It could be argued that such turmoil persists beyond adolescence for the gay male subject. The gay man is forced to take up contradictory patriarchal and heteronormative ideals of masculinity that he both identifies with and rejects, making his attempts at identification with masculinity particularly prolonged and uneasy. Horror film, and particularly *Carrie*, offers gay spectators the (un)pleasurable and transformative experience of cross-gender identification which serves to underline the fragility of masculine identity, particularly in relation to sexual, political and power structures.

Rieser's article raises a valuable point in the study of slasher horror and one that is pertinent to the understanding of queer reception, readings and interpretations of *Carrie* as simultaneously subversive and reactionary³. While the queer embrace of *Carrie* may signify a challenge to the dominant ideological representation of gender, Reiser argues it can also assert conservative masculinist values:

While these films' *may* accommodate female or queer pleasure or thrills, their tendency to punish non-hegemonic masculinity and to expulse [sic] femininity ultimately serves to reinforce heterosexual and homophobic masculinity. (389)

Ultimately, Rieser suggests that (straight) masculine subjectivities are not so much challenged by the shifting identifications within slasher horror, from monster to Final Girl, but are re-confirmed and re-masculinised via an 'Othering' and eventual destruction or disavowal of difference. The Final Girl and monster alike are considered queer entities that fight to

emerge into the symbolic order, to find their place in the hegemonically gendered binary. The gay male spectator is identified by Rieser, but only in terms of his pleasure in masochistic identification and development of the problematic in the narrative's resolution, whereby the Final Girl is allowed to survive and emerge as an ideologically condoned *feminine* woman. This assumes that the gay male subject too identifies with either the monster or Final Girl. Although Rieser's heterosexual male spectator is pleased to destroy the monster and to find the Final Girl eschewing any threat to masculinity she may pose in becoming 'his girl', what restorative masculinity is there for the gay male spectator? Indeed, what happens earlier in the narrative, when the gay male subject finds (un)pleasurable tensions in his imposed temporary identification with the Final Girl, much as the assumed (straight) male spectator does?

1.4 'You're a Woman now...!': Femininity and Masquerade.

In this text that is arguably 'about women' (Stephen King considers *Carrie* to be 'a feminist tale' (King cited in Clover, 1992: 3)), the gay male subject, in his assumed passivity, appears to have been aligned and associated with female disempowerment within patriarchal society. In this he recognises a similar display of torment, oppression, suffering and a culturally imposed set of incongruous and excessive gender traits. But what is revealed in the queer adaptations of *Carrie* is more of a subjective oscillation between a rejection of this shameful feminine association and a powerful identification with the female subject in terms of her repressed

cultural place within heteronormative structures. In *Carrie's* excessive performances of femininity, the gay male subject seeks indications of his own socially created, performed and gendered subjectivity which are read as constructed against the 'natural' but constructedness of others. The presentations of deliberately ironised femininity and of phallically charged women in queer appropriations of *Carrie* are valorised and revered, sometimes to the point of over-identification. De Palma's *Carrie* has been appropriated into numerous queer film and camp stage adaptations, many of which feature explicit yet problematic impersonations of the film's women.

Monstrous femininity has, arguably until now, been figured as the main focus of cultural anxiety in both King and De Palma's *Carrie*, with the specter of 'Othered' femininity remaining central to many critical interpretations⁴. Before fully considering the implications of conflating femininity and gay male sexuality in queer re-readings of *Carrie*, it is necessary to grasp the presentation of femininity as presented both in King's original novel and De Palma's film. King's *Carrie* is a dumpy adolescent with poor hygiene and bad skin who is not overtly feminine - whereas Sissy Spacek's *Carrie* in De Palma's film, has a waiflike, ethereal quality and a slender, pale prettiness. In the following extract from the novel we can clearly distinguish King's girl from De Palma's:

Carrie stood swaying between the showers and the sanitary-napkin dispenser, slumped over, breasts pointing to the floor, her arms dangling limply. She looked like an ape. Her eyes were shiny and blank.

She was thick through the waist only because sometimes she felt so miserable, empty, bored, that the only way to fill that gaping, whistling hole was to eat and eat and eat. (King, 1974: 40-41)

Despite their differences, in both texts femininity is clearly presented as a masquerade. Carrie moves towards a culturally-imposed idea of femininity via a *masquerade* of it: in dressing up, making clothes, fixing her hair and wearing make-up. In *performing* femininity, the masquerading women of *Carrie* are described by the narrative's abusive and somewhat misogynistic men, represented by Billy Nolan, as 'painted pigs'. In De Palma's film, Carrie is actively encouraged to masquerade both by Sue Snell and Miss Collins as a means of attracting men and improving her self-esteem. It is the allure of the feminine masquerade that appeals to the gay male spectator as a method of both highlighting and subverting gender impositions enforced by patriarchal hegemony.

In her article 'Womanliness as Masquerade' (1929), Joan Riviere reveals the psychoanalytic processes at work in the behaviour of women who display both typically masculine and feminine characteristics in varying social contexts. Curiously, this apparently very feminine concept of masquerade is influenced by Sandor Ferenczi's discussion of homosexual men who exaggerate their heterosexual traits (that is masculine ideals and machismo) in order to disavow their homosexuality in 'The Nosology of Male Homosexuality' (1916). Riviere maintains that this exaggeration is done as a means of defence against heterosexual male reprisals towards their assumed effeminacy. She then suggests this as the same reason that women, 'who wish for masculinity, put on a mask

of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men'. She demonstrates this in her discussion of the case of a prominent female speaker who successfully delivers papers in a decidedly masculine environment. Afterwards, the speaker mingles in the audience, flirting coquettishly with her male peers. Riviere concludes the same purpose for this masquerade of femininity and flirtation, as a means of averting tensions produced by her intellectual challenge to male colleagues:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to be in possession of it, much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen goods. The reader may ask now how I define womanliness or draw the line between genuine womanliness and 'the masquerade'. My suggestion is not however that there is any such difference, whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. ([1929] 1966: 213)

Initially it is understandable, given the reprisals towards women who pose a threat to patriarchal order, that the female subject would negate this threat with the assurance that she is merely 'a woman'. Yet, in the masquerade, this assertion of a supposedly 'authentic' womanliness, is declared to be mimicry. For Riviere, no true womanliness exists. Instead it is a means of proclaiming difference from an assumed masculinity via performance.

Mary Ann Doane takes Riviere's work and applies it to the field of cinema spectatorship to reconsider the idea of trans-sex identification discussed in Laura Mulvey's 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure' (1989)⁵. Initially Doane examines Freud's essay 'Femininity' (1933), which he states is an

inquiry into the 'riddle of the nature of femininity', but which she reveals is, in fact, a study of what it means to be masculine via a discussion of its binary opposite. Describing how Freud sees woman as an 'enigma' and a 'hieroglyph' (Freud, [1933] 2003: 102-3), Doane points out the paradoxical nature of the hieroglyph as simultaneously alien and indecipherable yet also legible because of its pictorial nature. Freud seems to assign this paradox to the female subject. Yet, in attempting to decipher the puzzle of femininity, he excludes woman herself from an informed discussion, proclaiming that the female subject is too close to her own image to offer an objective opinion. While Doane agrees that the relationship between woman and her iconic image is a close one, she criticises Freud for his exclusion of his female audience from this discussion because they cannot 'achieve the necessary distance of a second look' (Doane, 1992: 228). Doane argues that it is this very eviction that perpetuates the patriarchally defined voyeuristic gaze that defines cinematic language as argued by Mulvey.

What perturbs Doane (and what is also present in Riviere's inquiry) is, 'why woman might flaunt her femininity, produce an excess of femininity, in other words foreground the masquerade?' (234). She continues that:

The masquerade in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade's resistance to a patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence to itself, as precisely imagistic [...] the woman becomes the man in order to attain the necessary distance from the image. Masquerade on the other hand involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery or more accurately simulation of the missing gap or

distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image. (235)

Masquerading provides the means by which the female subject can seemingly maintain the patriarchal status quo, while simultaneously obtaining a distance from which to view her own feminine subjectivity. While it appears to deny her a gaze of her own, this ironic performance, if consciously used and competently read by other women, offers a distancing effect for the female spectator and is seen as preferable to trans-sex identification. According to Doane, such identification only locks the female subject into patriarchally limiting gender oppositions by seeking access to a male controlling gaze. Conversely, the ironic performance of an apparently innocent, yet excessive femininity veils its radical potential. The masquerade *challenges* the status quo by providing an *alternative* means by which the female subject 'simulates...the missing gap or distance' (235). By ironically performing an excessive femininity, the masquerading woman creates a distance between a supposedly 'true' femininity and a performed femininity while appearing not to. Doane argues that femininity is the more mutable gender identity:

Thus while the male is locked into sexual identity, the female can at least pretend that she is other – in fact sexual mobility would seem to be a distinguishing feature of femininity in its cultural construction. (234)

The concept of masquerade generally and specifically, as seen in the relevant scenes in *Carrie*, holds interest for the gay male spectator as it highlights the socially constructed and performed (whether volitionally

or not) nature of gender and sexuality. The progression from trans-sex identification to cross-gender impersonation may allow the gay male subject an opportunity to reassess and reconfigure his own gendered and sexual identity via an ironic, excessive mimetic performance of those varied characteristics imposed upon it from dominant heterosexist ideology. Yet the radical and liberating potential of such ironic performance may also be made at the expense of those genders being performed.

In one scene from De Palma's film, gym teacher Miss Collins encourages Carrie to perform a culturally-defined femininity (to masquerade) in anticipation of prom night. Making her stand in front of the mirror in the girls' locker room, Miss Collins actively fragments and objectifies Carrie:

'Would you look at that, that's a pretty girl...look at your eyes, a little mascara...your lips - try some lipstick, nice pretty lips...and your cheek bones, your hair, it's beautiful hair - just put it up a little...'

Doing so, she both establishes the distance via which Carrie can view herself objectively and closes the gap between Carrie's idea of her own femininity and its normative image. The makeover scene from De Palma's film takes Carrie's ugly duckling and transforms her with horrific consequences. Shelley Stamp Lindsey (1996) criticises the encouragement of masquerade by other female characters in the film. Challenging its subversive potential, she argues that the feminine masquerade sustains the repression suffered by women in a patriarchal culture. Indeed, she claims that the masquerade can be just as controlling

and constraining to women as Mrs. White's (Piper Laurie) religious prohibitions:

The bodily repression demanded by Mrs. White is ultimately analogous to the physical makeover promoted by Miss Collins. The culturally sanctioned femininity proffered by the girl's teacher is as repressive as her mother's fundamentalism. (1996: 288)

The masquerade may allow for self-consciousness in regard to female subjectivity, yet it can also perpetuate patriarchal oppression. The masquerade as sanctioned by Miss Collins is a suspect one as it is directed by an ideologically feminine, and biologically female, subject. At various points in De Palma's narrative, Miss Collins physically punishes, controls and restrains the girls in her charge as their gym teacher. She physically holds down and slaps both Carrie and Chris, submitting the girls to arduous and humiliating punishments for their bullying. Doing so, she appears to facilitate the film's objectification and fragmentation of the girls' images, as they are framed in close-ups and split screens and, with each exercise, pushed lower in the frame. Initially seen as the oppressor, Miss Collins too is objectified by De Palma's framing. Her body is fragmented in increasingly forward moving close-ups centering on her muscular (and masculine) legs and thighs. Her head and upper torso – the only obvious bodily indicators of her feminine gender - are framed out to emphasise them. As the diegetic agent of a voyeuristically sadistic look (it is Miss Collins who initiates both the sports' field punishment *and* Carrie's masquerade), she *might* seem to be figured as a butch lesbian but the dominant image is of a very masculine drill sergeant. However it

seems more likely that an inferred lesbian sexuality is used as a cipher for De Palma's phallogentric gaze. In several interviews, the actress Betty Buckley has referred to De Palma urging her to deliver off-camera punishments to her young female co-stars in order to inspire emotive reactions on camera⁶. Miss Collins could be read as a displacement of the objectifying authority of the male director. She comes to represent aggressive (heterosexual) male voyeurism as transposed onto signifiers of lesbianism. De Palma offers, through Miss Collins, an excuse for blaming women for the erotic and sadistic elements of the shower and gym sequences. This misogyny is carried through in the eventual killing of Miss Collins (a change from King's novel) during the prom sequence. Here a veiled reference to lesbianism is delivered via Tommy (William Katt). At an earlier point in the scene, Carrie is joined by Miss Collins in Tommy's absence and, upon his return, he appears threatened by the closeness of the two women: 'Hey what's going on here? What are you doing with my date? Don't let me catch you hugging any guys like that!' Stamp Lindsey summarises De Palma's voyeuristic sadism pointing out that Miss Collins' transformation of Carrie satisfies 'the needs of the masculine voyeur who initially glimpsed the horrific sight of sexual difference in the opening shower sequence' (289). Linda Williams also critiques Doane's work on the masquerade in her discussion of King Vidor's 1937 adaptation of *Stella Dallas*. Employing the concept of the masquerade, Williams discusses *Stella Dallas*' (Barbara Stanwyck) craving for a subject position that allows the woman to be 'something else

besides a mother', the erotic, feminine sexuality that is denied by patriarchal forces. Williams sees melodrama as a genre which provides a context whereby female spectators can take up multiple positions of identification simultaneously. Unlike Laura Mulvey, whose article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1977) demands a 'radical destruction of the major forms of [patriarchally defined] narrative pleasure' (142), Williams offers a counter solution, emphasising the methods by which women *do* achieve a look and a position of enunciation *within* patriarchal structures. Williams argues that melodramas ask for 'reading competence' from their female spectators, whereby women can recognise and acknowledge processes of masquerade and trans-sex identification and thereby oscillate between them.

Discussing Stella's femininity as defined by excess - in her 'stacks of style', layering of clothing, make-up and jewellery - Williams argues that here the masquerade is performed for *other women*, as well as for men, both diegetically and extra-diegetically. The fetishistic disavowal of female masculinity, identified by Mulvey, seems out of place in the melodrama. This is clearly demonstrated in both the mother's and the daughter's looks at each other's performances. For the sake of her daughter Laurel's social advancement, Stella deliberately masquerades passing for a gaudily dressed and ill-mannered working class woman. Her punishment within the narrative appears to adhere to the patriarchal insistence that 'it is not possible to combine womanly desire with motherly duty' (Williams, 1990: 151). Her performance is deliberate, obvious and clear to both

diegetic and extra-diegetic spectators; so much so, that it is almost parodic. Williams goes on to state that the female subject is capable of multiple identifications and of coming to terms with contradictions within roles that are imposed upon her:

The female spectator tends to identify with contradiction itself – with contradictions located at the heart of the socially constructed roles of daughter, wife and mother – rather than with the single person of the mother. (1990: 152)

Williams' critique of the masquerade is based around Doane's claim that the female spectator tends to occupy one of two subject positions. For Doane, the female spectator tends to *over-identify with the female image* on screen narcissistically, or *identify with the position of the masculine subject* as voyeur, and it is these two subject positions that inform her concept of the masquerade. Whichever way she chooses, Doane intimates that the female subject loses herself. Her solution to over-identification, being too close to one's image, is for the female subject to *read* the masquerade or image as a sign which manufactures a distance. Through this means, the masquerade can 'generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable by women' (1992: 240). Williams offers an alternative view:

Rather than adopting either the distance and mastery of the masculine voyeur or the over-identification of Doane's woman who loses herself in the image, the female spectator is in a constant position of juggling all positions at once. (1990: 156)

Though concerned with the melodrama genre, Williams' article offers an insightful look at viewing processes and identification more generally.

Why should the female spectator be the only subject capable of multiple identifications? The male subject (regardless of sexuality) may be already privileged with access to the phallogentric cinematic gaze, but what of the gay male spectator? Williams considers how Freud's theory of psychosexual development differs between boys and girls whereby:

boys define themselves as males negatively, by differentiation from their primary caretaker who [...] is female [...] This means that the boy develops his masculine gender identification in the absence of a continuous and ongoing relationship with his father, while a girl develops her feminine gender identity in the presence of an ongoing relationship with the [...] mother. (1990: 144)

She further concludes:

Unlike the male who must constantly differentiate himself from his original object of identification [his mother] in order to take on male identity, the woman's ability to identify with a variety of different subject positions makes her a very different kind of spectator. (1990: 154)

Indeed it does, but the *gay* male spectator is a very different one also. In Williams' argument, adapted from Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mother, Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), the *masculine* subject position is based upon a rejection of the connection to the mother and the adoption of a socially constructed masculine gender stereotype, which is represented by the father. The *gay masculine* subject, on the other hand, is caught between identifying with his mother (in terms of her passive and receptive nature in a sexual sense) and disidentifying with her in order to form a male identity. The gay male subject faces the further issue of his father, with whom he erotically disidentifies. In effect, his subjectivity is fashioned by disidentifications with both female *and* male subjectivity. He *too* desires to be 'something

else besides', and this is where the contradiction lies – he wishes to be something else besides feminine (which, via his penetrability and masochism, patriarchy shamefully deems him) *and* something else besides masculine (which, in turn, both oppresses him and yet demands impenetrability from him). I would argue that the gay male spectator of queer horror, like the female spectator of melodrama, finds himself simultaneously identifying with a number of subject positions, all of which offer both varying degrees of guilt and shame and moments of liberation and jouissance. Like her, he too 'tends to identify with contradiction itself'. The gay male spectator of queer horror and, indeed, of *Carrie*, like the female spectator of Williams' 'women's films', is also capable of multiple identifications but via a means of *differentiation* and of multiple *dis-*identifications. He too establishes subjectivity negatively. Yet, in his case, it is achieved in the oscillation between the processes of differentiation or distancing awarded by parodic performance and an (at times erotic) over-identification with both the masculine and feminine image.

The gay male spectator also experiences the jouissance of over-identification and, as a consequence, guilt and shame. He may over-identify both with the masculinity of the male subject and with femininity of the female. Over-identifying with normative masculinity (the impenetrable male) offers social mastery and a psychic 'wholeness' and thus differentiation from the female subject, who is associated with lack. Such an over-identification with masculinity encourages a fantastical *parade* of hypermasculinity, whereby the subject appears to have the phallus. In

this sense, it is necessary to differentiate between a previous theoretical comprehension of both a masquerade and a parade of gender, and transvestitism or female impersonation.

1.5 The Masculine Masquerade

For the purposes of this thesis, to ‘masquerade’ or ‘parade’ (Williams, 1990: 53) is to exaggerate or perform one’s femininity or masculinity as a signifier of the subject’s own biological sex. The male subject ‘parades’ his socially constructed gender - masculinity, and the female subject ‘masquerades’ hers – femininity. Yet if masquerade, as argued by Doane, is the performance of an exaggerated femininity, then is parade also an equivalent exaggeration of masculinity? I want to suggest that parade is not strictly gender performance ‘straight up’, for the male subject the parade exaggerates the culturally determined gender traits that would seemingly confirm a biologically determined gender. 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. Effectively, both parade and masquerade achieve the same purpose. Interestingly, there is potential for the *perpetuation* of binaried language around gender oppositions given that masquerade is used to describe the performance of femininity by a female, and parade is the performance of masculinity by a male subject. I wish to avoid this and so will refer to this performance or

exaggeration of gender as a masquerade for reasons outlined below. The understanding of the term parade, relates to Lacan's concept of the 'parade of signifiers', whereby the speaking subject makes his or her unconscious desires known by way of the 'parade of signifiers' in language and the flow of speech; these in turn are governed by Lacan's concept of 'The Name of The Father' and thereby implicated into a patriarchy and gendered male (Lacan [1978], 1998: 104). Indeed, as Lacan states in reference to the masculine parade, 'virile display in the human being itself seems feminine', and even the parade of masculinity is associated with femininity. If Lacan's concept of *parade* represents the male subject's excessive performance of machismo, it is a performance of gender that he ultimately considers feminising. Taking this into consideration, is the term parade really so different from masquerade? Indeed, is there such a concept as the 'masculine masquerade' that does not imply such a cross-gender movement?

Harry Brod (1995) considers the masculine masquerade – but instead of referring to the act of masquerade as an essentially feminine one, he attempts to reveal masculinity as a masquerade also. Brod maintains not only that masculinity may be a masquerade in its heteronormative performance, but that 'masculinity itself in any and all of its forms, is a masquerade' (13). In order to distance his concept from the traditionalist view (more specifically the work of Doane and Stephen Heath) of the masculine masquerade existing in essentialist singular terms, he advises referring to 'masculine masquerades...the pluralized masculinities, coined

to reflect the significance of difference' (18). This opens up the concept to my consideration of a *gay masculine masquerade*.

Brod looks at the historical view of masculinity as 'inherently opposed to the kind of deceit and dissembling characteristic of the masquerade' (17). According to this traditionalist understanding, 'the masculine masquerade is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms' (17)⁷. Indeed, if the masquerade's purpose is ultimately to provide the 'simulation of a missing gap or distance between the subject and their image' and if the masculine subject is competently aware of his 'true' subjectivity, why then should the male subject have a *need* to masquerade in a patriarchal culture as the female subject does? The gay male subject, however, despite being only partially implicated into the patriarchal culture, masquerades/parades because *he has to*, to achieve similar yet contrasting ends to Brod's masquerading idealised heterosexual male subject, this time in order to 'pass as straight' to avoid reprisals within a heterosexist ideology.

As Williams states of *Stella Dallas*, 'Stella's real offence...is to have attempted to play both roles [of both mother and erotic woman] at once' (1990: 151). In the queer appropriations of *Carrie*, playing both roles at once, here in terms of feminine and masculine, becomes more significantly gendered and theatrically realised. What happens then in queer appropriations of *Carrie* where playing both gender roles at once (i.e. transvestite performance) is literalised on stage and cross-gender identification 'crosses over' into cross-gender performance?

1.6. *Carrie's* Trans-Sex (Dis)Identifications.

Existing somewhere between the socially constructed binary of a femininity as indicated by his anal receptivity and his biological masculinity, the gay male subject seems initially drawn to the concept of masquerade or parade as a means of revealing the fragility of his culturally prescribed and gendered subjectivity. It provides a means with which to negotiate the symbolic possession of masculine and feminine identity traits and it also draws attention to the accessibility of the masquerade for both sexes. I want to suggest that a man can perform both an excess of masculinity in hypermasculine *parade* or *masquerade* and, further still, via female impersonation or a camp parody of it.

If to masquerade is to deliberately perform an excess of gender, the masquerade of femininity in *Carrie* is intensified, from wearing pretty clothes to the excess of faked menstrual blood worn by Carrie in her humiliation on prom night which is imposed *upon* Carrie. This bodily fluid, which symbolises Carrie's femininity and threatening potency, adorns her in the blood showers of De Palma's film (and prefigures the shower of male bodily fluids in *Indelible* (Lum, US 2004)). What I want to elaborate upon here is this idea of bodily fluids as the representation of biological identity being externalised. Blood (in this case menses) becomes implicated into a culture of clothing and 'performative' layering.

Addressing the concept of *excess*, Doane quotes Michele Montrelay's 'Inquiry into Femininity' (1978):

From now on, anxiety tied to the presence of the body can only be insistent, continuous. This body, so close, which she has to occupy, is an object in excess which must be lost, that is to say repressed in order to be symbolized. (Montrelay: 91-92)

These ideas of *continuity* and *insistence*, in other words *flow*, alongside that of *excess*, saturate De Palma's and queer variations of *Carrie*. They are presented in terms of *cinematic excess* (in form, editing and style): the excess of *bodily fluids*, an excess of *performance* in layers, and in an excess of *gender*. Such excessive performance of femininity and masculinity inform the masquerade, but how does it influence the transsexual performance of gender? Female impersonation would seem to offer a utopian ideal of sexual fluidity to the gay male subject, yet, as I will argue, the potentially subversive nature of this performance fails, only serving to reinstate patriarchal hegemony.

While there may be an obvious reason for the gay male subject's masculine masquerade of machismo in gay macho stereotypes, what is the appeal of cross-gender or trans-sex masquerade or more specifically *female impersonation* for the gay man? It is entirely understandable, given the cultural reprisals directed towards feminised gay men or gay male sexuality, that exaggerating the subject's masculine traits is used as a defence against such punishments, but to what purpose does the gay male subject adopt a feminine gender masquerade? Doane argues that female transvestism is considered potentially subversive, while male cross-dressing is often regarded as comic or ridiculous:

Male transvestism is an occasion for laughter, female transvestism is only another occasion for desire. Thus while the male is locked into sexual identity, the female can at least pretend that she is other. (234)

Is there any hope for the subversive potential of male transvestism as a means of providing freedom from the constraints of cultural prescriptions of gender? One answer is suggested by Shelley Stamp Lindsey in pointing out that in *Carrie*, telekinesis (the willed movement of objects) is presented as a distancing metaphor:

Telekinesis severs the body from physical action, displacing the violence associated with Carrie's desire onto external objects, masquerade separates body from image, interior from exterior. Both strategies attempt to substitute the monstrous female body with a void. (289)

Similarly, Stephen Koch's discussion of Paul Morrissey and Andy Warhol's use of transvestite performers as purportedly 'real girls' throughout their films⁸, identifies transvestites as an act of willed 'pretence'. He considers the transvestite to possess a 'sense of control over his/her flesh so they can temporarily 'delude' themselves into 'becoming female':

The transvestite on one hand builds a life upon the denial of his anatomical reality [on the other] the transvestite puts complete credence in the dominant efficacy of the so-called masculine property of will [...] the transvestite absolutely links will and behaviour thereby denying the flesh. (Koch, 1985: 122)

Telekinesis, operating as a representation of 'mind over matter', could offer a metaphor for the gay male subject's fusion of femininity and masculinity, one that is denied by his own male physicality. The gay male subject in this sense can 'pretend that [he] is other' – but to what

purpose? Already configured as 'Other' in the heteronormative symbolic, it would seem that this simply underlines the subject's 'Othered' status. One could deduce that the adoption of cross-gender masquerade or, indeed, female impersonation in the queer appropriations of De Palma's *Carrie*, go some way to subvert traditional gender stereotyping of the female as passive, masochistic object of spectacle and the voyeuristic, sadistic male subject. Yet both the transvestite and the masquerading female subject may indeed be guilty of perpetuating traditional patriarchal ideals of femininity and, in some extreme cases, of disavowing femininity and encouraging misogyny and gynophobia. When the gay male subject appears to over-identify with the female subject and willingly adopts drag, identification processes – as in *Stella Dallas* - become exaggerated and obvious. We must therefore take into account the *contexts* in which these performances are being staged and with what intentions. Commenting on female impersonation, Judith Butler states that, 'parody by itself is not subversive [...] a typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception' (1993: 139). Much of the drag and theatrical parody of De Palma's *Carrie* appears to have been staged with acerbic camp comic intentions centred around ridicule and humiliation. It is comedy, not horror, which informs them and in uncovering the layers of comedy that shroud camp-*Carrie* performance, a wealth of anxiety and unease is revealed.

The cult of *Carrie* even inspired an ill-fated Broadway musical in the late 1980's. *Carrie – The Musical* was briefly staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1988 and became notorious in theatre circles for being a legendary financial disaster and is one of the subjects of study in a book on theatrical failures entitled *Not Since Carrie* (1998) by Ken Mandelbaum. At the time of its reviews, it was already being heralded in The Monitor as a 'cult musical' (Larry S. Ledford, May 17th 1988) and clearly figured as a camp oddity. Critics were astounded by the outrageously overblown kitsch of much of the musical's staging claiming that it 'ranks as one of the most misconceived in theatre history, often wildly off in tone and unintentionally comic' (352).

At one point in its short run, *Carrie – The Musical* became a hot ticket for the 'flop connoisseur'. The musical's cult status was also enhanced by its failure, suggesting that a lack of success may itself be pleasurable for the gay male spectator. Its short-lived notoriety lay in its presentation of 'flawless failure'; Mandelbaum even refers to one of its songs as 'perfectly awful' (352). In a similar sense, the gay male subject is associated with an unsuccessful or a failed masculinity within the dominant heteronormative patriarchal culture. The same valorising of failure may appear to be at work here, and one that he recognises in his identifications with the female protagonists of *Carrie*. However, in celebrating failure in a display of excessive femininity by ironically embracing his 'failed' masculinity in the effeminate performance of

feminine masquerade, the gay *male* subject similarly encourages its derision.⁹

Subsequent theatrical versions of *Carrie* all attempt similarly to ‘perfect failure’ but, according to Mandelbaum, none will ever reach *Carrie – The Musical’s* iconic status, ‘there’s never been a musical like her’ (354). The gay male subject’s trans-sex identification with the arguably empowered female protagonists of *Carrie* is taken to its logical extreme in various stage performances that display increasingly explicit queer references and in which various female characters are performed by (in many cases) gay men.



Figs 2-3. The Sick and Twisted Players’ *Carrie* (1996).

Now disbanded, a San Francisco based group of ad-hoc performance artists known as The Sick and Twisted Players, led by Tony Vaguely, produced underground queer theatre that would fuse cult feature films (often horror) with television serials and soaps to present cross-breed variations. The company, largely made up of male actors, drag up as the female leads and often reinterpret scenes word-for-word from their source

inspirations. Productions staged in the early to mid 1990s include *The Brady Bunch: Friday the 13th*; *Texas Chainsaw: 90210*; *The Exorcist: A Dance Macabre* and a version of *Carrie* (1996) that, alongside their other productions, encouraged audience participation in the action on stage.

Vaguely's production of *Carrie* included:

Carrie Kits [which] armed audience members with lunch bags containing plastic crucifixes and tampons to throw at the title character, played by [Tony] Vaguely, while shouting 'Plug it up!' during the pivotal shower scene. (Becky Ebencamp, 1996)

Vaguely states that his version of *Carrie* is heavily influenced by the De Palma film, 'as it is so embedded in mainstream culture through its visually powerful telling in cinematic terms, that indeed I believe to have more resonance with audiences, and specifically for me...' (Interview with Vaguely, 2007). The Sick and Twisted Players' appropriation not only featured female impersonation but also female male impersonation and, as Vaguely puts it, 'straight drag' (see figs. 2-3) whereby characters' genders are performed 'straight-up' but in a histrionic, campy and excessive style:

The mother was a real woman, though with her over the top acting and make-up many assumed she was in drag. Not so. But I was Carrie in drag, Miss Collins was in drag, and possibly some of the extras at the prom...the rest of the cast played "straight drag" so to speak, women were women, and men were men. (Vaguely, 2007)

One review states of the gender play and jibing of performed menstruation:

Vaguely perfectly captures [...] the role of Carrie. His/her compressed body language and long straggly hair wrap him/her up into a flawless introvert. Actually we'd better stop attempting to

identify genders in this review since S&TP love to switch sexes and keep you guessing [...] the audience members dip into their complimentary *Carrie* souvenir bags and hurl feminine hygiene products at the menstruating mess onstage. (Sister Dana Van Inquity, *San Francisco Bay Times* January 11th 1992)

In 2005 Hell in a Handbag Productions staged a run of *Scarrie - The Musical*, in Chicago. Their version of De Palma's film also involved drag performances of the triptych of female leads, Carrie, Mrs. White and Miss Collins. Written by David Cerda, the play is an unauthorised parody of *Carrie* which features 'a rockin' 70s influenced score and lots of pig's blood.' Cerda professes that:

This story just resonates with me, it's the ultimate revenge fantasy. I also truly love the film, Sissy Spacek is the embodiment of what I and so many others I know felt on the inside - the film is just ripe for parody. (Interview with Cerda, 2007)



Figs. 4-5 *Scarrie – the Musical* (2005) promotional stills.

Erik Jackson's production of *Carrie* (2006), (initially sub-headed *A Period Piece*), for Theatre Couture, was staged at New York's PS 122 Theatre.

Jackson's version features only one drag performance, that of Carrie

herself, by performance artist Sherry Vine (Keith Levy). Despite playing the narrative relatively straight, and being touted as the only theatrical version (other than the musical) to be sanctioned by Stephen King himself, the production draws many of its comic moments from the references to female sexuality and menstruation. The central blood shower sequence is played for laughs and implicates the audience in the prom night glee, by dumping buckets and buckets of 'blood' over Carrie and most of the front rows of the audience. Yet Jackson's version, despite these uneasy moments of pointed comedy at the expense of women's bodies, is one of the only productions that highlights the narrative's radical potential in identifying with the 'outsider', 'the freak' and the 'Other'. Jackson's final scenes clearly state the play's queer subtext:

SUE: Doesn't it stand to reason that there are others? Hundreds, maybe thousands. But these people won't always be the Carrie Whites, the oddballs, the freaks! They might blend in with the rest of us! (Taken from finished script of Jackson's *Carrie*)

Jackson's version, he admits, was born out of an identification with Carrie as a tormented outsider. Its star, Sherry Vine, concurs in several interviews that he identifies with Carrie as a marginalised individual:

What gay can't relate to the story of *Carrie* and all of the torment that the title character faces? I was the school sissy and lived every day of my life in fear until college. I wish I had that strength that I have now and said 'Yes okay I'm a fag', I think that would've taken the air out of their balloons! (Genre Magazine, 12th January 2006)

Jackson enlarges on this proclamation of his version of *Carrie* as the 'ultimate outsider' who is *especially* relevant to those with stigmatised sexual orientations:



Figs. 6-7 Theatre Couture's *Carrie* (2006).

Many who struggle with any non-hetero impulses or identities often feel similarly. And that Carrie is able to enact such an impactful revenge certainly taps into the extreme fantasies of the oppressed and shunned.

Jackson rejects the criticism of female impersonation as misogynistic. He describes his production's comic highlighting of menstruation and female sexuality as an affectionate critique of femininity:

There's sometimes a knee-jerk reaction that a male writer who writes a female part to be played by a man in drag must hate women...since I'm working in a comic milieu with this material, there was no way that the part could be played by a woman, since there is nothing funny about girls throwing tampons at a real girl who's having a fake period. But you switch out the genders and something in the equation completely clicks. You have to have that distance in this instance. The conceit for me doesn't comment on gender politics as much as it does on the demonization of the outsider, which here is represented by a man in a dress, which our society barely tolerates. (2007)

Yet, once again, it is the *female* subject that is excluded from the performance of excessive femininity. It seems that, in terms of comic excess, Jackson's 'man in a dress' is more able to achieve 'that

distance', which both formulates a critique of gender and differentiates male homosexuality from femininity. The actors onstage are not simply simulating femininity, rather they are performing a comically unsuccessful masquerade of femininity. What *is* being performed on stage is a *failed woman*, highlighted by the simulation of a highly exaggerated menstruation. This deliberately failed gender performance offers a very strong point of identification for the gay male spectator. The ironic pleasure offered to the gay male subject in the failed *Carrie The Musical* influences Jackson's work heavily¹⁰, and perhaps it is failure in general that remains the central lure for the playwright: 'I'm attracted to spectacular failure. It's compelling!' Unlike other drag-*Carrie* performances, Jackson's version never explicitly makes clear that it is a man in a dress performing excessive femininity onstage. Yet, there are occasions where traits of masculinity are revealed in dropping the drag. As Jackson declares, 'We never drop the drag per se, but it isn't played totally straight, if you'll pardon the pun.' What is indicated in these moments, where the fabricated performance of femininity is dropped and the layers reveal both a constructed feminine *and* masculine subjectivity, remains to be seen.

Is there a difference between patriarchal representations of femininity (associated with monstrosity or, at the very extreme, nothingness) and the willing adoption of a camp parody of that representation? This is debatable and entirely dependant upon how volitional one views the irony to be. For example, the post-failure celebration of *Carrie the Musical's*

camp overtones are perhaps not as pointed in their critique of gender identities as those which foreground the masquerade of camp and drag. It must be noted that the parody of monstrous femininity, represented by the various drag-*Carries*, is not undertaken by its *objects* (women) but notably by its *subjects* (men) and, as such, cannot be separated from patriarchal influence. There is an implicit misogyny in many of the drag appropriations of *Carrie*. Gynophobia is evident in the disgust shown towards menstruation encouraged by The Sick and Twisted Player's audience participation and in Theatre Couture's overblown gross-out explosion of blood onto audience members¹¹. In highlighting the monstrous Otherness of women's bodies and, indeed, of femininity, the gay male transvestite performer seems to ridicule femininity by performing an excessive and desperate plea to be recognised as *not* woman. Do such performances, encouraged by a clear identification with both victimised femininity and phallic femininity, offer a chance for the gay female impersonator to highlight his difference from femininity and thus disavow the phallic lack attributed to him by heteronormativity?¹²

In 'Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag' (1991), Carole-Anne Tyler discusses the 'phallically regressive nature' of female impersonation and its relation to camp and mimicry. Through a discussion of drag performance, male and female impersonators and feminine icons, Tyler points out the potentially oppressive connotations of camp mimicry:

Not too long ago camp languished, theorized as the shameful sign of an unreconstructed, self-hating, and even woman-hating

homosexual by gay, feminist and lesbian feminist critics alike. Now camp has been rehabilitated with a vengeance: not only femininity but even macho masculinity is read as camp and, therefore, radical...[but] if all gender is an act and not the direct expression of a biological essence, what counts as camp and why? And if camp is a parodic distance from an identity theorists once thought it too nearly imitated, what guarantees are there that such a distance is not a difference complicit with phallogocentric hierarchies? (33)

The distance, which recalls Erik Jackson's words, that is awarded to camp parody and female impersonation is one that highlights, paradoxically, not only the subject's difference from patriarchal, heteronormative masculinity, but also from the femininity it mimics. In effect, this propels the performing subject back to a masculine subjectivity that is situated alongside and within phallogocentric patriarchy. This is perhaps because the performance originates in a failure of a phallogocentric scripting. Tyler argues that female impersonation by gay male subjects, while being used as a weapon against the limiting heteronormative masculinity thrust upon them, may in fact also exist as a defence mechanism against heterosexist reprisals:

...camp and its interpretations participate in the reproduction of subjectivity and can be defensive as well as counter-offensive. (33)

Tyler separates masquerade from what she calls, 'transvestic performance' (33). She identifies a contradiction within the defense of camp and drag, which maintains that all identity is a cultural performance. What then makes camp performance of gender 'any more radical or indeed achieving any more subversion than the masquerade or parade' of gender played 'straight'? Her solution offers a productive insight into the various dragged performances of *Carrie*. She argues, like Williams in

regard to the deliberately scripted female protagonists of melodrama, that the *context of performance* and the subject's *authorial intentions* should be taken into account, 'parody is legible in the drama of gender performance if someone meant to script it, intending it to be there' (54).

Though the intentions of transvestite performance may well be subversive, the performance may unconsciously uphold an oppressive phallogentric discourse. It seems that authorial intention only goes some way to influence the potential readings of a gendered performance. The grotesque renditions of the tragi-comic femininity in drag acts seem to suggest that, despite the transvestite performer's protestations of apparent identification, there is a derision aimed at the female figures parodied. While this *masquerade* of feminine impersonation, present in the queer appropriations of *Carrie*, initially offers the gay male spectator identification with the character of Carrie and highlights the fragility of presupposed 'natural' masculinity, it also provides a means by which he can reject the shameful femininity associated with his sexual identity. The gay male subject mimics the female subject, performing an exaggerated version of a femininity attributed to him, presenting it as unreal and ridiculous. Tyler concludes via various references from feminist critics all of whom maintain the negative, oppressive functions of gay male drag for the female subject, that:

These feminists all assume that camp operates defensively to hold femininity and the lack it signifies at a distance from the man who seems to have adopted it. His femininity is a put on, not the real

thing, signaling that he has what women lack: the phallus. The man in drag, they suggest, is the phallic woman. (44)

Conclusion

It appears that in drag-*Carrie* performances, the cross-gender masquerade, which at first appears to be an homage to femininity, may merely provide a veil for the reaffirmation of masculinity. What occurs in the gay male spectator's reception and appropriation of *Carrie* is a literalising of the same symbolic trans-gender identification of both Mulvey and Clover's works. Though *Carrie* is not a slasher horror in the strictest sense, I propose that a similar distancing with femininity is enacted via simultaneous (dis)identifications with femininity via the film's narratives and subjective framings. Both Clover and Hutchings implicitly claim a heterosexual orientation for the majority of male adolescent horror spectators who are re-masculinised via their shifting identifications from monster to Final Girl. The gay male spectator also seeks a potent re-masculinisation, but from a more complex hegemonic cultural imposition which places him, like the female subject, in the position of lack and thus alongside femininity. His re-masculinisation is achieved via contradictory, multiple dis-identifications with both femininity and masculinity.

Klaus Rieser points out that the horror film is constructed and defined by 'improper fusions', be it either in the figure of the monster/killer or the Final Girl herself. These fusions may prove the primary identification point for the gay male spectator, but by virtue of his identification with such

'improperly fused' characters, he too fights for emergence and acceptance into the symbolic. Rieser concludes that in the slasher film:

illegitimate (con)fusion is one of the prime threats [...] the feminine men, the masculine women, the male spectator identifying with a woman - they are prime examples of such improper fusions, who are defined as monstrous then punished and expelled [...] (confusions are resolved in slashers) [...] In other words, difference from hegemony (queerness) is othered while heterosexuality and the sex/gender system it maintains are reinstated (388)

Such contradictory and reactionary reinstatements of heteronormative masculinity are present also in filmic appropriations of *Carrie* and throughout the queer horror film sub genre. By presenting either extreme versions of gay macho masculinity or excessive femininity via cross-gender performance, queer horror presents an appearance of gendered fluidity while simultaneously valorising fixed gendered subjectivities.

¹ My definition of epistolary as, 'a story written in the form of letters, or letters with journals' is taken from *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Margaret Drabble (Oxford University Press, 1985: 322-3).

² Leigh A. Ehlers' 'Carrie: Book and Film' in *Literature/Film Quarterly* Vol, 9, No. 1 1981 p. 32-33, notes *Carrie's* many literary antecedents, including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) with its uses letters, diaries, transcriptions of wax disc recordings and newspaper reports.

³ Although I may transpose such theories onto *Carrie*, it should be noted that the film is in no way affiliated into the slasher sub-genre. The film has *two* Final Girls, Carrie and Sue Snell, one of whom, Carrie, can only be considered as a hybrid of victim-hero *and* monster, in which case the film also has *two monsters*.

⁴ For critical writings on De Palma's *Carrie* see: Carol Clover, 'Carrie and the Boys' in *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton University Press, 1992); Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993); William Paul, *Laughing, Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy*

(Columbia University Press, 1995) and Shelley Stamp Lindsay, 'Horror, Femininity and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty' in *The Dread of Difference : Gender and the Horror Film* by Ken Gelder (ed) (University of Texas Press, 1996).

⁵ Mulvey argues that the female spectator, being denied a cinematic gaze in both a diegetic and extra-diegetic sense has to become a metaphorical transvestite in order to identify with male protagonists and phallogocentric framing on screen to afford herself a look or a gaze by proxy.

⁶ See accompanying DVD Special Features on *Filming Carrie* on MGM Home Entertainment *Carrie: Special Edition* (2004).

⁷ Brod discusses a repressed anality in the very term 'masculinity', '[a] more 'feminine' anal eroticism, a repression also linked to the suppression of homosexuality. The masculine mask is worn in order to achieve a normative performance-oriented phallic heterosexual male sexuality...' (17).

⁸ See for instance, Candy Darling, Holly Woodlawn and Jackie Curtis in *Flesh* (Morrissey, US 1968), *Trash* (Morrissey, US 1970) and *Women in Revolt* (Morrissey, US 1971).

⁹ A recent revival of *Carrie – The Musical* was staged by MCC Theater in March 2012 at the Lucille Lortel Theater in New York, despite opening with favourable reviews, the production closed in April 2012.

¹⁰ Jackson reveals that 'The cult status of the musical infuses my own adaptation, especially since I was doing the play in a way that embraced the camp aspects that the musical failed to.' (Personal Interview, March, 2007).

¹¹ Vaguely defends the ambiguous elements of The Sick and Twisted Players' *Carrie*: "Gay men have always appropriated images of strong outsider women for camp purposes. Also, they are fascinated/repelled by women's bodies (or girl cooties, if you will)... No one was guilty [of misogyny], and no regrets over it. I'd say it's the men who don't identify with *Carrie* are the misogynists. Note: In several of our productions females did drag to play male roles!". (March, 2007)

¹² Queer horror film parodies of *Carrie* include: *Another Gay Movie* (Todd Stephens, US 2006) which features a fantasy sequence in which a gay couple are crowned 'Queens of the Prom' dragged up as Carrie and Tommy having a bucket of semen, rather than blood, pulled onto them; and *I Was A Teenage Werebear!* (2011) by gay filmmaker Tim Sullivan features a young college student (Brent Corrigan) whose repressed homosexual desires erupt in him turning into a young monster bear-cub,

Carrie's opening shower scene is parodied as a gay werebear is abused by jocks while they chant 'plug-him-up!'.

Chapter Two

Indelible - Carrie and the Boyz

2.1 The *Indelible* Carrie White

Indelible adj.

- (of ink or a pen) making marks that cannot be removed.
- not able to be forgotten. (*OED*, 879)

Charles Lum's experimental short *Indelible* (2004) shifts 'Carrie worship' to more extreme and explicit levels. The concept of indelibility and the impressionable or unforgettable event or image is at the centre of Lum's fusional short. Certain impressionable images and events induce a traumatic effect upon Lum's work and this extends to the traumatic discovery of his own HIV positive status which feeds into his visual contemplation of pleasure and mortality. *Indelible* brashly combines borrowed original feature film footage in a clash of the horrific and the erotic. The video is chiefly made up of Lum's own self-described favourite films: *Carrie* (1976) which is intercut with excerpts from *The Fury* (De Palma, US 1978) and is further cross cut, dissolved and juxtaposed with images and sounds from hardcore gay pornographic films, most notably, *LA Tool & Die* (Joe Gage, US 1979). He describes it as:

an aborted narrative about emasculated machismo, femininity, fear, shame, bloodlust, sexual desire, disease, retribution and death in an American pop cultural spray of blood and semen that builds to an explosive, cathartic climax. (Interview with Lum, 2004)

Lum interprets *Carrie's* pain via his own subjective experience and socially constructed identity, and it is reworked to reflect both the trauma

and anxiety experienced by a gay male subculture in an era that is defined and influenced by HIV and AIDS. *Carrie*, *The Fury* and *LA Tool and Die* were produced at a time in the late 70s, a period in time just prior to the onset of a global epidemic of HIV and AIDS but which, retrospectively viewed, seems populated by a gay masculine culture that appears naïve and unconcerned with such matters. This hedonistic time of louche gay male sexuality could be viewed in retrospect as sustaining the definition of gay masculinity as paralleled with the penetrability associated with femininity and female sexuality, via a new understanding of the infectiousness of bodily fluids.

Lum's work reveals the confining structures of cinema and, in reformulating feature film narratives, he critically reveals the moving image's ability to manipulate our sense of self and how subjectivities are culturally formed 'through pre-conceived filmic narratives'. He continues that, 'my videos are attempts to both observe and then change those narrative conventions'. Lum's works often favour the short form as digital videos that concern themselves with ideas of gay sexuality in relation to his own HIV positive status. *Indelible* 'borrows' or 'samples' (it re-edits, re-configures and visually alters) scenes, images, shots and sounds from multiple films. In this sense *Indelible* is an (un)original *mashup*¹ or a piece of bricolage that appropriates scenes from original sources.

Lum's films are informed by the conviction that HIV alters the subject's personal experience on emotional, political and sexual levels and *Indelible* passionately embraces these themes. Lum points out that *Indelible* is most frequently screened at 'gallery shows, small art events, or lectures'. The only major festivals to screen were the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, Toronto Film Festival and Mix Brazil. Yet the short has been rejected from various independent film festivals and galleries due to its controversial imagery and because of its explicit sexual content and the copyright issues that arise in borrowing clips and sounds without permission. Not only is Lum marginalised by the mainstream artistic culture, his work is stigmatised somewhat within gay and lesbian artistic subcultures. One particularly vitriolic response to *Indelible*, from a critic at the Austin Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival in 2005, clearly highlights the potent and provocative content of Lum's short:

...when the MOST GODAWFUL AND HORRENDOUS SHORT FILM I HAVE EVER SEEN IN MY ENTIRE FUCKING LIFE was shown...It is repulsive. To even discuss this piece of shit gives one the impression that it is in fact a viable film when it is no such thing. This isn't even 'art'. (cited on Lum's website, www.clublum.com)

Arguably *Indelible* would find its place within a body of films known as 'paracinema' defined by Jeffrey Sconce (1995) and Joan Hawkins (2000) as a form that crosses and fuses genres and aims to disqualify the tendency within academic film studies to separate out high art from 'trash'. Paracinema is largely dependent on an ironic reading strategy by its spectators (and perhaps its creators), and is often done so some time

after the film's original release. Yet Hawkins notes that in paracinematic films:

The operative criterion is affect, the ability of a film to thrill, frighten, gross-out, arouse, or otherwise directly engage the spectator's body. And it is this emphasis on affect that characterizes paracinema as a low cinematic culture. Most of the titles are horror, porn, exploitation, horrific sci-fi, or thrillers. (2000: 4)

Hawkins' study involves a detailed study of form, genre and physiological affect as well as its socio-political influences. She points out that, 'paracinematic catalogs are dominated by what Clover terms the "body genre" and films that Linda Williams notes "privilege sensation"'. She further references Williams by listing three foregrounded components, the first of which is of specific relevance to the study of *Indelible* and its inauguration into the canon of paracinema as presenting 'the spectacle of a body caught in the grips of intense sensation or emotion...the spectacle of orgasm in porn, of terror and violence in horror, of weeping in melodrama' (Hawkins: 4).

Sconce's 'Trashing the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style' (1995) focuses upon the political and subversive aspects of the paracinematic movement and originally coins the term. According to Sconce, the readers and contributors to fan publications such as *Zontar* and *Necronomicon* include graduate students. Sconce points out the potentially contradictory position these academic devotees of paracinema find themselves in, overwhelmed by the desire to oppose and challenge academic film reading strategies while also adopting said

strategies in their own critical appraisal of this cultish pantheon. Inevitably their devotion to this counter-cinematic genre draws upon academic language to praise paracinema which aims to:

valorize all forms of cinematic 'trash', whether such films have either been explicitly rejected or simply ignored by legitimate film culture [...] the paracinematic sensibility has recently begun to infiltrate the avant-garde, the academy, and even the mass culture on which paracinema's ironic reading strategies originally preyed. (1995: 372-3)

As an ex-film student and video artist with a past career in professional filmmaking and a cinephile, Lum more than fits the description of the typical academic fan of paracinema. Sconce points out that paracinematic texts are frequently produced by 'eccentric individuals' whose productions 'often present unpopular – even radical – views addressing social, political, radical or sexual inequities [...] or in other ways [...] assault taboos in relation to the presentation of sexuality, violence and other mores' (384).

If *Indelible* demonstrates Lum's own academically infused, heavily ironic yet devoted readings of the films he claims as influential, inspirational and worthy of re-vision, *Indelible*'s place in paracinema remains debatable. What could be considered the paracinematic text here: the original source films or the end product? Is *Indelible* merely a rendition of paracinematic appeal rather than existing as a paracinematic text in its own right? Does Lum's queer reassembling of De Palma's supposedly misogynistic² and, arguably, reactionary *Carrie*, offer any progressive readings at all? Or

does it simply map conservative, reactionary values onto the alternative sexualities that Lum brings to the fore in his reworking of the film?

In *Indelible* Lum uses a bricolage of appropriated images in order to form a critique of the media used and the cultural impositions they bring. While its interpretation of violence and sexuality in relation to gender is obvious, *Indelible* reconfigures these themes and images with the added influence of external forces such as the threat of HIV/ AIDS upon gay culture.

Indelible particularly presents his own oscillating identification with both femininity and masculinity as a gay male subject. The video explicitly brings together the two genres of horror and pornography, to connect their conceptions of the monstrous, the threatening, the violent, the dangerous and the erotic. It fuses the generic, thematic and filmic conventions of each of the films by means of simple juxtaposition, superimposition³, cross cutting, cutting on action, dissolving through imagery and soundtrack and, taking De Palma's now clichéd and overblown use of split-screen to an extra-diegetic level, it brings images from other films together in a frenzy of split-screen action.

Among the short's various source texts, it is undoubtedly *Carrie* that provides the most potently *indelible* effect. Lum's fascination with *Carrie* started at the age of 17, watching the film three days before his own senior prom. The film, according to the director, left an 'indelible impression' and revisiting it at the age of 45, in an editing exercise while

at the School of Art Institute of Chicago, allowed Lum to experiment with the footage from De Palma's film:

I felt compelled to see how my two favourite films, *Carrie* and *LA Tool and Die*, reflected upon each other in both hard (jump) cut, juxtaposition, in superimposition and in split-screen images.
(Lum, 2005)

The deconstructive aesthetic of *Indelible* allows us to explore the generic conventions of the horror film and gay male pornography and draws parallels between them: of a connected eroticism, shared anxieties, shared imagery and notions of desire, shame, humiliation and trauma. By taking apart, reviewing and re-editing the horror film in this way, the genre takes on a new resonance and cultural meaning. Erotic elements that may have been implicit become foregrounded by association. The films become eroticised by the *penetration or insertion* of explicit sexual imagery into their narrative and, conversely, horrific elements are attributed to explicit erotic scenes of sex.

This chapter investigates Lum's eroticisation of horror as a means of revisiting, recollecting and replaying cultural notions of trauma. His fusion of mainstream horror film with gay male pornography permits a clearer understanding of an emerging queer horror aesthetic. *Indelible* allows for a contemplation of queer horror as a means through which the gay male spectator revisits and replays cultural notions of trauma that are pertinent for the gay male subculture. These include: the defining or cultural imposition of subjectivity that is acknowledged by Lum and that is consequently rejected; the paralleling of homosexuality with HIV and

AIDS and the effect this has upon homosexual culture and, finally, the conflation of a submissive femininity with gay men within heteronormative culture.

Lum's paradoxical consideration of the potentially threatening and, for him, liberating elements of gay male sexuality is shown in *Indelible's* uneasy and frenetic comedy of eroticism. The film's presentation of a gay machismo as visually fascinated by the phallus, and the anxieties of heteronormative masculinity in light of the devastation caused by the AIDS virus, clearly invites a comparison with Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' (1987). I want to discuss points with which they concur, using Lum's *Indelible* as both a visual example of Bersani's ideas and as providing moments of contradiction to Bersani's polemic.



Fig. 8 / Fig 9. Freezing the flow; Carrie's silent scream.

The fragmentary nature of *Carrie's* original narrative is taken one stage further in *Indelible*. Here the same fragmented, disorientating and repetitive presentation of both King and De Palma's *Carrie* is forced back into a different narrative. Lum starts his re-presentation of *Carrie* out of

sequence, beginning with a flash-forward to prom night, returning to Carrie and her mother's dinner discussion of the prom. Flashing forward to the prom again, Lum displays the build up to Carrie's blood shower, which itself is stopped in mid-motion (fig. 8), showing her revenge, then returning to the gym shower torment and finally returning to the blood in full flow upon Carrie and Tommy at the prom. He finishes the film with a shot of her destroying the car carrying Chris and Billy, and then concludes with Carrie's reaction to her humiliation in a silent scream (fig. 9). Lum interrupts the flow of an already disorganised series of events, with scenes from various other films, including gay porn films *LA Tool and Die*, *The Final Link* (Chi Chi La Rue, US 2000) and *The Fury*, and fuses the scenes together. He restores the fragmented narrative by mixing genres and including footage from different films. Lum re-reads *Carrie* by way of the enforced new 'voices' he introduces to the text and consequently enhances and restores the *flow* (of narrative and blood) with renewed vigour. *Carrie* is a narrative and cultural text that is susceptible to such 'breakage' or a 'shattering' in an already fragmentary narrative structure, made visually fragmentary and 'fragile' by De Palma. Lum merely takes the pliable text and alters it accordingly by mixing horror narrative with porn narrative.

2.2 'The things that boys do to each other'

Carol Clover points out the relation of the horror genre to that of pornography: 'The 'art' of the horror film, like the 'art' of pornography is, to

a very large extent, the art of rendition or performance, and it is understood as such by the competent audience.’ (1992: 11) Lum’s work seems to take up the stereotypical notion of the formulaic, ‘sequel-ised’, repetitive, narratively and technically predictable horror film to explicitly reference its close ties with the technical structure of the pornographic film. Both tend towards the repetition of a specific narrative structure (narrative exposition followed by death scene/narrative exposition followed by sex scene), a tendency for serialisation or sequelisation and a compulsion to both repeat and enact parody. Via various editing techniques, Lum super-imposes and layers these numerous film sources creating one amorphous narrative which is nevertheless always informed by the appropriation of its original visual materials. Lum’s decision to juxtapose *Carrie* with *LA Tool & Die* (with its representations of macho masculinity), and *The Fury* paves the way for *his* main thematic and visual opposition and his analogy of what a heteronormative ideology defines as ‘abject femininity’ with ‘abject masculinity’.

Among other works of gay pornography used in *Indelible*, the main film which stands in opposition/juxtaposition to *Carrie*, is *LA Tool and Die*, the third and final film in director Joe Gage’s ‘Working Man’ trilogy of films which begins with *Kansas City Trucking Company* (US 1976), followed by *El Paso Wrecking Corp.* (US 1977). Gage’s films are known for their unabashed display of ‘Gage Men’, supposedly ‘real’ working class, macho gay performers. In the ‘Working Man’ trilogy, male protagonists are often solitary loners whose main drive (other than a sexual one), is

finding employment in blue collar environs, as demolition men, policemen, delivery drivers, welders and construction workers, all of whom are trying to survive and making ends meet by taking work in harsh, physically demanding settings. Their journey to find work or to secure a plot of land often mirrors their search for a companion or lover. The trilogy follows a basic road movie narrative, yet its romanticism sits incongruously alongside numerous promiscuous and anonymous sexual encounters set on location in blue-collar locales oozing with machismo. They often display alternative sexual activities such as glory-holing and cottaging. Favouring a more mature, middle-aged, hirsute and burly man, Gage's works often focus on sequences which display his main protagonists' rough but, at times, romantic attitude to anonymous sex (for example, the finale of *LA Tool and Die* hangs upon the decision faced by main protagonist Willie (Will Seagers) of whether or not to join his companion Hank (Richard Locke) in collecting his deeds for a plot of land in a show of romantic commitment). Despite their macho masculinity, Gage Men are sensitive too. The characters are stereotypically mustachioed bikers, lonely macho truckers, burly leather queens, lumberjacks and 'bears' (large, hairy men), yet they all pine for a nostalgic ideal of companionship. Gage sees the clichéd and stereotyped elements of his characters as indicative of their 'ordinariness' and he maintains that the machismo of Gage Men is a true reflection of everyday gay masculinity: 'I never went out of my way to emphasise the butch or straight attributes of my guys – I always sought to present them as representatives of the average,

ordinary - for the most part - working-class citizen (Morris, 'Keep on Truckin' 2003).

However, in his re-appropriation of *LA Tool and Die*, Lum excludes many of the images of hypermasculine men and indeed of anal penetration, choosing instead to focus upon Jim (Michael Kearns), a transitory character only encountered in the film's opening ten minutes and one of the more groomed, hairless (although mustachioed) and conventionally attractive of Gage's line up. This decidedly ambiguous figure of oral and aggressive passivity is more enigmatic than Gage's typically macho protagonists.



Figs 10-11. Semen ingestion in *Indelible*.

The other films featured in *Indelible* include an untitled video directed by gay pornographer Paul Morris which features scenes of fellatio and semen ingestion (figs. 10-11), and *The Final Link*, featuring an orgy scene set in a sadomasochistic 'dungeon' with performers dressed in leather harnesses and studded dog-collars. Lum foregrounds scenes from gay pornography that involve unprotected sex either mainly of an oral or masturbatory nature. Indeed, alongside a nostalgic inclusion of

scenes from more antiquated pornography from an earlier era – prior to the trauma of AIDS (such as the Gage film) – *Indelible* includes several scenes from more contemporary porn films from the late nineties from Treasure Island Media, a studio famed for its unprotected sex films or ‘bareback porn’⁴.

Composed entirely of borrowed sources and footage ‘ripped’ from other films and videos (apart from Lum’s superimposed titles), *Indelible* draws attention to editing as a process designed to create narrative cohesion and diegesis. In rupturing *Indelible’s* source films, only to juxtapose and over/underlay them to combine both their narrative and spectacular scenes, Lum takes De Palma’s excessive and overblown editing style and exaggerates it further to foreground the very ‘material’ elements of film itself. This connects with what Sconce suggests is a vital element of paracinema which:

foreground[s] structures of cinematic discourse as artifice so that the material identity of the film ceases to be a structure made invisible in the service of diegesis, but instead become the primary focus of attention [...] the paracinematic aesthetic is closely linked to the concept of ‘excess’. (386)

Indelible, if taken as a text in its own right, does *not* include the entire narratives of the aforementioned films. Specific scenes, sequences, sounds, scores, still images and flash cuts are taken out of their original contexts and placed within new ones. If we are to understand and analyse it as an original filmic text it is helpful to have a working knowledge of these films’ narratives and structures, as they exist in their

original forms, in order to understand what technical, symbolic and thematic elements they bring to *Indelible*. Lum may have assumed that the spectators of *Indelible* would have some knowledge of his source texts, especially of *Carrie* and perhaps of *LA Tool and Die*, in order to appreciate the visual and narrative links and motifs. Although it is possible to understand *Indelible* without any prior knowledge of the film's inter-textual references, the film has extra resonance in its sources and their importance as historically informed texts. *Indelible* and its source texts can be read as socio-cultural texts which document the sexual practices and attitudes to sexuality in the mid to late 70s, but as ironically and nostalgically viewed from an AIDS-informed present.

By almost totally reworking the narratives of *Carrie* and *LA Tool and Die* to form an alternative one, *Indelible*'s 'excess' allows the viewer to recognise filmic narrative, and the subjectivities it imposes, as created and mutable. Sconce continues that, 'Excess provides a freedom from constraint (391). It is this concept of excess, arguably part of the allure of De Palma's original, that continually resurfaces in *Indelible* and provides a means by which we can view the gay male spectators' identification with *excess* in its many forms, as a way of disturbing subjectivities and identities that are projected upon them.

However, as much as Lum's refashioning of the films in *Indelible* draws attention to the artifice of narrative, it also leaves stretches of narrative intact (the narrative of *Carrie*'s prom night scene is shown in flash forward

during the White's discussion of events at the dinner table), narratives that may reveal a masculine essentialism. In paracinematic terms, Lum's position as anti-narrative artist, but also devotee and fan of the narratives he uses, does indeed create tension and ambivalence. Due to its inter- and cross-textual nature, we may consider *Indelible* to exist as an open text, that is, one which invites multiple readings from its spectators. *Indelible* takes one or more 'closed texts' (complete and whole filmic narratives) and explodes, fragments and takes them apart only to re-edit and replace specific scenes, sounds and imagery in amongst one another to create a new narrative. Yet it is not wholly an open text in that its reconstructed narrative is taken from a limited number and its finished narrative, to some extent, replicates largely that of both *Carrie* and *The Fury* and in compiling the scenes and images so in its own order suggests a primary narrative reading. *Indelible's* success as an open text lies not in the finished result of it as a re-edited version of its source texts, but in the act of taking apart coherent mainstream narratives and reconsidering them as fragmentary and constructed fictions. The film exposes the way in which mainstream narratives, and allows the spectator to reveal the, otherwise hidden, ways in which the dominant discourse defines and interpellates its subjects. Experimental videos and films that attempt this also work to expose dominant heterosexist structures which construct identities. Yet their success is often limited when the individual fragments of narrative are reconstructed and juxtaposed to create a new original narrative. Any newly reconstructed

narrative, regardless of its radical avant-garde incoherence, still posits a somewhat complete and fixed narrative and this is the precise problem with *Indelible*.

Each source text is replaced in fragmented form into the finished short, and each film's themes, subtexts, characters and ideologies may indeed contradict each other. Therefore the film may appear to be making contradictory statements simultaneously, for example, abhorring explicit and potentially dangerous unprotected sex yet, at the same time, valorising and championing it as subversive. The new found narrative then exists not as an open text, but more as an ambiguous text; not necessarily open to an endless multiplicity of readings, but a finite number defined by its very form and source films.

2.3 Abjection, Blood and Semen.

In *Indelible*, Lum presents sex *en masse*, where the multiplicity of images is turned into a hyperbole of split screen, replayed and repeated scenes. This gradual increase of re-presentation and re-play suggests the almost viral character of the image as a metaphor for the AIDS virus itself. It is via HIV and AIDS and their relation to the bodily fluids of blood and semen that the concept of abjection is presented in *Indelible*. One of *Carrie's* main areas of controversy and discussion is its treatment of feminine sexuality as 'abject' yet in *Indelible* abject substances include menses and semen. The use of the term 'abject' here is taken from Julia

Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982), where abjection is understood as the expulsion of a part of the self in the pursuit of identity and subjectivity:

The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine [...] The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to the I [...] What is abject [...] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses. (1)

Kristeva, and subsequently Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), focuses upon the abjection of the body's own fluids - waste, blood, urine, saliva and excrement. Kristeva defines menses, excrement, urine and also sperm as abject bodily fluids. Outside of the body they represent potential infection. It is the *visibility* of such fluids that indicate their status as expelled or wasted, as polluting or toxic. Visible sperm, rather than that which is located inside the male body or secreted into another's in penetrative sex, would suggest its 'abjection' from the subject. But having defined sperm, among other bodily fluids, as that which symbolises a 'pollutant' in opposition to the body's pure and 'clean self', Kristeva later retracts the polluting power that she earlier attributed to it: 'neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to the borders of the body, have any polluting value.' (71) Confusingly then, sperm seems to represent abjectivity but without any *polluting* power. If Kristeva is correct, what makes sperm so explicitly abject in *Indelible*?

Semen is the bodily fluid that is most strangely absent from both Kristeva and Creed's discussions of the abject; generally Kristeva tends to identify abjection with women and, more specifically, with the maternal, with an

opposition to patriarchal law. Creed offers a close study of the menstrual pollutant in relation to *Carrie*:

woman is specifically related to polluting objects which fall into two categories: excremental and menstrual. [The Abject] is that which crosses or threatens to cross the border. (1993: 10-11)

Creed observes that blood is of extreme symbolic importance in *Carrie* and takes the form of both menses and pig's blood, identifying woman with two religiously condemned fluids. This blood ties Carrie to her mother (who describes her daughter's first period as a 'Curse of Blood', women's punishment by God for the 'original sin of intercourse') via the deadly blood spilled in the film's denouement. Blood is the central symbol of pain, femininity, infection and evil in *Carrie* and, to some extent, in *The Fury*. How then can semen be positioned as abject in terms of Kristeva and Creed's theories? Following Creed's argument, semen ejaculated not in the act of reproduction but in masturbation, oral and anal sex becomes waste, and therefore abject. Moreover, the onset of AIDS as referenced in *Indelible* would seem to suggest that semen, as the fluid medium of infection, is not only 'abject' when wasted. In the wake of the AIDS crisis, semen can become fatally infectious.

The threat of pollution is made explicit in *Carrie's* representation of excremental and menstrual emissions. Moreover, at one significant point, Tommy Ross's poem about (environmental) pollution is read aloud in English class. The poem, which does not feature in *Indelible* or King's novel reads:

What are you going to leave for us, you people in your big cars?
Spewing pollution into the air. You people with heavy feet.
Trampling down the wilderness. You people who peer into
the back seats of cars, hours after you come
out of the back doors of your motels.
Soon all we'll have is each other, and that could be enough.

Although the poem alludes to environmental pollution, it is given new meaning in a film filled with allusions to religious views of sex as dirty and unclean. Far from being limited to a metaphor, the issue is developed by De Palma (from environmental to bodily and psychical pollution, and the pollution of innocence) and expanded upon by Lum to figure homosexuality as a potential pollutant with semen as its symbolic referent.

Both *Carrie* and *LA Tool and Die* were made prior to the early 1980s hysteria surrounding the AIDS epidemic and before the promotion of safe sex became widespread. Combining scenes from both, Lum clearly equates menstrual blood with semen in *Indelible*. It is questionable, however, how he views semen. Does he see it as a cause for revelry in its potency or as source of anxiety in its potential for lethal infection? Lum replies to this question with more questions:

After presenting my own rabid fear of anality through Carrie's Mom, I show all manner of spectacular alternatives: that amazing blowjob, and climaxes ad infinitum and all very, very visible.

I am asking whether it is the sight of semen what makes it an abject, more humiliating than within fucking, where the ejaculate is hidden,

seeded, planted in a more natural, more normal hidden place, (that 'other' - vagina, anus, condom).

Does the act of basking and bathing in semen represent a contraceptive waste of the greatest magnitude? Does safe sex itself indicate the greater more absolute rejection of infection? Is eating the stuff even worse, a willful defiance of safety or the sanctity of procreation? Is it just gross? (Lum, 2005)

It is not the actual spermatozoa that Lum renders abject in *Indelible* but its visible, viscous *flow* (as paralleled with menses). It is the liquid medium of sperm (particularly in regard to HIV, where it becomes a carrier of the disease) that is deemed a source of abjection.

The tense build-up of shots and sequences leading to Carrie's shower of blood is paused in *Indelible*, for it is not a shower of blood that Lum wants as his spectacular release but showers of semen. By analogy then, these torrents of semen, and their ingestion, temporarily replace the aforementioned 'curse of blood' associated with feminine sexuality, with a 'curse of semen' in a display of potentially infectious unprotected sex. In turn, the juxtaposition also highlights the potential infectiousness of blood as much as semen in the transmission of HIV. Lum juxtaposes pornographic images from bareback porn studio Treasure Island Media. Paul Morris (the studio's founder) claims that the studio documents an emerging subculture in gay male sexual practices⁵ allied to what Tim Dean (2008) refers to as a 'breeding culture', a gay subculture where unprotected sex is practised for the purposes of actively seeking HIV infection from willing partners in the acts of anal or oral insertion. Those who seek to be infected by the HIV virus are termed in the subculture as

'bug chasers' and those who willingly donate their ejaculate as 'gift givers'. Dean maintains that these movies represent a shift in cultural attitudes towards AIDS and HIV, now seen as a *less threatening* virus. He goes on to state that in an era of subjective disenfranchisement in western masculinity, these movies also provide a frisson of danger and excitement that allows spectators or indeed participants to threaten and reassess their subjectivities, while also providing an opportunity to re-establish concepts of community and kinship networks based on exchanging the 'gift' of the virus.

Although the HIV status of its stars is not explicitly disclosed, the studio's titles such as *Breeding Season* (2005) and *Breed Me* (2006) evoke a subculture that eroticises the possible transmission of the HIV virus between partners. Dean continues that the act of barebacking encourages the breeding not only of a *virus*, but a breeding of a *subculture* with its own system of rules, iconography and norms. It is a subculture that is seemingly at odds with queer culture as well as heteronormativity. The subculture 'reinscribes eroticism within the sphere of transgression' (Dean, 2008: 81), and reinstates the gay male in the position of the 'outlaw' in a wider culture of increasing social acceptance, civil unions and homosexual visibility. For Dean, the act of barebacking is not as nihilistic as one may initially assume. What is established then is a community of 'outlaws' in a further romanticising formulation of the Other⁶. Dean claims that the act of gift-giving takes on a creative, rather than a

destructive, element (strangely at odds with Bersani's earlier ideal of anonymous gay anal sex as 'anti-communal' and 'anti-egalitarian' (1987: 215)), for there is indeed a clear element of cooperation and social bonding occurring here. Although Dean maintains that the act of unprotected bareback sex offers the individual access to social and communal networks, it is a provisional closeness that he calls, 'the paradox of unlimited intimacy, at a distance' (2009: 138). For Lum too, unsafe sex is a paradox, combining nostalgic jouissance and traumatic anxiety.

The symbolically traumatic sex act is literalised in bareback or breeding pornography, as the penetrated male is potentially infected with a life-threatening virus and, as such, Dean recognises that 'gay men have discovered that they can in some sense reproduce without women' (2008: 86). A re-masculinising power is also awarded within the act of 'breeding'. The more danger the penetrated male willingly risks, the more potent a masculinity he presents. Dean continues:

The presence of HIV has allowed gay men to transform the practice of taking it up the butt from a sign of failed masculinity into an index of hypermasculinity...the more men you're penetrated by, the more of a man you become... Being HIV-positive is like having a war wound or a battle scar. (2008: 85)

Dean offers a further reason for the motivations behind the act of breeding:

the exchange of semen has become ritualised, as an initiation into a fraternal community, yet the scar of initiation is one that is marked on the inside rather than the outside. Bug-chasing and gift-

giving involve fantasies about making an indelible connection with someone else's insides. (86)

What also occurs in the sexual act of barebacking and breeding is the reorganising of the traditional disempowerment attributed to the penetrated individual in the sexual act. The balance of power shifts in the sexual act with the penetrated male becoming re-masculinised. *Indelible's* presentation of unprotected sex and potentially infectious semen provides a jouissance born out of the anxiety and thrill associated with such sexual acts, but also from the re-empowerment gained in putting oneself in such a position or by vicariously experiencing it via memory or re-presentation.

Kristeva argues that it is not uncleanliness or illness that is the source of abjection, rather, it is a symbolic representation of that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. The object is that what does not respect borders, positions, rules, it is the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (4).

Indelible's appropriated bareback pornography reveals the border that the object bodily fluid, semen, encroaches upon is that of the condom and, further still, the body itself. When the border is transgressed, semen can become potentially dangerous. For Lum, it becomes object in its ambiguous representation of both intimacy and lethal infection frequently visualised via oral ingestion.

In her discussion of abjection, Creed emphasises food loathing as:

perhaps the most elementary and archaic form of abjection. Food, however, only becomes object if it signifies a border between two distinct entities or territories (1993: 75).

Lum's mixing of blood and semen is further agitated, if we consider the idea of semen as also symbolically representing milk. Creed notes that the oral nature of sucking and feeding in vampire films is often paralleled with oral sex:

Semen is sometimes referred to as milk [...] Insofar as the act of vampirism mixes the idea of blood/sperm/milk, it becomes a particularly abject act in relation to biblical taboos on mixing blood and milk. The penis also takes the form of the breast in that it is suckled and it gives forth a milky substance [...] Vampirism combines a number of abject activities: the mixing of blood and milk; the threat of castration; the feminization of the male victim. (1993: 70)

In this sense, *Indelible* posits the penis as a replacement of breast. The transgression of boundaries is demonstrated by the male being placed in the position of both breast (female/passive) and suckling (vampire/active), therefore collapsing boundaries between man and woman, sex and nurturing, human and animal. The symbolic mixing of blood and semen (and milk) in *Indelible*, coupled with the religious mania of Mrs. White that permeates its citations from *Carrie*, is rendered sacrilegious despite Lum's confessed identification with Mrs. White's conservative, right-wing standpoint.

If abjection is only possible if it straddles a border between distinct entities and territories, what are those in play here? Are the entities that of the socially constructed (but still phobic within these structures) ideals of the feminine and the masculine, here symbolised by (menstrual) blood and (gay men's) semen? Does Lum want to tie a heterosexist (and homosexual) fear of gay men, as represented by their potentially infected

semen, to the heterosexist and homosexual male fear of menses and the abjection it connotes for women? If menses crosses the border between men and women, it operates, according to Kristeva, to threaten 'the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference' (71). Can semen, and more specifically HIV infected semen in its juxtaposition with menstrual blood, also create the same threat?

The central visual motif of *Indelible* intermingles *Carrie's* shower of blood with *LA Tool's* shower of semen, combining not only blood and semen, but the culturally determined and gendered connotations that are projected onto them via colour codings. The mise en scène of De Palma's *Carrie* is re-presented in *Indelible* and begins to form one of the film's basic binary oppositions of red (representing blood and, by extension, femininity) and white (symbolically representing semen and masculinity). Carol Clover observes the comparative connotations of white-hot heat (and the eroticised connotations of heat as sexual intensity) with the cooler red: 'the genital coolness of the female is normally red and manifest as menses [which] becomes, in the greater heat of the male, whitish and manifest as semen' (14).

Indelible picks up on the idea in the original film and develops it. In one significant scene from De Palma's *Carrie*, Mrs. White enters her daughter's room in a final attempt to dissuade her from attending the prom. She curses Carrie's choice of dress, again prefiguring the excess of colour in the blood shower that is to follow: 'Red! I might have known it

would be red!' suggesting the colour's cultural connotations of wanton sexuality. But, as Carrie protests, the dress's actual colour is pink, combining red and white. Pink, with its cultural connotations of homosexuality, further supports both De Palma's and Lum's films' queer appeal. *Indelible* develops this symbolic intermingling of red and white via their symbolic and colour coded referents to create a queer text. Blood (red) and semen (white) intermingle to make pink and with it fuse the gendered cultural connotations of the aforementioned bodily fluids.



Figs. 12-13 *Indelible's* colour coding.

The opening of Lum's film sets up the colour coding that is to follow (figures 12-13). The film's title 'INDELIBLE' appears repeatedly in the opening shots, changing from red bold type to a white type with a slightly translucent quality. The paler appearance of the second title suggests perhaps that the previous, bolder, red image has become a persistent afterimage. This suggestion is made more explicit as the frame cuts to black, with the word INDELIBLE in bold white type flashing intermittently. This repetition of the word both references *Carrie* as an indelible memory

for both the spectator and Lum himself and also prefigures the opposition of the film's main visual referents, blood and semen.



Fig. 14 The Last Supper tableaux; **Fig. 15** Gay pornography bleeds into the domestic.

Dissolving over the fading white titles from *LA Tool and Die*, the shot tracks back into a scene from *Carrie*. The frame slowly reveals the Whites' tapestry representation of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1495-98), and then an altar-like dinner table at which Carrie and her mother, Margaret White, now sit eating an evening meal (see fig.14). Carrie's family name 'White' now also forms part of a colour coded opposition within *Indelible* as a whole. Three small red candles are centred at the lower portion of the frame, flanked either side by two taller white candles. The scene at the dinner table continues from *Carrie*, but sub-imposed underneath and running concurrently are images of a rough, wooden garage or workshop connoting labour and masculinity. A hand-held camera, suggesting a subjective point of view, frames a man's shadow approaching the door of the garage and continues to follow his movements inside the warehouse. Throughout this melding of images,

the domesticated dinner conversation between Carrie and her mother continues. The films play out in composite layers under/over each other in a dream-like synchronicity, where images of hairy, male legs shadow the wooden walls of the garage underneath the dinner in *Carrie*.

As the Whites' conversation turns from apple pie and pimples to that of a prospective date at the prom, the images from *LA Tool* become more visible. Out of focus, extreme close-ups reveal hands, legs and what appears to be a penis. Mrs. White's shock and disapproval at Carrie's suggestion, 'Prom?!', is pronounced at precisely the same time that images of sexual acts become more apparent under this domestic scene (see fig. 15). A hand fleetingly comes down over the penis at bottom centre of the frame and a mouth follows; fellatio is being performed. Mrs. White's face becomes aghast in disbelief, and under the image again is a sub-imposed wide shot of three or four torsos of burly, muscled men, standing partly in shadow, masturbating. The formation of men across the frame parallels the position of candles in *Carrie*, linking them as phallic symbols.

Cut to a medium close-up of Carrie pleading with her mother, more brightly lit at the right of the table. A candle fills the left of the frame foregrounding the startlingly white glass of milk. 'It's that teacher that called...' Mrs. White carries on. 'Please see that I'm not like you, mamma. I'm funny – all the kids think I'm funny and I wanna be, I wanna be

normal, I wanna start to try and be a whole person before it's too late,'
Carrie pleads.

Cut to a medium close-up of Mrs. White, who throws the contents of her cup at her daughter's face, prefiguring the shower of blood that the viewer expects to follow, but this time it is a milky shower now foreshadowing the ejaculation that will actually follow. Their arguments continue, with Mrs. White ranting wildly, over shots of more men, indulging in barely visible anal sex and fellatio. Mrs. White cries out for her daughter to 'run to your closet!', which the knowledgeable viewer of *Carrie* will understand as the room under the stairs into which Carrie is thrust to pray for her sins. The closet in *Indelible* then, like Carrie's plea to be 'normal' and her declaration that she is 'funny' (as in peculiar), becomes a representative symbol for clandestine homosexuality or queerness. Mrs. White's order is directly linked to the heteronormativity that would condemn gay sex.



Fig. 16, Fig 17. Mise-en-scène divided by colour and split screen

Other instances of this opposition of red and white occur in *Indelible*. The first scenes of the prom stage at the high school in *Carrie* are represented

in high angle wide shot with the bucket of pig's blood positioned precariously on a girder, hovering over the school stage. The girder splits the image between stage (the place of spectacle, stars, fantasy and eroticised imagery) and the dancehall (the audience, the place from which the spectacle is to be viewed). The palette of colours on stage from De Palma's original is of a decidedly whiter, silvery shade, whereas the audience appears redder, warmer and darker (see fig.16). Lum juxtaposes De Palma's tinted red/magenta split-screen images of the revenge that Carrie unleashes upon her tormentors in contrast with the cooler hued images from *The Final Link* (fig. 17), but it is the fusion of (red) blood with (white) semen at the film's centre that demands discussion.

Suddenly, 'Jim' is introduced to the viewer in a startling cut in the midst of Carrie and Mrs. White's argument about the prom. In contrast to the dreamlike dissolves to gay male sexuality that have gone before and continue underneath this scene, there is an abrupt cut from *Carrie's* domestic setting to an opaque, medium close-up of a man bathed in a yellowish, amber light. His hair is slicked back and oily, and he appears naked and sweaty. In the lower portion of the frame the groin and penis of another man is shown, his chest and lower legs cut by the frame, fragmenting and objectifying him. Jim pumps the erect penis, while directly gazing at the camera. A gruff male voice addresses him from off-camera and renders the shot subjective: 'Don't let me stop you, Jim', to which he replies 'Nothing could', proceeding to plunge down and fellate

the erect penis. Then, continuing the idea of the extreme heat of seminal fluid, he announces, 'This guy's real hot....he's just about ready to pop!'. It is Jim, the fellator, who is the main scene of spectacle and the active party, rather than the recipient (deliberately cut out of the frame). Similarly, his aggressive demands are to be rendered passive, as he commands the diegetic and extra-diegetic voyeur in a direct address to camera: 'Why don't you jack that dick off 'till you cum in my face?'



Fig. 18 Jim pumps in *LA Tool*; **Fig. 19** Chris tugs in *Carrie*

After introducing us to Jim in this scene of phallic and oral obsession from *LA Tool*, *Indelible* speeds through dissolves, flash cuts and shots from *Carrie*: Carrie meeting Tommy; her prom date; the rigged voting at the prom; Carrie and Tommy's dizzily romantic dancing; the announcement of their victory and their procession to the stage. Lum includes most of De Palma's editing of these proceedings (adding his own jump cuts and dissolves to the build-up to the seminal climax of *LA Tool*), which comically eroticise the tension that Chris feels in her plotting and revenge upon Carrie. The original sequence replays extreme close-ups of Chris's hands and fingers teasing at the rope from under the stage, her eyes blinking. In several close-ups, her moist tongue darts out to lick her full

lips. However, Lum supplements this implicit eroticism with scenes of literal masturbation and fellatio. He juxtaposes the feminine imagery of Chris's lips and her teasing of the phallic rope with an erect penis and Jim's gaping mouth (figs. 19-20). The succession of cuts to and from *Carrie* and *LA Tool* speed up as the former film approaches its humiliating climax. *Carrie's* tense, Hitchcockian, strings warn of impending horror and humiliation, which also serves to lend a moralistic warning to the approaching act of release. The action in both *Carrie* and *LA Tool* is then slowed, creating a parallel romanticism in Carrie's ascent to the stage and Jim's frantic sex. As Pino Donaggio's lyrical and sentimental score swells over both films, it also serves to eroticise, romanticise and render spectacular the scene from *LA Tool*.

Cut to Chris in close up, pulling down on the cord attached to the bucket. The shot is orgasmic in suggestion. Her ecstatic release is shown as the action cuts to the high angle shot of the bucket, falling from the rafters in slow motion, to the sounds of sexual groans from *LA Tool* (later mixed with Mrs. White's orgasmic death cries throughout the ejaculation). Lum cuts to a visually matching expression from *LA Tool*. Jim's eyes are closed in pleasure as a voice from off-screen warns 'I'm gonna cum', and we see the first, almost subliminal, spurt of semen (figs. 20-21).



Figs 20-21 Ecstatic pleasure juxtaposed in *Indelible*

It is interesting to notice, at this point, that the object of spectacle *crosses genders*, but it is the fact that it is the initiator of the sexual act who is the centre of attention, not the victim or passive object of spectacle. Carrie does not pull the bucket of blood onto herself, but Jim willingly exposes himself to the shower of semen. By this, Lum offers an alternative to gender stereotyping and arguably a 'de-gendering' or 're-gendering' of the conventions of the horror genre by crossing traditional boundaries of who is deemed the object of spectacle. He plays with these gender connotations and reverses them, by positing Jim as a very aggressive, demanding fellator and paralleling him with Chris from *Carrie*. As a sexually objectified but aggressive, manipulative and demanding female character, she links the two gender types and blurs their conventions. Lum's film cuts the blood descending from the bucket in slow motion as a low angle medium close-up shows Carrie, centre frame, looking out to the audience at the prom, awaiting the shower of blood. The blood falls into the extreme top of the frame, but a freeze-frame holds it in mid-air with the words, 'gonna cum' from *LA Tool* echoing repeatedly over it. The downward cascade of red blood is paused, instead focusing on an

upward spurting fountain of white semen. As King replays the blood shower in his novel, Lum eventually does the same – but this time with the symbolic effect of blurring the gendered connotations of genital fluids and the spectacular objectification.

On the freeze-frame, Lum cuts to *LA Tool* where a penis emits a torrent of semen in slow motion, showering Jim's face, with the initial spurt replayed over and over. All the while, the blood splash from the soundtrack of *Carrie* is layered underneath these images. The looped replay of the *money shot*, or ejaculation, a convention in pornography, is one that is even more exaggerated in *Indelible* via the re-editing of these extracts. The spurt of ejaculation, which in the penetrative sex act remains hidden within the body, is shown to authenticate the sex on screen. In *Indelible*, semen is even more visible in the multiplicity of replayed images and scenes. The spurts are synchronised to the amplified sound of screeching violins used in *Carrie*, suggesting a link between her psychokinetic powers and the potency of ejaculation. The note held by the strings slides down in musical scale in a glissando effect - suggesting an almost vertiginous decline to a mood of foreboding and seriousness, in contrast to the upward ejaculation. Lum is perhaps suggesting, in his underscoring of the seminal spectacle with a typical horror score from *Carrie*, that Jim's unprotected ingestion of the man's ejaculate is a cause for concern rather than frenetic pleasure, or indeed perhaps a thrill, that is derived from the potential danger of such an act. There is an ambivalent tension between pleasure and revulsion that ties

the films together at this point, in representing ejaculation as a spectacular liberation and visceral pleasure but also as dirty and dangerous. Is the moralising suggestion that unprotected gay sex is threatening influenced by the hysterical heteronormative anxiety about gay sex and gay male sexuality as paralleled with HIV and AIDS? It seems more likely that it is precisely *this* danger that provides the jouissance for Lum, and a dangerous act that provides another means of disavowing passivity and femininity.

2.4 'After the blood comes the boys': Phallic Panic in *Indelible*.

The visual representation of masculinity becomes hysterically multiplied in Lum's film, not only in the many increasing repetitions of excessive machismo but also in an overload of phallic imagery. Carrie pleads with her mother to let her go to the prom. She proclaims: 'He's a nice boy momma, you'd really like him...', to which Mrs. White replies in despair, 'Boy? Ha-Ha !' with humiliating laughter. 'The Boys...' she continues, and beneath the sequence from *Carrie* a dissolve reveals multitudes of men mutually masturbating from *LA Tool and Die*. Mrs. White goes on clapping her hands with glee, belittling these images, turning them into boys and making the act seem adolescent and ridiculous but, at the same time, offering an excuse for another objectification of the male and his act of onanism. By multiplying the amount of 'boys' that pose such a threat to Carrie, Mrs. White enlarges the singular menace into epidemic proportions. The male gender, in its

plurality, becomes an ever-increasing metaphor for infection, much like Opendra Narayan's rhetorically charged metaphor of gay sex that Bersani quotes in 'Is the Rectum a Grave?':

These people have sex twenty to thirty times a night [...] A man comes along and goes from anus to anus and in a single night will act as a mosquito transferring infected cells on his penis. When this is practised for a year, with a man having three thousand sexual intercourses, one can readily understand this massive epidemic. ([1987] 2010: 3)

Mrs. White continues in her pluralising of this male threat: 'After the blood comes the boys! Like sniffing dogs, slobbering, trying to find out where that smell comes from, where the smell is...that smell'. Yet, in *Indelible*, it would appear that *after the blood, the boys cum*. Mrs. White's rhetoric of a canine male sexuality, visually paralleled with a singular image of penetration taken 'doggy style', seems to suggest an anality to the sexuality on display. The smell that Mrs. White refers to in *Carrie* is that of menstrual blood. Yet in its reworking via *Indelible*, the reference to 'smell' and to boys 'like sniffing dogs', complete with the accompanying (but brief) imagery of anal sex, takes on a new faecal suggestion. The images of anal penetration are few and are out of focus: a pair of jeans is pulled down to reveal bare buttocks in close-up. The camera then jerks manually to reveal another man, pumping his penis into his partner's anus. These images are blurred, darkly lit and angled to show very little. Both Gage's camera angle and Lum's refusal to allow the dissolved image to become fully opaque and supersede the White's conversation makes *Indelible's* only shot of anal penetration a rather non-explicit one.

The film's presentation of gay male subjectivity offers an opportunity to consider representations of (gay) male sexuality orally and phallically, but not essentially *anally*, directed. This appears to be at odds with Bersani's suggestion that all gay male sex culminates teleologically in anal penetration. *Indelible* centres on oral sex, a more equivocal sexual act, which defies easy classification as active or passive. Conversely, Bersani's argument revolves around a masculine subjectivity that he claims is 'shattered' in the penetrative act of anal sex and which he links, by analogy, to the feminine, supine sexual position. For Bersani, 'to be penetrated is to abdicate power' ([1987] 2010: 19). But *Indelible* does not overtly conflate anal penetration with cultural or political subordination.

Fellatio is not exclusive to homosexuality and same-sex sexual practices are neither the only non-reproductive practices nor the only transmitters of HIV. Lum chooses to show *gay* pornography exclusively because, as a gay man, it has particular relevance and appeal for him, but can *Indelible's* abjection of blood and semen be transposed to other sexualities and genders? And why does Lum choose to omit the multiplicity of anal sex scenes from *LA Tool and Die*, focusing instead upon scenes of masturbation, ejaculation and oral sex? Lum has produced short films such as *Facts.suck* (US 2005) that consider the apathy within gay male sexual culture towards safe sex and the debate concerning the safety of *oral sex*. The director describes himself as:

a longtime AIDS survivor who has *never* had receptive anal sex. The content of my videos deal directly with that traumatic fear, its [the exclusive practice of oral sex] inability to protect me from the virus, and the negotiations I have with myself, sex partners, and the public about the risks and responsibilities of ORAL sex in the current sexual arena in which HIV is (or should be) always invisibly present. (Lum, 2005)

The indelible effect that *Carrie* has upon Lum is then paralleled with the traumatic effect of HIV and is made formally visible in the 'invisibly present' superimpositions and sub-impositions which perpetually interchange. Lum's presentation of oral sex and masturbation draws upon cultural notions of such sexual acts as polluting practices of self-harm⁷. The eroticised moments of self-touching in the opening of *Carrie*, as the protagonist touches her own body in the school shower, become a bloody spectacle with the flow of her menstrual blood. The scene can be read as a self-caused injury, a punishment for self-pleasuring, and one that continues throughout the film's narrative.

In *Indelible*, the horror of the horror film and the eroticism of the porn film become fused with a masochism that is tied to the idea of fatal infection. The pollution of HIV transmission supplants the polluting connotations of both *Carrie*'s self-touching and subsequent menstruation and the pig's blood shower that is a horrific symbolisation of her menses. The masochistic pleasure experienced by the spectator in viewing the horror film, as discussed earlier, is transposed in the porn film's own subjective framing via juxtaposition. *Indelible* is a masochistic text for Lum, in that it associates sex (largely oral) with death via *Carrie* and other cultural and

personal references. In Freudian terms, if a moral masochism or a 'sense of guilt' (Freud, [1924] 1984: 420-1) exists in *Indelible*, it is one that finds its origins in any sexual act. Fittingly then, the erotogenic masochism that Freud articulates does seem to lie at the bottom of the guilt apparent in the film. Does Lum's own 'sense of guilt' emerge from the knowledge that sexual pleasure has resulted in his HIV positive status, and is this then transmitted to the homosexual subject as a kind of moral warning?

As Aviva Briefel points out, much of mainstream horror's effectiveness in producing masochistic viewing experiences for the spectator is dependent on the 'cultural gendering of masochism' (2005: 22). She maintains that it is this opposition of masochism/female/passive against sadism/male/active that intrinsically genders pain and the enjoyment of it and therefore:

sets a safe parameter around the spectator's alleged masochism in choosing to sit through a horror film and prevents the 'willing subjection' from turning into an act of self-destruction, if not of lives then of identities (24).

I would argue that in *Indelible*, by crossing the traditionally gendered concepts of object of spectacle and of victim and monster, Lum attempts to both acknowledge and challenge the passivity of the recipient of oral sex. What Lum offers in his uneasy 'de-gendering' of horror is a symbolic self-destruction of a culturally enforced, patriarchal concept of gay male subjectivity associated with femininity. He achieves this by visually manipulating the fatal implications of oral sex and symbolically *working*

through masochism via a cathartic and explosive finale, suggesting that the only relief for gay male masochism is a symbolic suicide, figuratively represented in the increasing freneticism of *le petit mort* and ejaculation on display.

Lum regards his avoidance of anal sex as the cause of his apparent marginalisation from within a gay male subculture: 'as a non-anal practising gay male, I only know too well my own rarity within this club'.

Lum seems to disagree that only penetrative sex is related to power structures, seeing this possibility in other forms of sex. He is interested in the shame that a gay man can be subjected to by a gay male subculture that defines itself in terms of the penetrative anal sexual act. He connects *Carrie's* representation of social rejection to gay male subjectivity. The struggle to 'be normal' is transposed to a gay subculture simultaneously fixated on and struggling against being defined by anal receptivity:

Both Carrie and I avoid penetration. We kill everyone through non-penetrative methods. (Spraying water, creating fire, electrocution, spinning car wrecks, crushing gym teacher, an eye bleeds from a kiss, a woman is centrifuged until her blood sprays out, and Childress totally explodes.) Carrie only penetrates her mother in self-defense. (Lum, 2005)



Figs. 22-3 The feminine/masculine 'spray' in *Indelible*.

Phallic obsession too features heavily in *Indelible* and seems to confirm Bersani's proposal of 'gay men's almost mad identification' with masculinity (1987: 211) in its symbolic form. This obsession crosses *Indelible's* filmic boundaries. In the scenes from *Carrie*, phallic symbols resurface in the face of threatened castration and now constitute what Barbara Creed terms a 'phallic panic'. She argues that:

Proper masculinity embodies phallic power [...] By his very existence, the male monster points to the fact that masculinity, as defined by the symbolic economy, is a fragile concept, one that is rarely, if ever fulfilled. To undermine the symbolic is to create a disturbance around the phallus, to create sense of phallic panic (2005: XVI).

Carrie's vengeance on her school mates and teachers takes the form of a telekinetically-controlled phallic fire hose which sprays high speed jets of water at her classmates. The image alone is a highly eroticised phallic metaphor but, when juxtaposed with images from the gay porn film *The Final Link*, they are made sexually and comically explicit. The most notable of *these* phallically potent images is the repeated powerful ejaculation of one of *The Final Link's* actors, Spike, whose spurting penis mirrors the hose's own powerful spray from *Carrie* (Figs. 22-3). In this juxtaposition *Indelible* becomes quite frantic and, in its mania, almost

comical. Lum seems initially to be representing this phallic obsession as monstrous. Yet does the potency of the phallus, when controlled by and associated with a decidedly feminine power, become threatened?



Figs. 24-5 Castrating in super and sub-imposition.

During his replaying of Carrie's revenge upon her tormentors in *Indelible*, Lum mixes various dissolves from another untitled Paul Morris porn film with footage from *Carrie* of Mrs. White's own torment. In high angle wide shot, Mrs. White's kitchen is shown, with the camera looking down on her pacing anxiously (figs. 24-5). A superimposition introduces the image of ejaculation over the images from *Carrie*; a man's face enters shot, his mouth is open and his tongue protrudes to ingest some of the ejaculate. Sub-imposed under this image, Mrs. White walks over to her kitchen counter, incoherently mumbling to herself. She picks up a large kitchen knife and cuts/hacks methodically at a symbolically phallic carrot lying on her chopping board. With each drop of the knife there is a jump cut on action and the image cuts to a closer focus, quickly drawing our attention to the carrot being symbolically castrated by Mrs. White. She continues to

slam the knife down on the chopping board, even after the carrot disappears.

Indelible is caught between a frenetic embrace of the oral act as an alternative and supposedly safer sex, and the unknown risks involved in contracting sexually transmitted diseases⁸ through indulging in it, as Lum may have done, in what is seen as a phallic panic. Lum's ambiguous desire to both defend and prosecute fellatio and masturbation as unsafe, yet erotically alluring, sexual practices is presented in the face of both heteronormative *and* homosexual views of anal sex as infectious. A spectacular liberating, yet dangerous, orality is paralleled with the religious right's castrating view of anality with which Lum also seems to identify.

Yet there is still a clear jouissance in the film's literal and visual climaxes, and an ecstatic frenzy that frequently overwhelms the guilt and anxiety of Lum/Mrs. White's 'avoidance of sex'. Lum sees the liberating jouissance in *Indelible* as only possible because of its co-existence with guilt: 'If there were no guilt or anxiety, ecstatic frenzy would not be liberating or spectacular' (Lum, 2005). It is worth noting here Bersani's claim that 'there is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it' ([1987] 2010: 3). The ambiguous aversion to sex represented in *Indelible* seems to agree with Bersani's description of the 'gross-ness' of sex. If *Indelible's* narrative were to completely adhere to Mrs. White's repression then the symbolic

visual castration would, via editing, cut away from such imagery. Instead, it lingers on it. To return to the film's sequence, *Indelible* serves to show a continuation or a *flowing* of the homosexual sex act in the face of this castrating threat. Mrs. White continues chopping even though there is no phallic symbol to castrate. Just as Carrie ignores her mother and goes to the prom, the gay pornography carries on, perhaps in a mania of 'unstoppable sex' (Bersani, [1987], 2010: 16). Lum not only wishes to gain access to the potent flow that is attributed to menses in De Palma's *Carrie*, but hopes to supersede it in his presentation of a more powerful ejaculation. In this sense, *Indelible* effectively concurs with Bersani in positing the gay male as what Carole-Anne Tyler terms is the 'better woman' (Tyler: 40). *His* flow is shown issuing forth with a more concentrated force than Carrie's seeping menstruation. The inclusion of powerfully spraying hoses of water in *Carrie's* prom sequence, juxtaposed in *Indelible* with almost comically powerful ejaculations, support the apparent conclusion that male fluids are more powerful and (more abject) than feminine ones. The power represented by these forceful bodily emissions progresses to a literal masculine explosion in *Indelible's* final images.

Indelible represents a desperate reaffirmation of phallic power as a response to the threat of femininity. Lum and other gay male fans of De Palma's *Carrie* are drawn to the heroine as both victim and powerfully phallic woman, but in their consequent representation of her they reveal a

desire to be dissociated with a femininity that compromises their masculine aspirations. Although Lum's film may not exhibit the same grotesque misogyny of many of the drag-*Carries* in associating guilt with feminine masochism and penetration, a similar shame is indirectly suggested. *Indelible* paradoxically reveres and disavows femininity both in the female subject and in the feminised and, by extension, penetrable gay male subject, though aversion to penetration may be motivated by the director's status as a gay man living with AIDS. While not overtly misogynistic, *Indelible* recognises a negatively coded and powerful femininity as something to be adulated yet feared and ashamed of. Yet the abject potency of femininity is surpassed by the explosive potency of gay masculinity, which is both worshipped and, in its heterosexist and oppressive form, also disavowed.

Indelible re-inscribes this complex representation of gender within the erotic culture of unprotected gay sex. In its fusion of gendered horror and bareback porn, the tropes of woman as victim and as penetrated are conflated with new vigour. Dean argues that bareback porn complicates the idea of the gay male subject's passivity by representing the passive recipient of the 'gift' of the HIV virus as *active* in his passivity. It is *his* pleasure that is the focus of attention. In subjecting himself to the lethal possibility of HIV infection, the ostensibly passive male is hypermasculinised (Dean, 2006). Yet *Indelible* reveals not only the falsity of the supposedly masculinising act of unprotected sex, but also the contradictory re-inscription of feminine language and traits associated

within 'breeding culture'. The 'breeding' bottom, despite his claim for hypermasculinity, is feminised to the extent that the terminology used within the subculture is drawn from concepts of artificial insemination, pregnancy and a re-establishment of heterosexual family values, no matter how subversive this familial unit may be. The AIDS virus becomes a 'child' that is passed on via clearly gendered 'parents'⁹. Notwithstanding the masculinisation attributed to unsafe sex, the language used within the subculture has a symbolically feminising quality. Paradoxically, this new feminisation of gay masculinity within the emerging sub-culture of barebacking and breeding films, and indeed within queer horror, continues to reveal the gay male subject's identification with femininity as his most *indelible* scar.

2.5 Broken men, male vulnerability and the cathartic spectacle.

In understanding the processes of identification in *Indelible*, it is necessary to read across from drag-Carrie performances representing transvestite (dis)identification in female impersonation to the (dis)identification experienced by the film's spectator. If the intention of the gay male transvestite or, in this case, gay male spectator who experiences trans-sex identification, is to identify with the phallic woman, why is there such a heavy emphasis on the inclusion of macho imagery in *Indelible* given Joe Gage's examples of tumescent masculinity? The link between spectator trans-sex identification and transvestite performance may indeed be a tenuous one, but it may also reveal the gay male

subject's own discomfort with an assumed cross-gender identification that he is both continually drawn towards and yet at odds with. Further still, the answer may be revealed in the film's presentation not only of femininity but also of masculinity – especially in the film's finale. The paradox of *Indelible* gives rise to yet another contradictory image: that of male subjectivity blown apart in the film's denouement.

It is interesting to observe a striking addition in De Palma's treatment of *Carrie* that does not appear in either King's original or Lum's re-appropriation (at least not explicitly). In King's original, the icon of religious worship that Carrie and her mother keep in their makeshift chapel under the stairs is a crucifix. In De Palma's film, it is changed to a statue of St. Sebastian. De Palma's art director Jack Fisk alters, and effectively queers, a model of a crucified Christ by removing the cross, adding arrows and repositioning the body in a Sebastian-like figure (fig. 26).



Fig. 26 *Carrie's* appropriated Jesus/St. Sebastian.

St. Sebastian enjoys most obvious notoriety as a gay icon, but the saint has been represented in a variety of forms throughout the centuries. Sebastian is thought to have originally served in the third century Roman army under the emperor Diocletian, who was also rumoured to be his lover. Upon discovering that Sebastian was a Christian, Diocletian ordered him to be executed by archers. Surviving this first attempt at execution, Sebastian was returned to the emperor, who then ordered him to be stoned to death. Sebastian's arrow-pierced body is a very popular image in Italian painting. His earliest appearance, in the mosaic of the Basilica of St. Appollinare Nuovo in Ravenna is dated from the early to mid-sixth Century and reappears frequently between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries¹⁰. Often depicted tied to a stake and penetrated with arrows, the handsome youth has an expression between anguish and ecstasy. St. Sebastian has also been known as a 'plague saint' throughout the Middle Ages. During the fourteenth century, Europeans likened the random infection of the Black Death to being showered with a flurry of arrows. To ward off the plagues, they turned to Sebastian. The saint is frequently depicted erotically, as a feminised male or a sadomasochistic figure. In light of the AIDS pandemic, Sebastian's iconic resonance becomes more topical in a contemporary culture facing the ravages of sexually transmitted disease. Though the figure of Sebastian has had various symbolic embodiments throughout history, it is in the late nineteenth century that his role as the homosexual saint was founded.

Sebastian became eponymous with homosexual decadence, a resonance continued through twentieth century literature and film¹¹.



Figs. 27-28 Semen is shot at the male subject.

Lum chooses to omit any explicit reference to the icon or Mrs. White's Sebastian-like execution, but the imagery of *Indelible* implicitly references the saint. In the opening orgy from *LA Tool*, and similarly choreographed scenes from *The Final Link*, visual allusions to St. Sebastian are more effectively present. Both scenes centre upon a single, ecstatic male figure being ejaculated onto. (Figs. 27-28) The visual parallels of the vulnerable male being 'shot at' here become comically obvious. Here the trauma faced is not of literal arrows but of virally charged semen. The themes and motifs of new queer horror film often involve placing the male protagonist in jeopardy. Juxtaposing this figure with *Indelible* opens up a discussion about the representation of the male under threat as a source of eroticism, jouissance and, equally, anxiety. Lum's inclusion of scenes from *The Fury*, in the final moments of *Indelible*, show two images of apparently feminised and shattered masculinity that connects with Bersani's 'shattered' gay masculinity. Lum literally restarts the fall of blood onto Carrie after he has transposed it with that of the shower of

semen, and it is in this re-flow of blood and of femininity that masculinity begins to become more fragmented. Lum furthers the narrative of *Carrie* within *Indelible* by including scenes that foreground the female gaze and, in turn, the potent telekinetic power of Carrie. The return of the gaze from the normally objectified woman, objectifies and fragments the male. Its threat is shown in spectacular form as Lum cross-cuts from a fragmented jump-cut which acts as a zoom into Carrie's eyes in a gaze, that via juxtaposition with *Indelible*, seems to cause the explosion of the male antagonist Childress (John Cassavetes) from *The Fury* (see figs. 29-30).



Figs. 29-30 Carrie's returned gaze, causes a masculine explosion in *The Fury*.

In another example, a similar 'zip-zoom' technique moves in close-up to focus on the eyes of Childress, *The Fury's* villain, whose captive female prisoner, Gillian (Amy Irving), enacts telekinetic revenge upon, making him weep tears of blood. The feminine act of weeping is rendered even more so by its association with (menstrual) blood. Femininity makes itself known by crossing the border of the body and forcing its way out. It is the externalising of bodily fluids, here semen and blood, which suggests the inability of the body to contain its own fluids. The fluid has passed through

the border of the body (which represents the self) and its visible return 'threatens one's own and clean self' (Kristeva: 63). .

Yet the film's final images reveal an explosive rather than exploded masculinity. The explosive male seems to perpetuate the concept of powerfully ejaculating machismo, rather than the Bersanian 'shattering' of 'proud' heteronormative masculine potency. In *Indelible*, Lum retains the glowing eyed feminine catalyst for Childress' explosion, yet the increasingly powerful ejaculations from the juxtaposed segments of pornography seem to radiate from *within* the potent male. Childress seems to explode himself in extreme slow motion. In a cut on action to an extreme high angle shot, his head flies up into the frame and his body explodes with such force that its liquids are evaporated. There is no longer any flow here.

I would argue that *Indelible* literalises Lum's paradoxical concerns regarding the contraction of the HIV virus and AIDS through sexual practices like the ones previously considered, the very same practices that provide an erotic thrill and appeal. In the face of the suicidal sex of bareback porn, Bersani's symbolic shattering of the self is negligible and the excessive display of bodily fluids can only be surpassed by the ultimate explosion of the subject himself. Shattered masculinity is of a different order here, leading us to question what exactly is being exploded? Is it a visual representation of the death of 'proud male subjectivity' or the idea of the passive, penetrated male?

Indelible's narrative peak seems to be reached in this explosion of masculinity and seems to revel in the renewed potency of gay masculinity. Yet, in its fusion with patriarchally defined femininity, it is also defiled. The anxiety this ambiguity provokes is displayed in *Indelible's* final images and is arguably developed from De Palma's version of the film, whose denouement reveals femininity continuing to flow in a contradictorily liberating and yet powerfully repressive form as maternal repression. In *Indelible* femininity is also allowed to flow once more, despite the spectacular death of iconic masculinity. Carrie's bloodied face is the film's final figure of identification for the gay male spectator as Margaret White's warning resounds over this last image, 'They're all gonna laugh at you!'

¹ The *Mashup* video includes clips from various visual source texts that are edited together to form a new video that is often created with humorous and parodic intentions.

² Bruce Babington attempts to rescue *Carrie* from misogynistic association in 'Twice a Victim: Carrie meets the BFI' in *Screen*, Vol. 24 No.3 May/June 1983.

³ Lum's use of superimposition, one image taking precedence over another is extensive. He achieves this by manipulating the opacity of the images that lie in layers on the editing software's timeline. Creating a keyed area on the chosen film and image, he alters their opacity, allowing one to become clearer than the other. Modifying the visibility of each clip he thereby controls the emphasis on specific clips running in concurrent time. To clearly define the image which retains the higher clarity (by no means indicating its importance, but drawing the viewer's attention to a specific image), I will define the images in layers: the primary layer will be referred to as 'superimposed' over; the secondary layer will be described as 'sub-imposed' under the former. They each, at times, visually dissolve over and underneath each other and, therefore, they are interchangeable.

⁴ *Barebacking* derives its name from equestrian pursuits of riding horses without a saddle, and perhaps draws on the machismo that this wild equestrian culture is associated with. It is interesting to note that the practice of barebacking, while not solely confined to the act of seeking deliberate infection with the HIV virus is, to some extent, limited to the sexual orientation of its participants. It is an exclusive subculture extended only to gay male sexuality.

⁵ Paul Morris' ethical policy can be found on the opening pages of the Treasure Island Media website, <http://www.treasureislandmedia.net> .

⁶ The definition of outlaw draws from Leo Bersani's understanding of the transgressive gay male 'Outlaw' as portrayed in the works of Jean Genet and Andre Gide discussed in *Homos* (1995) p.113-181.

⁷ Thomas Laquer's *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (2003) considers a largely Victorian cultural view of masturbation as a 'polluting' disease with infectious potential, both bodily and affecting the subject's mental state of mind.

⁸ 'Preventing the Sexual Transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS: What you should know about Oral Sex.' (December 2000) ed. Annabel Kannabus and Ben Hills-Jones reveals that 'In fellatio, there is a theoretical risk of HIV transmission for the receptive partner (the sucker) because infected pre-ejaculate (pre-cum) fluid or semen can get into the bloodstream via an oral lesion. For the inserting partner (the suckee), there is a theoretical risk of infection as infected blood from a partner's bleeding gums or open sores could come into contact with a scratch, cut or sore on the penis.'

⁹ This configuration is turned metaphorical for Lum in his multiple identifications with Carrie (as child/AIDS virus) and Margaret White (mother/bottom) in *Indelible*.

¹⁰ See for example, Van Dyck, *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (after 1621), Mantegna, *St. Sebastian*, (1457-8), Botticelli, *St. Sebastian* (1474), Perugino, *St. Sebastian* (1493-94), Ribera, *St. Sebastian* (1630)

¹¹ See for instance T.S. Eliot's pre-war poem 'Love Song Of St. Sebastian', Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), *Suddenly Last Summer* (Manciewicz, US 1958); and Derek Jarman's film of the St. Sebastian story, *Sebastiane* (GB 1976). T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Love Song of St. Sebastian' is also featured in an article by Richard, A. Kaye, "A Spenidid Readiness for Death: T.S. Eliot, the Homosexual Cult of St. Sebastian and the First World War" in *Modernism/Modernity* Vol. 6 No. 2 April 1999, p. 107-134.

Part II:

Queer Horror Aesthetics –
From Exploitation to
Slasher

Chapter Three

Gaysploitation Horror

The queer reception and appropriation of the horror genre has been shown to offer a working through of specific anxieties within gay male culture in the various cinematic, theatrical and experimental adaptations of *Carrie*. This chapter charts the emergence of a sub-genre of the exploitation film, Gaysploitation horror, featuring films made by gay male or queer identified directors which highlight either homoeroticism, or homosexuality in increasingly pornographic ways in order to attract audiences. The titles discussed are born out of a recognition of a gap in the market, gay male horror fans. Beginning in the early 2000s, the emergence of this niche sub-genre focuses upon the celebration, erotic display, torture and evisceration of the male body spectacular in horror feature films and gothic television serials that are aimed at gay male audiences. Ironically, the homosexuality they portray is often shown to be remarkably 'straight acting' and obsessed with a machismo that is coded heterosexual.

Via a textual analysis and a study of the sub-genre's allegorical narratives, this chapter will demonstrate that queer horror also summarises contemporary anxieties within gay male culture surrounding an association with penetrability as feminising and traumatic. As a consequence, this leads to a phallic mimicry via an exaggerated

masculine performance and a gendered scripting as 'straight' by the gay male subject that often foregrounds impenetrability.

3.1. The rise of queer fear.

Harry Benshoff's study of 1997 understandably does not extend to study of more recent horror titles that favour an overt homoerotic display of monsters and male victims alike. Had he been aware of such directors like David DeCoteau, Jason Paul Collum, television horror soaps like *Dante's Cove* and Paul Etheridge-Outzs' 'first gay slasher film' *Hellbent*, dating from 2000 onwards, his sample may not have been so 'closeted'. Such titles, directors and production companies hold significant interest to those wishing to uncover recent representations of homosexuality in the horror genre. This chapter will consider whether they constitute a contemporary sub-genre of the horror film, which draws more specifically upon slasher horror, one which I wish to title Gaysploitation horror.

Titling this niche sub-genre so, references the exploitation film and the connotations and conventions that have been outlined in the past by critics and academics. In her work on the exploitation film and its feminist reception, Pam Cook (1976) defines the genre accordingly:

essentially a commercial category [...] for those films produced at minimum cost for maximum return which take up, 'exploit' the success of other films – replaying the themes [...] and genres of much more lavish, up-market productions. They are made with specific markets in mind, hence the development of 'sexploitation' and 'blaxploitation' categories referring to the capture of the soft-core pornography film audience and black youth audience respectively.

The horror genre has long been categorised as a cornerstone of the exploitation industry and is frequently considered as 'low culture' or as producing 'trash movies'. Cook continues that:

exploitation films offer schematic, minimal narratives, comic book stereotypes, 'bad' acting, and brief film cycles that disappear as soon as their audience appeal is exhausted [...] in order to attract/exploit their target audiences [they] contain a high degree of sensationalised sex and/or violence, playing on the more retrograde, sadistic/voyeuristic fantasies of young male viewers. (1976: 123-4)

Carol Clover, also indicates the slasher horror film's status as exploitation fare and its deliberate courting of the young male audience in its endless production of sequels and derivative titles:

At the bottom of the horror heap lies the slasher film [which] lies by and large beyond the purview of the respectable (middle-aged, middle-class) audience [and] of respectable criticism. Staples of drive-ins and exploitation houses [...] even commentaries that celebrate 'trash' disavow the slasher, usually passing it over in silence or bemoaning it as a degenerate aberration. (21-2)

Nonetheless, titling the sub-genre Gaysploitation horror is problematic. The titles discussed in this chapter can indeed be considered exploitation films in that they are born out of a market-driven recognition of a gap in the market (gay male horror fans), for they parody and 'rip off' existing horror titles and narratives, are often extremely low-budget, often enjoy limited (or non-existent) theatrical releases, are often produced and distributed by amateur filmmakers or independent studios, employ non-professional actors and often amateur direction, but above all contain nudity, sex and sexual violence that ranges from soft to hardcore.

However, while audiences, horror narratives and semi-naked cast members all may well be 'exploited', closer study of Gaysploitation horror reveals a curiously chaste and conservative presentation of the explicit. At times it is oddly withdrawn in its presentations of the explicit - in terms of both nudity and scenes of gore/horror and, even more curiously, in its coy presentation of homosexuality. In fact early Gaysploitation horror, in the case of David DeCoteau's productions, remains closeted in that, while homoeroticism exists, there few explicitly defined gay or lesbian characters. Even through the few exceptions that do present gay male protagonists, such representation and the sub genre itself is conversely defined by its non-gay-ness. Initially then, Gaysploitation horror may perhaps be a misnomer for it queers the very definition of exploitation cinema.

Pam Cook's study of the feminist reception of exploitation films considers the works of director Stephanie Rothman, who worked alongside exploitation auteur Roger Corman at New World Pictures throughout the late sixties and early seventies. What interests Cook about Rothman's work is that the director consciously took on the conventions of the exploitation film, recognising a potential audience of female viewers, and 'exploited' them to produce texts that attempt to subvert and challenge the often offensive stereotyped representations of women in film (Cook, 1976: 123). For Cook, the exploitation film's production methods existed

outside the Hollywood mainstream of the 1970s, and the lure of working without big studio involvement allowed such directors to use the conventions of the exploitation film (allowing for greater discussion of alternative issues and themes) to work with more challenging material. She argues that the exploitation film, in spite of its own patriarchally constructed stereotypes and ideologies, remains more radical and therefore more appealing to feminist filmmakers like Rothman. In Cook's view, the concept of the patriarchally defined 'stereotype' of woman seen as widespread in many mainstream Hollywood productions is also present in the exploitation genre. Yet due to Hollywood's 'naturalistic' presentation of stereotypes, such mainstream movies appear to be less offensive, but they tend to *cover over* the constructed nature of their stereotypes, presenting them as 'true' (124). Conversely, exploitation films make plain their deliberate presentations of women and stereotypes, so much so that the culturally constructed nature of such 'naturalistic' representation is revealed:

it is [...] clear that naturalised forms represent an attempt to efface and suppress contradictions, whereas the overt manipulation of stereotypes and genre conventions allows us to see that language is at work: myths are revealed as ideological structures embedded in form itself. In fact exploitation films are potentially less offensive than mainstream Hollywood cinema precisely because of their resistance to the 'natural'. (124-5)

Yet Rothman's works such as *The Velvet Vampire* (US 1971) and *Student Nurses* (US 1970), were received by feminists with mixed acclaim:

Widely shown in women's film festivals for their feminist interest [...] they are perhaps the most difficult of any women's films to justify in terms of feminism, relying as they do on the codes and conventions of soft-core exploitation genres [however] they manipulate the stereotypes and codes of the exploitation genres to create new meanings for women. (Cook, 1976: 126)

While I am reticent to claim the same radical and political inclinations for many of the films and directors working within the sub-genre of Gaysploitation horror, I want to draw parallels with Cook's study of the progressive potential within exploitation products and this subgenre's own negotiation with patriarchal and reactionary stereotypes based around gay masculinity. I want to explore whether Gaysploitation horror films and their directors, like those from Rothman's oeuvre, deliberately or unconsciously exploit the dominant ideological conventions of the exploitation film in order to create new meanings within the texts themselves.

There are further issues surrounding the sub-genre's embrace of the horror cinema tradition. Many of the films discussed in this chapter (and thesis) prove difficult to categorise generically. The films' highly parodic, satirical and above all 'exploitative' natures suggest that, on occasions, the conventions of the horror film are borrowed and assimilated into other generic structures. For example, *Dante's Cove* (US 2005-2008), *The Lair* (US 2007) are both Gothic-camp television multi-part soaps that borrow or pastiche horror stereotypes and narratives and blend them with mini-series parody (which are more akin to a Gaysploitation-*lite*). I would go so

far as to say that it is this elusion of any clear and defined horror convention that is a defining characteristic of the Gaysploitation horror. Evading definition as either gay or horror then, Gaysploitation horror is a sub-genre that paradoxically can be defined, not by those conventions and traits it possesses (as it does so largely with a sense of irony and parody), but by those it eludes. Gaysploitation horror is both *gay* and *not-gay*, *horror* and *not-horror*, adopting those conventions that suit it at any given moment. In itself, this defining point of Gaysploitation horror remains its most controversial; as Carol Clover states of the traditional horror genre, the successful horror movie achieves in 'having the shit scared out of' its audiences, 'to the extent that a movie succeeds in "hurting" its viewers in this way, it is good horror; to the extent that it fails, it is bad horror; to the extent that it does not try, it is not horror but something else.' (229) Gaysploitation horror lies somewhere between Clover's three 'types' and more towards that indefinable 'something else'.

So what are the elusive conventions of Gaysploitation horror? Recurring traits generally include: an erotic objectification of male victims; the prolonged and fetishised slaughter of male rather than female victims; an emphasis on youth, softcore nudity and sexuality and the presentation of gay male sexuality as largely closeted. In Gaysploitation the representation of gay masculinity privileges machismo or 'straight-acting' behaviour. While this exclusion of feminine gay male stereotypes may challenge heterosexist constructions of gay masculinity, by transposing

equally stereotyped masculine traits onto effeminacy, such narratives could be accused of heterosexist macho posturing. Gaysploitation horror typically includes narratives involving inclusion or exclusion from a peer or aspirational group of characters. Finally they present an ironic parody of traditional horror conventions or icons in camp fusions of often incongruously mis-matched genres, for example crossing explicit gore and horror with nostalgic teen sex comedy as in *Psycho Beach Party* (Lee King, US 2000) and even 50s style creature feature with high school drama in *Leeches!* (David DeCoteau, US 2003).

This chapter will focus on how these conventions are formed and represented in various significant queer horror directors' works, and whether they can generally be considered under the umbrella term Gaysploitation horror. The study moves from ex-Corman collaborator David DeCoteau, through to television horror such as the content produced by gay run US cable channel Here! TV, and on to the work of independent gay directors such as Jason Paul Collum (*October Moon*, 2007), Sean Abley (*Socket*, US 2008). It concludes with a consideration of more politically aware films such as Jaymes Thompson's *Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror* (US, 2007) and Alan Rowe Kelly's *A Far Cry From Home* (US, 2008) both of which offer more camp, yet gritty and violent, depictions of gay men tortured and slaughtered by right-wing devout Christian rednecks.

3.2 David DeCoteau: Gaysploitation horror-‘lite’?

Of the many producers and directors working within this niche sub-genre of exploitation horror, it is David DeCoteau’s titles that demonstrate a blueprint for the conventions of Gaysploitation horror-‘lite’¹. DeCoteau’s filmography features clear similarities and crossovers in theme, aesthetics, narrative and cast. His films appear formulaic, derivative and seemingly offer little social commentary. However, there is a distinct personal style that is recognisable via recurring subtexts and motifs, which present a continued preoccupation within certain aspects of gay male culture. Their narratives and representations reflect a sub-cultural concern within gay male communities with the eroticisation of hypermasculine images, which leads to the eradication of femininity.

Like Rothman, David DeCoteau began his career working in the exploitation horror and fantasy genres, having assisted on the production of many of Roger Corman’s works with New World Pictures. He achieved moderate success in the eighties and nineties with Full Moon Pictures where he produced and directed hilariously titled exploitation horror films that eroticise and eviscerate their female leads, including *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-A-Rama* (US 1988) and *Beach Babes from Beyond* (US 1993) DeCoteau was moderately successful at producing and directing Corman-influenced direct-to-video, soft-core ‘Tits and Ass’ horror aimed at heterosexual adolescent males. Focusing on erotic female spectacle may seem an odd choice for DeCoteau as an out gay

male director, but his interest in such tongue-in-cheek horror seems to lie, not only in the titillating or erotic elements of femininity, but also in the camp appeal of the presentation of excessive female sexuality.

DeCoteau's films play with the concept of gender performance extra-cinematically. Pre-2000 he often directed films under a pseudonym taking cross gender aliases such as Victoria Sloan and Ellen Cabot and defends this choice by advocating that 'every gay boy should have a drag name!' (DeCoteau, 2006)² As such, his place as a director within the horror genre is a confusing one: a pseudo-transgender director producing soft-core erotic low-horror for what appeared to be a largely adolescent male audience, but in accentuating a trashy and camp appeal, his films also play to a niche queer audience. DeCoteau's adoption of cross-gender masquerade also lends an extra erotic appeal for the films' straight male audience, in that it appears that a female director has produced the voyeuristic and erotically objectifying images of other women, for the sole consumption of a male audience. This masquerade perhaps adds a frisson of possible lesbian voyeurism to the films' lure.

In 1997, DeCoteau directed his first drama as an openly gay male director, *Leather Jacket Love Story* (US 1997) a film that explicitly deals with issues surrounding gay male sexuality in Los Angeles and also departs from the horror genre. The film is the first DeCoteau made, apart from those completed for Full Moon Pictures, and it also marks a 'coming

out' for the director. In the films made during the period between 1997 and 1999 (especially in *Curse of the Puppet Master* (US 1998)), DeCoteau's characters were increasingly male. One particular film, *The Killer Eye* (US 1999), although featuring an erotically objectified female antagonist who controls a giant mind-controlling eyeball, offers several scenes where two young male characters (coded as heterosexual), sleep in the same bed wearing only white boxer briefs while being possessed by the towering phallic eyeball (Fig. 31). These young men then appear to be under the erotic controlling gaze of a *female* seductress, thus disavowing the presence of any homosexual gaze.



Fig. 31 The 'eye' of the female gaze - controlled by DeCoteau.

Voodoo Academy (2000) is the first of DeCoteau's films to display his recurring structure, themes, cast and conventions. Five young men enrol at a religious training school, run by a seductive headmistress, Ms. Bouvier (Debra Mayer), and become part of her larger plan to transform

each one of them into ceremonial dolls in order to raise an army of the undead to sustain the running of the school. Their seduction, and subsequent punishment, is channelled through and meted out by the school's handsome male minister, Reverend Carmichael (Chad Burris). It is the Reverend who entices the men into the confession booth, whereby he hypnotises them to do the headmistress' bidding, and who watches over his young charges as they indulge in their nightly, and lengthy, sojourns of supernaturally induced self-caressing in their dormitory beds. Though *Voodoo Academy* has engendered somewhat of a cult following³. its departure from an overtly heterosexual narrative made Full Moon Pictures wary and it was the final movie that DeCoteau made with the company. Encouraged by the film's success and the possibility of new audiences, the director set up his own production company, Rapid Heart Pictures with the release of the key title *The Brotherhood* (2001) Which can be seen setting DeCoteau's original and basic template, narratively, thematically and aesthetically. Both it and its sequels were all been produced or co-produced by Rapid Heart Pictures whose productions, simply put, take the template of his earlier heterosexually oriented exploitation horrors and, via switching the gender of the victims from female to male but keeping the male monster/killer, effectively queer them. But DeCoteau's aesthetic is curiously chaste, conservative, even reactionary. The Rapid Heart films are direct to video/DVD products. With the proliferation of cable television and on-demand online streaming, his films are more widely seen on gay-run or specialist horror cable channels

such as Here! TV, who, more recently, have acted as co-producers⁴. They have very low-budget production values (*Voodoo Academy* was produced on a budget of \$55,000)⁵, use amateur actors, recurring locations and sets across films and series that are not connected diegetically. These actors are predominantly young, physically toned white men, with the almost tokenistic inclusion of a few attractive white women.

Taking his cues from Universal Pictures' films of cinematic monsters from the 1930s (*Dracula* (Tod Browning, US, 1931), *The Mummy* (Karl Freund, US 1932), *Frankenstein* (James Whale, US, 1931)), DeCoteau mimics the studio's generic packaging of monstrosity. His films largely relocate the monstrous figures from horror history into a modern, North American collegiate, workplace or gang-related setting. These are refigured in the plural, as an exclusive set or group of male characters that an outsider becomes associated with, lured by their presentation of excessive glamour and power. Beneath their veneer of white, male, largely middle-class respectability, lies a monstrous reality of vampires (*The Brotherhood*); werewolf stockbrokers (*The Wolves of Wall Street* (2002)); witchcraft and warlocks (*The Brotherhood II: Young Warlocks* (2001), *Voodoo Academy* (2000)); serial killers (*Final Scream* (2001), *The Frightening* (2002), *Beastly Boyz* (2006)); mummies (*Ancient Evil: Scream of the Mummy* (2000)); zombies (*The Brotherhood IV: The Complex* (2005), *Ring of Darkness* (2004)); demons (*The Brotherhood III:*

Young Demons (2002), *Speed Demon* (2003)) and 50s creature feature-inspired, chemically-enhanced monsters (*Leeches!* (2003), *Grizzly Rage* (2007)).

While perpetuating and parodying the treatment of horror clichés and monsters, DeCoteau's films offer a critique of certain social sub-sets of American youth culture: fraternity groups, religious cults, boy-bands, college swim-teams and small town biker gangs. Yet DeCoteau's critical analysis of such (debatably monstrous) sub-groups remains at surface level and gay male subjectivity remains curiously absent in any explicit sense. After the open discussion of gay sexuality in *Leather Jacket Love Story*, DeCoteau's treatment of gay male sexuality returns to the implicit and the suggested (with the exception of the more recent Edgar Allen Poe adaptations which present some of its male characters as homosexual, yet never explicitly declare themselves 'gay'). While homoeroticism is a major convention within the Rapid Heart catalogue, by deliberately marketing the films as 'celebrations of the male form', the production company underlines a decidedly ambiguous stance that offers the naked male form for consumption.

While his earlier films celebrate the display of explicit female nudity, his later films do not offer the same candid erotic spectacle in their presentation of the naked *male* form, often retaining boxer briefs and gym socks and recalling a fashion trope of gay pornography. In his Rapid

Heart films, none of the male characters have penetrative sex with the opposite sex, engaging only in foreplay, and much of the soft core erotic display features his male cast in the privacy of the shower, the gym or their bedrooms, self-caressing or seducing barely visible women. There is no escaping the films' clear homoeroticism but it is at the expense of the women characters who, while providing a catalyst for male erotic touching, are often used to disavow any explicit homoeroticism and then framed out of view.

Rapid Heart films follow a narrative formula, featuring a central male protagonist who is either a newcomer to the town, fraternity, sport team, workplace or party, or is returning to a small town having lived in the city or vice versa. The story centres on the protagonist's attraction to and induction into a largely male group, the 'Monsters'. The films move to the revelation that the 'newcomer's' inauguration into the 'monster group' is needed as a sacrifice to perpetuate its members' immortality, to sustain them as 'Others'. Despite the variety of monstrous archetypes, the vampiric element of the immortal (read aged) monster group needing new blood to sustain itself, figures as an important one in relation to gay male anxieties revolving around age-ism and the erotic potency of youth⁶.

Rapid Heart's fraternity narratives can be understood as 'coming out' tales, stories centred on anxieties surrounding the private and public

declaration of one's homosexuality. This can be understood via two distinct and oddly conflicting reading strategies, firstly:

- *The Reactionary 'Coming Out' Narrative:* (Examples include *The Brotherhood*, *Ancient Evil: The Legend of the Mummy II*, *Ring of Darkness*)

Firstly the 'Newcomer' can be read as a sexually confused individual who is attracted by the erotic allure of the 'Monster group' who are coded as queer (given their stereotypical associations with monstrosity and non-normative sexuality). He is tempted to experiment erotically in various coy scenes of bloodletting but eventually is rescued by the support of his (heteronormative) 'Sidekicks'. They overturn and destroy the 'Monster group' and return the narrative to stasis and normality.

And conversely:

- *The Counter 'Coming Out' Narrative:* (Examples include *Speed Demon*, *The Wolves of Wall St*, *The Brotherhood II: The Warlocks*, *Beastly Boyz*, *The Frightening*)

Here the 'Newcomer' is also coded as an outsider, a marginalised individual perhaps due to his presentation as a sexually confused individual. This is complicated by the presence of, in some instances, a girlfriend. Despite the girlfriend's heterosexual significance, their relationship is a decidedly chaste one where sex is non-existent or overwhelmed by the allure of the 'Monster group'. The girlfriend then becomes a friend or a kind of 'fag-hag'. The 'Newcomer's' status as

an outsider is further supported in his choice of unpopular, 'nerdy' male friends or roommates who represent a decidedly non-stereotypical masculinity. By contrast, the 'Monster group' is presented as hypermasculine. If the 'Newcomer' is coded as a gay man, the attraction lies in the potent phallic masculinity of the group with which he erotically dis-identifies, rendering the 'Monsters' heterosexual. Recognising his erotic attraction to, yet difference from, the group's 'straight-acting' masculinity, the 'Newcomer' eventually destroys them and returns to the margins.

The films' narratives usually feature moralistic warnings against various American cultural taboos: the dangers of drink and drugs (*Leeches! & Speed Demon*), gang-culture (*The Brotherhood*), sexual promiscuity (*Final Stab, The Frightening*), corrupt religion (*Voodoo Academy*) and the exploitation of the young via patriarchally defined capitalism (*Wolves of Wall Street* and *Ring of Darkness*). In addition to these concerns, the central character's ambiguous sexuality may also suggest a censorious attitude towards homosexuality. While not wholly presented as heterosexual, these characters often display an *indifference* to sex in general. Whether these presentations are a response to marketing concerns about the target audiences of exploitation films (traditionally considered to be heterosexual men) or whether they reveal a personal shame or guilt in regard to the director's own homosexuality remains to be seen. There is no explicitly presented gay sexuality. While the films'

death scenes focus on the erotic slaying of men, these are usually offset by the presence of a female victim to disavow the homoeroticism within the scene. In many seduction scenes, her presence allows the scene to be read as merely homosocial rather than homoerotic. The presence of the female character in homoerotic scenes also allows the erotic male spectacle to be consumed as marketable erotic material for straight women, but does not wholly discount its appeal to a gay male spectator.

DeCoteau himself understands the chasteness and deliberate sexual ambiguity within his films as a mean to achieving financial success by appealing to as wide a market as possible:

The films I do have basic gay appeal, but the character's sexuality is always fluid or unspecific or ambiguous. It's more a matter of trying to cover a lot of different bases...you know a gay market, straight female market, couples market, trying to keep it as open as possible in order to sell the movie in lots of different ways. (DeCoteau, 2007)

Rapid Heart Pictures originally marketed their products to a wider female audience, as 'horror films for girls'⁷. Recognising the appeal of the horror genre to the teenage girl, Rapid Heart links their presumed interest in men to that of gay male spectators. Via the marketing of its titles, it avoids separating one from the other. But in intimating that the films' 'celebration of the male form' has cross gender appeal, the studio implicitly assimilates gay masculinity not only with femininity but with an adolescent girlish sexuality.

Insofar as DeCoteau's works fit into a Gaysploitation sub-genre, it is their failure to frighten that has often resulted in much criticism from horror fans, who, as Clover has suggested, are generally made up of (straight) adolescent male viewers. The negative responses from many male horror fans dwell mainly upon the films' failure to deliver the genre's staple conventions, for example, female nudity, explicit gore and above all, fright. This failure contributed to their lack of critical success and the ostracisation of DeCoteau from the horror canon. The director replies that such negative responses to his films are indicative of the straight male horror film fan's anxiety about homoerotic death or torture scenes queering the genre and, consequently, its viewers. DeCoteau maintains that the sight of such apparently provocative homoeroticism is guarded against by primal (homophobic) defence mechanisms enacted not only by straight male spectators, but gay male viewers also:

Maybe the most frightening thing in the horror film, is that fact that even the most jaded horror fan, heterosexual, homosexual, whatever, when there's homoerotic scenes or celebration of the male form, when those buttons are pushed – the reaction to them is very primal. (DeCoteau, 2006)

By 'primal' DeCoteau suggests a raw aggression perhaps provoked by a shameful association with visible homosexuality or homoeroticism in both straight and gay male viewers. Many of the most vitriolic responses (and the inference of their homophobic undercurrents), are difficult to reference, given many internet-based film forums' policies of removing offensive language. Such comments include:

My not so straight roommate put this movie on tonight [*Ring of Darkness*], I've never felt more gay in my life. My roommate's

girlfriend commented, 'it makes *me* feel gay watching this'. Wow! What a horrible movie!. [small1022 from United States, imdb.com user comment]⁸

Where the hell was the gore? I can't stand homoeroticism in horror movies! Not that there's anything wrong with that, if that's your thing go for it, but man it really pushed this movie over the edge. I never ever need to see anything like that again!
[Horroribe_Horror_Films from Outer Mongolia, imdb.com user comment, 20th December 2005]

A typical straight male is not going to enjoy this type of movie, unless he is hiding something! I am getting sick of Mr Decotau's [sic] films. They are polluting movie shelves and quite frankly...gay or not, are really bad movies...He must be stopped!
[undeadmachine669 from United States, 14th November 2005]⁹

Such responses to DeCoteau's movies perhaps uncover anxieties of the assumed heterosexual young male horror fan's disappointment after renting what appears to be a typical soft-core exploitation horror that focuses on female victims, only to discover that it disposes of many female characters off screen and instead objectifies male slayings. DeCoteau essentially reads the typical horror fan's disappointment as one that is grounded not only in the anxiety felt as a result of forced identification with the voyeuristic female/gay male gaze at the objectified male body, but one that is born out of a basic disappointment in the failure to deliver a formulaic 'straight' slasher film.

They've really pushed a lot of homophobic buttons in a lot of people...it's just one of those things where the people who maybe have a homophobic streak in them are just really upset that the films didn't deliver, that there's a vampire film with essentially no blood, and very little gore if any. No nude chicks. Celebrating the male form.
(DeCoteau 2006)



Fig. 32 DVD covers of Rapid Heart Productions.

The DVD covers and publicity materials of DeCoteau's Rapid Heart films often feature head and shoulders shots of the attractive young male cast members, often in a delta formation (Fig. 32)¹⁰, but also figures one or two female cast members in the background. This selling strategy is transposed onto the films' narratives and presentations of key scenes. Reversing the conventional straight film focus, he brings the semi-nude, young male characters to the forefront of many scenes, while keeping semi-nude female characters in the background of the frame, reassuring any straight male, or indeed any straight female viewers, that what they are watching may be homoerotic, but not explicitly homosexual – not *too* gay. In short, DeCoteau's films appear to sell an anodyne, curiously un-erotic ideal of homoeroticism to straight men and women. If this is true then, what is the appeal of his continuing series of films for the out gay male spectator? To understand this it is necessary to look specifically at a key scene from *The Brotherhood*, to question whether the framing, narrative structure and aesthetic of DeCoteau's film markets a chaste, non-sexual homoeroticism to gay male spectators and fans (in a sense

presenting a non-gay gayness); or conversely, whether or not the film may also be providing a conservative yet fantastical ideal of (straight) masculinity, to gay male spectators who are willing to buy into the fantasy of an erotic encounter with a straight man who is erotically coded with macho masculine.

The Brotherhood is DeCoteau's self confessed 'homage to *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher, US 1987)' (2006), a film with its own with perhaps unintentionally produced, homoerotic undertones¹¹ it follows the format of the assimilation of a young man into a group of sexually coded vampires/monsters. *The Brotherhood* explicitly sets the action within a college fraternity (a recurring milieu within queer horror), which further underlines the male oriented exclusivity of the 'Monster group' and marks out the fraternity setting as a convention and an integral part of the mise en scène. Situating the characters in such masculine environs provides the means by which the cast can be comprised largely of male actors, and the excuse for the continued exclusive and voyeuristic access to the spectacular male body while offering the necessary excuse for the invisibility or exclusion of women.¹² North American fraternity cultures are notorious for their hegemonic male exclusivity, and most notably for the perpetuation of heterosexist ideologies. Fraternities are associated with straight male privilege and gay male initiates often prefer not to disclose their sexual orientation. The fraternities in DeCoteau's films appear

initially to be heterosexual, but this appearance is often undermined in the ensuing narratives.

In a study of the emergence of gay fraternities, Yeung, Stompler and Wharton (2000) discuss the masculinist ethos of traditional male fraternities. The exclusion of the feminine from 'traditionalist' fraternities often extends beyond the exclusion of women, to that of marginalised male subjects who display feminine traits, typified in dominant heterosexist ideology by the gay man:

College Fraternities [...] are defined by power and conflict between two sets of socially constructed binaries: men/women and masculinity/femininity. These two sets of binaries, moreover, intertwine. For instance, men who do not conform to the hegemonic definition of masculinity – being white, heterosexual, aggressive, dominant, competitive, muscular, class privileged – are equated with women and thus feminized...the traditional fraternity institution maintains itself through the exclusion of both women and marginal men who are rejected by the terms of hegemonic masculinity. (140)

Considering the homoerotic elements in the initiation antics of heterosexual fraternities, Yeung et al suggest that this is simply another means whereby femininity is disavowed and masculinity reaffirmed:

Even when homoerotic rituals are prevalent in some fraternities, they are merely tools to humiliate pledges and reinforce brothers' heterosexuality, serving as a rite of passage to 'real' manhood. With the intention to produce men who are not-women and not-feminine, the process of men-making in the traditional model hinges on stigmatizing homosexuality. (141)

In DeCoteau's films it remains to be seen whether the fraternities are presented as heterosexual. It could be argued that they could be

understood as monstrous gay fraternities, depending on which of the previous two reading strategies the spectator adopts when interpreting DeCoteau's fraternity horrors (whereby the monster group is either coded queer or heterosexual). Despite the sexual orientation of its members, gay or straight fraternities both operate towards the same effect – to disavow and exclude femininity. Yeung et al's study reveals that this gender division exists even within actual gay fraternities¹³, the male members of which, despite frequently adopting feminine gestures and language within the fraternal structure or donning drag or performing femininity, still draw the line at the inclusion of women. Anthony James notes that in gay fraternities, drag was a central pastime and masculinist ideologies and structures were nevertheless re-inscribed:

Although members comfortably performed femininity, a strict gender distinction was re-inscribed when brothers rationalized the gender exclusiveness of the fraternal model. (James, 1998: 20)

One particular sequence from *The Brotherhood* featuring a *ménage à trois* exemplifies the homoerotic triangle and the exclusion of women from erotic proceedings. Central protagonists, Devon (Bradley Stryker, leader of the vampire fraternity) and Chris (Sam Page, the new initiate) take an invited girl, Sandy (Chloe Cross) into an opulent Gothic bedroom, giving rise to a threesome, which all but excises the female subject from both the frame and the narrative. Although Sandy is figured centrally in the frame, the direction of both her and Devon's gaze in turn directs the spectator towards Chris who looks off frame, unaware that he is now figured as erotic object of spectacle. Devon, positioned behind and in

close proximity to him, begins massaging Chris' shoulders sensuously. As he does so he explains to Chris: 'We're fraternity Chris, blood brothers, they're all the rites of passage...you could stay in college forever! You could live and relive, all the glory days, all the great home games...all the good times'. But, Devon explains, 'You've gotta pay to play'. In order to get the 'good times', which the framing suggests would involve just Chris and Devon, that occur 'between men' - he must 'pay' or take a gamble. Enacted heterosexual erotic relations with a woman become an initiation, a dare or a rite of passage in the fraternity, which would normally take the form of something unpleasant or humiliating, rather than enjoyable. Upon Chris' discovery that Devon is a vampire who wishes to *turn* Chris, Devon replies, 'No, vampires wear capes and have fangs, I drive a Masarati and spend an hour a day in a tanning booth. Vampires are myths, they don't exist, we're the reality.'

Chris is slowly undressed, firstly by Devon and then by Sandy as he relents and participates in the ensuing vampiric foreplay. During this soft-focused erotic scene, Sandy is gradually framed out both by the camera frame itself and by the bedding that serves to 'cover up' her presence in the room, instead re-centering on the two men. Devon leans in, takes out the pin from the heart-shaped jewel in his fraternity necklace, gently pricks Sandy's arm with the needle and urges Chris to drink from her wound. A sudden cut reveals a homoerotically suggestive sight, due to the positioning of Chris' sucking head and of Devon's body directly

behind it and where both the arm and Sandy are obscured from the frame. It appears, instead, as though Chris is fellating Devon, whose hand gently but firmly guides his head and mouth (See Fig. 33).



Fig. 33 Chris ‘fellates’ Devon.

After Sandy is eventually drained of blood, Chris falls back on the bed with a look of post-coital exhaustion. Blood begins to dribble downward from his upturned mouth. A zoom outwards shows Devon looming over Chris as he asks, ‘How do you feel?’. Cut to Chris in extreme close up, with the blood on his cheek, as he answers, opening his eyes ‘I feel...alive’. As Devon touches Chris’ face in an almost romantic caress and dabs at the blood with his other hand, Chris teasingly kisses his symbolically phallic finger. Devon then sucks the blood from his own finger, furthering the now explicit suggestion of this fellatio and post-coital ejaculate.

The homoeroticism here is incredibly self-aware, obvious and thus, almost parodic, but it is also rather coy. What appears to be occurring in this and many of DeCoteau's films is a re-inscription of the homosociality described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). Sedgwick's book builds upon Gayle Rubin's (1975) consideration of the gendered triangle (made up of two men and one woman) and the concept of the 'traffic of women', whereby a woman is situated as an object of exchange between men as a means of confirming patriarchal power structures. Sedgwick maintains that within patriarchal society, male sexual identities negotiate between two contrasting social dynamics: 'homosociality', which works to reaffirm the power structures between men within patriarchy and upholds common interests and values, and 'homosexuality' (explicit erotic relations between men), which conversely threatens the stability of the patriarchal system and, consequently, must be suppressed or disavowed.

To summarise, for Sedgwick, women exist not only, as Rubin suggests, as objects of exchange, but also to mask or disavow any suspicion of homosexuality, in regard to homosocial relations between men. They channel away any existing homoeroticism via their very presence.

Elizabeth Young (2000) further develops Sedgwick's work in her own study of the male-female relations in James Whale's *Bride of*

Frankenstein, stating that woman exists as:

a desperate cover-up [...] In such a homophobic culture, any threat of exposing the potential homoeroticism that underlies male

homosociality constitutes a challenge to the whole system of exchange. (2000: 314)

Young refers to a homo-social triangle (between the Bride, Dr Praetorius and Dr Frankenstein/the monster), whereby homoeroticism is disavowed by the presence of a woman (the Bride) returning the dynamic, at certain points in the narrative, to the homosocial and eventually returning the entire narrative to a heteronormative conclusion. Young argues that the film consists of a series of visualised gender triangles, each superseding the previous one, building to a potential break with the homosocial:

Each successive gender triangle is even less stable and suggests a progressive falling away from an 'acceptable' homosociality into an overt homosexuality. (2000: 315)

I would argue that this is also the case in DeCoteau's films, especially in his *Brotherhood* series, whereby each 'successive gender triangle', as visualised in the many sex/death scenes that involve a female victim as the 'third character', increasingly excise woman from the frame and eventually the narrative, arguably leaving only homoeroticism between men.

Young's article highlights the initial reading of the eroticised 'gender triangle' seduction scene from *The Brotherhood*. Although they are more obvious in their suggestions and presentation of homoeroticism, any explicit discussion of homosexuality is pointedly avoided in DeCoteau films. Such titles actually appear closer to the anodyne and comedic homoeroticism of Whale's *The Old Dark House* (US, 1932) and *Bride of*

Frankenstein particularly as represented by Ernest Thesiger's characters, Horace Femm and Dr. Praetorius. A homosocial triangle is continually operative within much of the Gaysploitation horror subgenre, and does indeed work to consolidate male power. By adopting a performance of straight acting masculinity, in its coy presentation of explicit homosexuality and in focussing wholly on eroticising male victims and death scenes, DeCoteau's films disavow femininity. As in Young's description of *Bride*, homosocial/homoerotic bonds are determined through the exclusion of women, but this is not a subversive homosexuality – it is one that maps macho masculinity (as a performance and an unattainable ideal) onto any gay male characters in a desperate desire to be recognised as *not-woman*. 'Straight-acting' serves to render homoerotic situations anodyne, and reinstate the homosocial alongside the homoerotic, ending up with an uncomfortable conflation of the two.

There is a further difficulty in proposing DeCoteau's films as potentially radical queer texts, in that their conservatism is increased extra-cinematically by elements of their production. Specifically, I refer to the use of heterosexual male actors in films that may include (explicit or implicit) homoerotic scenes that they may feel uncomfortable enacting.

DeCoteau himself recognises the issues surrounding this:

About 98% of the actors I use are straight. They've seen my movies and know what they are about, but when you want them to do certain things, like the scene in *The Brotherhood*. If you suggest to them maybe to take it a little further, they aren't going to want to do that if they don't feel comfortable with it. (DeCoteau, 2006)

Analysis of the 'straight-acting' within his films then becomes more complex: there is an apparent self-reflexivity in many of DeCoteau's films, whereby straight actors play sexually ambiguous (potentially gay) characters, acting 'straight'. This erotic trope of the sub-genre, particularly DeCoteau's works, draws upon the gay man's erotic conversion fantasy – to fuck straight or apparently straight men.

3.3 Machismo and Homo-Dudes: *Dante's Cove* / *The Lair* (2005-2009)

While DeCoteau's films do not appear to fit neatly into an explicitly gay horror aesthetic, many more of the titles within Gaysploitation horror cannot be considered explicitly as gay or queer texts. In her discussion of Rothman's films, Cook highlights their radical potential as they, 'produce contradictions, shifts in meaning which disturb the patriarchal myths of women on which the exploitation film rests' (123). DeCoteau's works (whether consciously or otherwise) also manipulate pre-existing stereotypes prevalent within the exploitation film, firstly in swapping the erotic objectification of gender from female to male, and secondly in challenging the typical effete stereotypes of gay men as erotic objects by emphasising the machismo of his male leads. But consequently DeCoteau's films and arguably other Gaysploitation Horror texts create new gay male stereotypes.

DeCoteau's films appeal to an audience made up of gay men, straight women, teenage girls and also, arguably, heterosexual male horror fans.

In doing so, they have opened up the market for other horror films that present non-specific or fluid sexualities, eroticised male victims and scenes of homoeroticism. In spite of their homoeroticism there is very little evidence in the characters' dialogue, language or behaviour that would suggest that they are anything but typically young, white male heterosexual American 'Jocks' referring to American slang for an athlete. These character types effectively become 'homo-dudes', that is: apparently gay male subjects who adopt the language, behaviour, fashion and cultural connotations of young, white heterosexual machismo as represented by the 'Jock'.

While the majority of Rapid Heart's productions do not feature characters with clear homosexual orientations, Here! TV's horror and supernatural serial dramas *Dante's Cove* (Sam Irvin, US 2005-2008) and spin-off series, *The Lair* (Fred Olen Ray, US 2007-2009), both foreground their gay male protagonists. Here! TV, founded in 2002 and owned by gay distributor Regent Entertainment, is a premium cable and online television network that targets lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender audiences. It markets itself as the alternative television channel for those discerning viewers who wish to 'live openly', with 'no apologies', referencing an assumed guilt within gay and lesbian culture. The channel's name apparently references the 1990s political slogan of protest group Queer Nation 'We're here. We're queer. Get used to it!' (Banks and McGee, 2010: 221).

Dante's Cove also features lesbian, gay and bisexual characters who indulge in erotic encounters. Nevertheless these are clearly designated as support to the centrally featured gay male couple, Kevin (Gregory Michaels) and Toby (Charlie David). The serial takes place on a fictional US island in Dante's Cove, where a hotel/boarding house is home to various hyper-sexed characters. Kevin, a young blonde man from the mainland, is in love with Toby, an older, 'out' gay man. Invited to stay with him on the island, Kevin comes out to his parents who duly reject him. The history of the Cove influences the present throughout the narrative. Season one's prologue features an immortal witch, Grace (Tracey Scoggins), who discovers her fiancé, Ambrosius (William Gregory Lee), sleeping with another man, for which she enacts her revenge by killing his gay lover and imprisoning Ambrosius for centuries in the cellar of the hotel. Kevin begins suffering visions under Ambrosius' spell and, in a trance, he eventually frees him with a kiss. Ambrosius, in turn, falls in love with Kevin and strives to split him from Toby and to wage war with Grace by using the power of 'Tresum' witchcraft that links feminine power with that of the moon and water, and masculine power with the sun. Its convoluted narrative is derived from soap operas, but it has horror elements too and is driven by the tumultuous love affair between the two gay men and the forces (supernatural or otherwise) that conspire against them. *Dante's Cove* takes the basic structure of DeCoteau's films and updates them into a long running serial format, but instead confidently

presents its male and female characters as gay, lesbian, straight or bisexual. Despite this seemingly fresh presentation of unapologetic homosexuality, the representation of gay masculinity in *Dante's Cove* is not without its problems. For while the characters clearly state their sexual preferences, it is the continued adoption of macho posturing and language and, at times, oddly contradictory straight-acting behaviour that subverts any 'outed' and guilt free declaration of homosexuality that the channel's title, Here!, suggests. *Dante's Cove's* marketing campaign has often ran with the tag-line 'Your newest Guilty Pleasure'. These horror soaps borrow the soft-core erotic elements of the exploitation film with their soapy aesthetics being loaned by the aforementioned Gaysploitation horror films. Further analysis of *Dante's Cove* and, to a lesser extent, *The Lair* reveals that the representations of gay masculinity within these supernatural horror soaps, propose the *incidental* nature of homosexuality, by foregrounding a stereotypically heterosexual macho masculine performance by young gay men (again played largely by straight actors¹⁴). *Dante's Cove* features straight actors playing gay, yet effectively acting straight. It is via this paradoxical fusion of performances that a certain type of idealised macho and straight-acting gay masculinity is affirmed.



Fig. 34 The Daddy and Kept Boy.

Dante's Cove stages a gender war, between the power of masculine witchcraft and its feminine counterpart, the metaphor is queered as the traditionally stronger power of the sun is overwhelmed by the traditionally weaker *feminine* moon. Given the shameful disempowerment of the gay male, it is understandable there is a great deal of macho posturing. As a young, recently 'outed', gay male character, Kevin suffers the most in coming to terms with this idealised masculinity. In contrast to his blonde, androgynous prettiness, his partner Toby is an older, more hirsute, darker skinned figure with brown hair and stubble. Kevin's status as 'kept-boy' and the younger of the couple further emasculates him (Fig. 34). This is countered by his overcompensating macho language, clothing and heteronormative behaviour and in his casting of himself in his fantasy visions as a Prince Charming figure. As Kevin struggles to pay his way at the hotel, his torrid love affair with Toby is fraught with anxieties of

powerlessness. Through his supernatural connection with Ambrosius, he attempts to re-masculinise himself, but instead Ambrosius feeds upon his youth in order to gain the power to avenge himself on Grace. In the series' second season, Ambrosius' character is developed further into a macho stereotype. His long hair is cut into a shorter fifties slicked style, complete with black leather jacket and the shortening of his name to 'Bro' furthers this rejection of a feminised gay male culture.

One sequence in particular reveals Kevin's anxieties about his homosexuality and fear of emasculation. He reveals to Toby that, in his youth, he was a street hustler. He continues that he never let his customers anally penetrate him and still has never let anyone do so. In bed with Toby, Kevin confesses, 'I never let anybody fuck me, because – you know I had to love them to...let them do that'. Breaking down, Kevin weeps, 'I never let anybody have that part of me! Nobody ever, 'til now'. Upon which Kevin kisses Toby, and they begin to have sex. A cross-cut between Kevin's confession and the initial stages of their love making, shows Grace casting a spell on the moon, turning it blue to affect the actions of the male characters. Her voiceover chants, 'The power of the moon frees us...The power of Tresum frees us!'. Freed by femininity, Kevin has anal sex with Toby, crying throughout in a hilarious mix of relief, pain and guilt. Despite the scene's obvious comic nature, it is clearly indicative of the central themes of *Dante's Cove*, with gay male passivity being associated with feminine passivity and the social and

cultural powerlessness that is inferred as a result of such an association. The series' gay director, Sam Irving, may indeed be attempting a parody of such views, but in perpetuating the erotic objectification of machismo he effectively maintains them.

The Lair, like DeCoteau's *The Brotherhood*, draws upon a cinematic and literary history of queer/vampire narratives, historically representing gay men's fixation with youth. A spin-off from *Dante's Cove*, the serial takes place in a sadomasochists' nightclub on the island which is run by a vampire clan. *The Lair* fuses the narratives from Oscar Wilde's *A Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), both queer commentaries on the attraction of youthful beauty and the fear of ageing. Because of the all-male nature of the club, *The Lair* features only one female character (Laura played by Beverly Lynne), who is revealed to be the victim of domestic abuse. By narratively figuring its only female as 'victim', unlike *Dante's Cove*'s Grace, the series offers no place for the female 'bitch' character that carries over from American soap culture. Instead the archetypal 'bitch' in *The Lair* is the effeminate male Colin (hardcore gay porn actor Dylan Vox), a camp and untrustworthy bleach blonde bent on taking over the queer vampire clan. In *The Lair*, effeminacy displaces femininity – but it is equally vilified. Both soaps borrow from the conventions of the horror genre and Gaysploitation, becoming camp pastiches of Gaysploitation horror with

resulting series that can be considered, not only as gay horrors, but more so as gay commentaries on or satires of gay horror texts.

Where *Dante's Cove* and *The Lair* associate a passive femininity with male homosexuality, this is counterposed to the 'straight acting' über-masculinity of the gay and straight male characters. By 'straight-acting', I refer to a gay sex advertisement term for traditional masculine behavioural traits¹⁵. What is the appeal of the parodic spectacle of machismo in Gaysploitation horror? *Dante's Cove* has developed into a camp supernatural comic soap that many of its fans watch both for its comedic value and for its display of naked male flesh and soft-core titillation. Yet such anodyne sexual display essentially achieves only a flaccid eroticism, one that is not designed to arouse, but merely to provide 'eye-candy', and is arguably just a source of comedy. The parodic representation of macho masculinity in DeCoteau's films and in Here! TV serials like *Dante's Cove* and *The Lair* remain celebratory caricatures, without lampooning machismo.

In the arguably implicit adoption of heterosexual masculinist ideals in DeCoteau and Here! TV productions, gay male culture may indeed be enacting a new invisibility, by disavowing any effeminate behavioural traits and associations through 'straight-acting' and by being non-stereotypical and unrecognisably gay. More specifically, the presentation of gay masculinity in Gaysploitation horror strips stereotypically

effeminate gayness from gay male subjectivities and replaces it with a diffuse, but equally stereotyped, gay masculinity. Whether or not the replacement of stereotyped effeminate gay behaviour with equally stereotyped straight-acting gayness is indeed subversive remains to be seen. While these texts characters' sexual fluidity is undeniable, it comes at the expense of any positive representation of femininity. The following examples of Gaysploitation horror all present 'out' gay characters which offer a more self-aware critique of both feminine and macho gay male stereotypes.

3.4 *October Moon* (Collum, US 2007)

October Moon mixes psychological thriller with horror and presents its central characters as gay, yet it avoids any obvious straight-acting caricatures and focuses instead on the everyday emasculation and age-centred anxieties of young and middle aged gay men. Having previously worked with DeCoteau in various roles ranging from writer, assistant director to camera operator, Jason Paul Collum sought to take DeCoteau's version of Gaysploitation horror to a less sensational and self-aware level while acknowledging their success:

DeCoteau's films were marketed as 'horror films for girls', adhering [himself] firmly to the market research in 1997 that well over 40% of horror film goers were female. DeCoteau tried to tap into the completely dry gay market. But there technically wasn't any 'gay' at all. All the male characters claimed to be straight, though at the end of each film a single line of dialogue would conjure up a 'possibility' that perhaps some homosexual tendencies could exist in the hunkiest characters. So, DeCoteau's idea, to make safe homosexual films which weren't homosexual films, paid off. (Interview with Collum, October 2007)

October Moon is a typical Gaysploitation horror in that it crosses many genres. Though it references horror in its opening shower sequence (another homage to De Palma's *Carrie* and Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) but it is not a critique of the genre. In the film's closing third act, it turns to the horror genre wholeheartedly, borrowing a Gothic aesthetic and narrative with its brooding soundtrack punctuated with sharp stabs of strings in moments of tension. Its recurring voiceover is slowed to give it a monstrous connotation, the lighting is expressionistic and the film's final sequence is a typical discovery of and escape from the monster/killer's dungeon.

Its plot is a gay take on the *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, US 1987) narrative¹⁶. Gay couple Corin (Sean Michael Lambrecht) and Jake (Jeff Dylan-Graham) have relationship problems due to age anxieties (Corin is markedly older than Jake, an unemployed, 'kept boy' figure). Their relationship is thrown into turmoil when Corin's new male assistant, Eliot, (Jerod Howard) conceives an erotic obsession with his boss. Eliot infiltrates their home life, driving a wedge between the two, stalking Corin, building a shrine to him in a nearby abandoned house, and eventually kidnapping and murdering him before attempting to murder Jake. Distraught with grief, Jake eventually kills Eliot. *October Moon* also satirises and highlights anxieties around ageism and gender stereotyping particularly the conflation of gay masculinity with passive femininity this

time, both by the dominant heterosexist ideology and from *within* a gay male sub-culture. There is very little erotic content, homoeroticism is rendered obvious given the characters' out gay status and it remains very clear, via a distinct lack of nudity, that *October Moon* does not intend to titillate its viewers. Within the diegesis there is an awareness of sexual stereotypes and the anxieties surrounding them. Via his characters' dialogue, Collum seems to be dramatising the issues surrounding the feminisation of gay male culture, both from without (via heteronormativity), and from within (via its own sub-cultural language).

Several scenes involving Corin's colleague, Lisa (Brinke Stevens), reveal both her and Corin's uneasiness over gay male culture's feminisation of *itself*. Corin reveals that, as a child, he would play-act as Wonder Woman: 'I'd be Diana Prince, and do the spin and everything!', to which Lisa replies, 'You are *such* a fag!', at which Eliot (their dinner guest) looks uncomfortable. When questioned by Lisa as to the sexual orientation of his new assistant, Corin affirms, 'Hell, yes – she screamed "Mary" the minute she walked through the door!', Lisa, looking perturbed, asks 'Why do you always refer to gay men as women?' to which Corin responds, 'Well, aren't we?' and Lisa replies, 'Yeah, I guess'. It is precisely these moments of feminine identification by gay male characters, and a general feminising of gay men by the film's straight *and* gay characters, that define the film's central anxiety.



Fig. 35 Jake and Corin from *October Moon*.

The film also discusses anxieties surrounding ageism within gay male sub-groups. The main protagonists' relationship is dogged by their own and their surrounding culture's valorising of youth. Emasculation anxieties revolve around age and inexperience for Jake, who becomes depressed at being the dependent partner, uncomfortable with being tied down, and finding monogamy oppressive. The older Corin is a clear 'daddy' figure, a more mature gay man (although, tellingly, he is still fairly young), the sole bread-winner, and who is relatively successful at his job and independent of his family (Fig. 35). Most importantly, Jake is anxious about being unemployed and the passive connotations of being unable to bring home a salary. On top of all this, Corin and Jake are a long term couple and are continually represented like heterosexual, married partners, inviting them into the gender positions of husband and wife respectively. Jake's journey

from 'kept boy' to 'Final Boy' is indicative of his struggle to be recognised as a masculine gay man.

Collum consciously places such social commentary within *October*

Moon's narrative, he suggests that:

Whereas in straight culture there is clearly a stereotypical 'man/woman' role in the household, when you place two men together in a homosexual relationship, there remains that sense that one of them 'has' to be the stronger 'dominant' and the other has to be the 'subservient' weaker partner.

As a result of American culture's inbred psychological need to define who is the more powerful in a relationship, it seems to me gay men still feel the need to define who's who in their relationships. (Collum, 2007)

Jake's survival is brought about via a burgeoning maturity. In attempting to rescue Corin from Eliot in the film's final sequence, Jake becomes the hero, the 'knight in shining armour', in order to prove his worth as a masculine and (upon Corin's death) vengeful male. In losing his more masculine partner and vengefully stabbing Eliot to death with his own knife, Jake is phallicised and becomes an independent, masculine gay subject.

3.5 *Socket* (2007): Top/Bottom Body Horror

Sean Abley's *Socket* (US, 2007) is a science fiction horror which clearly references the narrative of *Frankenstein* (both Mary Shelley's novel (1818) and James Whale's 1931 adaptation) while paying cinematic homage to the sci-fi and body horror of David Cronenberg (particularly *Rabid* (CA, 1977) and *Videodrome* (CA, 1983) and, most obviously, *eXistenZ* (CA/US 1999)). Despite being marketed as a science fiction

fantasy, the film wears its horror antecedents on its sleeve. Abley and executive producers John Carrozza and Doug Prinzivalli state, in several interviews and on the DVD's 'Making Of Featurette', that, as gay fans of horror, the film references significant titles from the genre. Abley comments,

I'm a gigantic Cronenberg fan. I love his biological horror movies. I was trying to come up with something that incorporated your body rebelling against you with the added extra bonus of sexualizing something that wasn't normally sexual. I also wanted to do a gay film that was uncompromising in the sexuality of the characters, but didn't rely on their sexual identity for the plot. (Abley, 2007)

In demonstrating an awareness of the anxieties of gay male association with shameful feminine passivity, *Socket* is typical of Gaysploitation horror. It also remains true to the sub-genre in its presentation of an everyday, non-political gay subjectivity. Abley continues that his production company Dark Blue Films intended to feature:

...leading characters who are incidentally gay. . . We want to continue to do horror films that have gay characters whose sexuality have nothing to do with the plot. (2007)

Abley, along with directors Irving, Olen-Ray and Paul Etheridge-Outzs, all highlight the incidentally homosexual nature of their films' characters, rendering their sexual orientation matter-of-fact, non-threatening and, some would argue, *non-gay*. *Socket* is a tale of lightning strike victims who survive only to develop an insatiable addiction to electric current, eventually compelling them to modify their bodies to seek the ultimate high in unleashing the bio-electric energy in others' bodies.



Figs. 36 and 37 *Socket's* body modification and 'plugging' into a victim.

Socket clearly plays on the vampire metaphor of the addicted monstrous individual feeding on others for power but, more importantly, references Cronenbergian 'Body Horror'¹⁷ via its characters' eroticised obsessions, sexually symbolised murders and bodily dysfunctions. Abley takes the main narrative of *Rabid*¹⁸ and transposes it onto gay male characters and adds electrocution as the main motivation for their obsessions. In *Rabid*, the sexually aroused heroine emits a phallic spike from her arm-pit-wound to stab her victims, infecting them with a virus that turns them into sexually obsessed 'zombies'. In *Socket*, Dr. Bill Matthews (Derek Long), driven by his erotic obsession with electricity, surgically alters his and the group's bodies to implant a similarly hidden phallic implement in one of their wrists (see fig. 36), while also implanting vaginal/ anal openings in the other one. The film also references *Videodrome*, via recurring visual motifs of television sets whose picture turns into static in Bill's presence, and in rapid cuts between the haunting black and white images and televisual static in which Bill views flashbacks of his own traumatic past and the traumatic memories of his victims when he 'plugs into' them (see fig. 37). Most importantly, the sub-textual trauma of *Socket*, which

revolves around the psychical and physical (un)pleasure associated with gay male penetration anxieties, more than references that of *eXistenZ*.

It could be argued that *Socket* is a queered (or *queerer*) homage to Cronenberg's science fiction tale of virtual realities and the blurring of a fictional gaming world with reality. *eXistenZ*'s plot follows the many versions of reality that befall Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), a savvy virtual reality games creator and one of her fans, Ted Pikul (Jude Law) who become embroiled in a plot to assassinate Geller and the game world she has created. In order to unravel the mystery, the two escape into that game world. Cronenberg's body horror twist to the software heavy plot involves the introduction of 'wet-ware' in which game participants connect to other gamers and the game world via bio-ports fitted at the base of their spines. These symbolically anal holes allow for their users to import 'pods', living biological gaming machines that tap into their hosts' spinal cords, and afford the possibility of connecting with other gamers, both mentally and physically, if one gamer 'plugs into' another. Ostensibly, *eXistenZ* is a narrative about male penetration anxieties¹⁹ and fantasies borne out of the gender play that Cronenberg instils into the plot (having a *female* games designer whiz-kid, the wide-eyed 'Alice' who falls down *eXistenZ*'s many metaphorical 'rabbit holes'). Indeed Ted Pikul is characterised within the film as an uptight, prissy and weak adventurer, with Law's soft, willowy body type further suggesting a very feminine vulnerability. Despite this feminisation, Pikul remains resolutely

heterosexual throughout (becoming Geller's lover) and, in one notable scene, it becomes clear that penetration anxieties in *eXistenZ* are heterosexist and represent 'homosexual panic'. Led to a run-down garage by Geller, in order to help her access the 'game world', Pikul is fitted with a bio-port by the garage proprietor, Gas (Willem Defoe) who is in the pay of the game's designer. The fitting of the port is depicted as a comic scene of exaggerated phallic suggestions and traumatic male penetration anxiety. After Gas reveals the immense gun-like weapon with which he is to drill Pikul a new bio-port, Pikul protests 'I have this phobia about my body being penetrated...surgically'. Pikul's pause underlines the scene's obvious homosexual rape metaphors. Gas's retort, in reference to his phallic weapon, further confirms the potential trauma: 'You don't wanna mess with the stud-finder!'. Immediately after the installation, Allegra fingers Ted's port, lubing it up and penetrating him with one of her bio-ports. Gender roles are reversed and the male is penetrated by the female. Equating the new (anal/vaginal) bio-port as a site of male bodily and psychological penetration, Cronenberg's narrative continues throwing Ted into various game world and real world scenarios in which he remains out of control, thus paralleling penetration, and the feminine masochism implied, with disempowerment.

Socket's penetration scenes take place in an explicitly homosexual environment, but this is not to suggest that similar anxieties do not arise for the film's gay male protagonist. I want to suggest that the penetration

anxieties within *Socket* are not necessarily based upon a fear of sodomy per se, but of the feminine masochism that is implied in it and, further still, the guilt and shame at one's own homosexuality (as coded feminine) and even the trauma experienced in sharing one's body with another. The film also reconstructs Elizabeth Young's homo-social/erotic triangle, in the dynamic between Bill, his female boss, Dr. Emily Anderson (Alexandra Billings) and intern/lover Craig Matthews (Matthew Montgomery). The men's relationship is discovered and frowned upon by Emily, which effectively emasculates them. The role of Emily is a castrating one throughout the narrative: she initially forbids Bill to perform surgery after his accident, relegating him to running rounds and completing administrative work²⁰. Indeed the representation of women throughout the film can be argued to be masculinised, with Bill's friend Olivia (Allie Rivenbank), a butch lesbian caricature, whose increasingly aggressive threats and desire to buy a 'big fucking truck' further masculinise her and emasculate him.

At face value, *Socket*, appears again to be presenting the typical Gaysploitation horror narrative of emasculation anxieties. The lightning strike imposes a traumatic passivity upon its target. It is this passivity and an inferred masochism, taking pleasure in willingly submitting oneself to pain, that central character Bill must negotiate throughout the film. Bill is a successful, very masculine surgeon who becomes disempowered (in his work and personal life) by his accident through being taken off surgery

rounds and being cared for by his female friends. The relationship that develops between him and Craig centres on Bill's attempt to regain control of his life. Cared for by Craig and by Olivia and Carol (a lesbian couple whom he refers to as his 'parents'), Bill is rendered feminine and confined to the domestic. Upon seeing his newly clean house, Carol remarks 'Welcome to Stepford!' and Olivia retorts 'StepFAG is more like it!'. The post-traumatic desire for electrical energy that Bill develops seems to be a drive to regain 'order' within his life. In one scene, Craig links Bill's curious desire to clean and tidy with his desire to experience electrical shocks: 'You craved order...[and]...the brain produces energy...[therefore] energy is pure order'. Later, refusing to embrace Craig at work, Bill exclaims, 'It's all about the pecking order, you know that as well as I do!' But it is the cultural stigma of gay penetration that provides the film's central tension.

The relationship dynamic between Bill and Craig fits the recurring pattern in Gaysploitation horror, Bill being the older, mature, 'Daddy' figure, while the worshipful intern Craig is smaller in stature, younger and, despite his initial status as carer, eventually depends on Bill. Craig is clearly figured as the 'boy' in the relationship, a status that is made explicit when Carol and Olivia remark, 'so he really is a boy!'. On the other hand, Bill is a more stereotypically mature, masculine, character with messy habits. When taken home by his female friend carers, his house is figured as a typical 'bachelor pad' – untidy, unclean and with sober decoration. Once

Bill is struck by lightning and begins to take erotic pleasure in submitting himself to shocks, he becomes anally retentive and an obsessive 'neat-freak', in other words, a stereotypically house-proud homosexual. In Bill's sexual relationship with Craig, however, he remains the top - the initiator of sex and the penetrator in the electric plugging sessions. It is as if Bill overcompensates for his daytime domestication and, by extension, feminisation by dominating in nightly 'plugging sessions' with his partner and other 'victims'. *Socket* parallels *domestic* order (tidiness) with a domestic *gendered* order that centres around power relations. Both exist within the same subject, Bill, and are at odds with each other, suggesting his inner turmoil. Despite his efforts to re-empower himself as male/active/penetrator, Bill masochistically experiences the dying moments and memories of his victims, and is feminised once more as a result.

Above all, while the narrative appears to represent gay male emasculation anxieties, it is *Socket's* equipping of its obsessed characters with the potential 'to plug' into electrical circuits and each other, as well as being 'plugged into', that almost comically symbolises the gay male subject's potential *to penetrate* as well as *to be penetrated* in sexual intercourse. It is this dual potential that, via such unnatural surgical enhancements, turn the group and its members monstrous. Bill's surgical enhancement of his body into a site of active and passive penetration eventually turns this potential into an *unnatural* ability and

informs Bill's mounting guilt and shame. The Cronenbergian surgical procedures, in which Bill and Craig graft metal prongs and socket slots into one another, would seem to afford an equalising potential for sexual partnership (to be both top and bottom simultaneously) but, tellingly, it is Bill, the more masculine of the two, who remains the top. Reciprocity (whereby Bill allows Craig to 'plug into' him and vice versa) eventually proves unsatisfying to the doctor, who, sneaking out at night, continues to 'cruise' and seek electric shocks in secret. Bill sadistically penetrates others' bodies to experience their bio-electrical impulses but, as a consequence, also masochistically experiences their pain 'by proxy'. The references to vampirism, obsessive drug abuse and the dangers of promiscuous sex become obvious here, with the doctor killing people indiscriminately and becoming addicted to it. Finally guilt overwhelms Bill, and he attempts a typically excessive (and camp) suicide by plugging into a local power station.

The concept of the self-help group is parodied in *Socket* (as a means of 'coming out' as a victim of a lightning strike) and comes to represent a pseudo-sadomasochistic community (in that its members are representatives of various genders and ages who meet in private to confess 'what they are'). Adding to the sadomasochistic symbolism, their meeting place is styled as a dark dungeon complete with rough-hewn brick walls and an antique electric shock machine. There the group's admission of pleasure gained in self-inflicted pain clearly states their

masochism. At one stage in the group's discussion of when 'their life changed' (after being struck by lightning), a montage of individual declarations reveals the parallel excitement and shame associated with their new found (sexual) identity: 'It felt exquisite...and I felt ashamed...until I found this...and my life became...perfect.' *Socket* clearly links masochism with homosexuality, but the film's 'self-help' group is made up of an equal number of men and women of varied sexual orientations. Its members are equally sadistic as well as masochistic, but it is precisely the (gay) man's possibility for both (in his desire to experience both penile and anal pleasure) that is turned *unnatural* via the traditional horror genre's conventional demands and heteronormative ideology. It is this that causes the most 'pain' for Bill: masochistic pleasure leads to cultural, and therefore psychological, trauma and pain. His drive for greater and greater levels of pain or unpleasure in the form of electrocution is presented as a means to prove himself 'more of a man', and it inevitably fails. It could be argued, however, that in Bill's continued drive towards re-empowerment and re-masculinisation, he continually finds himself propelled back into the passive position of 'victim'. In 'plugging into' the mains, he willingly submits himself to electrocution and the masochistic enjoyment of 'pain'. In his attempt at sadism, in inflicting pain on his human victims by 'plugging into' their spinal cords, he subsequently experiences their bio-electrical surges and memories masochistically which feeds his shame. What *Socket's* narrative provides is a guilt-ridden visualisation of Freud's understanding of sadistic

pleasure whereby he states that sadism (pleasure in inflicting pain on others) and masochism (pleasure in having pain inflicted upon oneself) are bound together in the subject's own enjoyment of suffering, either inflicting it or having it inflicted upon themselves. Freud states that:

while these pains are being inflicted upon other people, they are enjoyed masochistically by the subject through his identification with the suffering object. ([1915] 1984: 126)

This is visually depicted when Bill finally 'plugs into' Olivia, he experiences a flashback in which he sees, in montage, the deaths of all his previous victims (partners). The shame and danger of the gay male subject's promiscuity (particularly the viral connection between victims/partners) is catalysed in this series of shameful flashbacks. There are obvious references to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases that are particularly relevant to gay male culture in *Socket*: viral infection is represented by Bill retaining the memories of his dead victims (partners) even after unplugging from them – their memories (rather than a literal disease) infect Bill, adding to his guilt. The painful memories return unannounced to him causing both psychological and physical trauma – headaches, blackouts and the loss of his own memories. His final words before his suicide articulate the guilt and shame of Gaysploitation horror and the gay male subject's simultaneous desire for and frustration with re-confirming the heterosexual 'order' (a heterosexist masculinity with which he erotically disidentifies with):

I'm a fucking doctor and I've done terrible things. The man on our street, the one they found...and another one in an alley...they were all so desperate...Everything's a mess and I have to put things in order.

Bill's suicide attempt is an attempt to access the overwhelming (phallic) energy of the power station, to access its potency and to overload himself with a phallic charge. His failure to do is a reminder of Lacan's argument that the phallus is unattainable. But Bill does not enter the power station in order to 'top-up' his failing masculinity; in attempting suicide he accepts his masochism overwhelmingly. In plugging into the power station, he is also filled up (penetrated) with an electrical phallic charge, rendering him ultimately passive. In the film's closing shot, both Bill and Craig are seen to survive in a passive comatose state, side-by-side in hospital beds and connected to one heart monitor. *Socket's* final shot summarises its overriding trauma, that of the assimilation of one subject into another. It is the union of bodies and of subjectivities (the 'loss of self' that is implied in sexual penetration) that terrifies and fascinates in queer horror.

3.6 A Far Cry from Acceptance

More recently, Western gay culture has found itself at the centre of a cultural debate surrounding the legalisation of gay marriage and the consequent outrage felt by far right religious, political and social pressure groups decrying the move to equality as a desecration of the sanctity and traditions of heterosexual marriage.²¹ Both *Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror* (Jaymes Thompson, 2007) and *A Far Cry From Home* (Alan Rowe Kelly, 2009) tap into this cultural unease, portraying those right wing groups as the films' monsters. Both films feature gay and lesbian

characters as their main protagonists who, in true survival horror tradition (*The Hills Have Eyes*, Wes Craven, US 1977, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, Tobe Hooper, US 1974) unwittingly stumble into the world of religious and Republican fanaticism in the mid-West and find themselves tortured and slaughtered by stereotypical rednecks. These Gaysploitation horrors are significant in that they depict seemingly heteronormative, middle America as their monsters, and suggest that repressed homosexuality lies at the root of homophobia.

Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror follows the parodic leanings of Gaysploitation horror in foregrounding grotesque feminine masquerade and gross-out comedy. The film riffs on the stereotyped stratification of gay and lesbian 'types' alongside an equally stereotyped presentation of right wing, Republican, God-fearing, backwoods families who attempt to rid the world of its 'queer fornicators' and 'sodomites'. During the weekend of the 'biggest gay circuit party of the year', the Sahara Salvation Inn is the only available accommodation for party revellers. Run by Helen (Marki Marks) and Luella (Georgia Jean), an obsessively religious mother and daughter, the guest house, comically marketed as 'A Small Slice of Paradise Here in the Desert', masquerades as a chintzy bed and breakfast but is, in fact, a slaughterhouse. Five couples check in for the weekend: Dom (Vinny Markus) and Alex (Michael Soldier), both ageing drag queens; Mike (Derek Long) and Erik (Rebert Borzych), a middle class, bourgeois couple with their 'fag-hag' girlfriend Lizette (Lisa

Block-Wieser); Deborah (Shannon Lee) and Gabby (Denise Heller), both glamorous, stereotyped 'lipstick-lesbian', career women; Starr (Hilary Schwartz) and Brenda (Allie Rivenbark), an aspiring female folk singer and her butch lover; and Rodney (Jim Polivka) and Todd (James Tolins), an older sugar daddy with his younger 'personal trainer' lover.

During their stay, Helen attempts to 'cure' Erik of his homosexuality by torturing him and forcing him to marry her (secretly lesbian) daughter. Helen's outrageous religious fervour and her wildly curled red hair recall Piper Laurie's Mrs White (and the various drag-renditions of the role) as echoes of De Palma's *Carrie* continue to be heard throughout queer horror. However, the depiction of religious fundamentalism is clearly more tongue-in-cheek in its attempt to chastise the young and the sexually transgressive; at one point, Helen threatens her captive: 'You will embrace the light of God, and dream of the sugar-sweet holy vaginal walls of your soon-to-be-wife and my lovely daughter...FOREVER!' One by one, the other couples are murdered (often using a dagger with a crucifix for a handle) and fed to her mutant cannibal son Manfred (Noah Naylor). Helen later reveals that Manfred is the result of a gang rape 'the illegitimate love child of a hundred Republican convention delegates' (a comic reference to both *Carrie* and horror icon Freddy Krueger's conception, 'the bastard son of a hundred maniacs' in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*, Chuck Russell, 1987).

A Far Cry From Home (2010), part of the anthology horror *Gallery of Fear* (Rowe Kelly, Anthony G. Sumner), takes a more serious approach to its depiction of backwoods horror. Lane (played 'straight' as a man by director Rowe Kelly, who is notorious for being cast in female roles), a forty-something androgynous gay man, with long, feminine hair and subtle traces of drag make-up, and his lover Kayle (Don Money), a twenty-something, attractive, masculine lover, play the typical Gaysploitation couple. Their relationship is already wracked with generation gap anxieties as indicated by Lane's complaint: 'If I was ten years younger we'd be fine'. The couple decide to escape for a weekend's antiquing for some quality time together. Stopping off at 'Hung by a Thread', a dilapidated junk store in the woods, they come across a family of Christian 'rednecks' who claim they are 'God's warriors put on this pitiful planet to rid it of all its abominations'.

The film clearly references *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre's* mise-en-scène in the junk shop's animal skins, rickety furniture, dried bone ornaments, toy skeletons, grotesque Mardi Gras masks and pickled vegetables and human organs in jars, but it also includes Christian *objets d'art*, including crucifixes and collectable statues of the Virgin Mary. It also pays homage to Hooper's film's narrative trajectory in that, while Lane smokes a joint outside the shop, Kayle disappears, leaving the feminine central character to endure extended torture at the hands of the monstrous family Final Girl-style. The family, consisting of Aunt Idella

(Katherine O'Sullivan) and her grown nephews Otis (Benzy) and Buster (Jerry Murdock) (a Leatherface-like porcine brute), receive religious guidance from an equally monstrous Preacher (Terry West) who, quoting from Corinthians, legitimises their crusade against 'certain debased, debauched humanity', declaring that 'sodomites will be sent straight to hell!'. The Preacher encourages the slaughter of homosexuals, particularly effeminate gay men, whom he claims 'fuel the fires of Satan!':

'Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolators, not adulterors, nor effeminate, not abusers of themselves with mankind, shall inherit the kingdom of God (Corinthians 6:9-10)'

Lane's feminine masculinity provides the main source of hatred for the family, and, arguably, is the main source of anxiety for both homo and heterosexuality. Both Otis and Buster make continual references to it: 'Do you smell pussy? I smell pussy...well, I smell cock!', before concluding 'You look like a girl!' After being tortured, Lane escapes the family and fleeing into the woods nearby discovers a collection of tents pitched in a clearing, each of which contains the rotting corpses of gays. Lane finds Kayle strung up and barely alive, tied between two trees and positioned in a crucifixion-pose, complete with a crown of thorns and nails driven into his wrists. He stumbles into a trap that literally tears his lover in two and orgasmically sprays him with arterial blood and innards. Tracked down by his pursuers, Lane is eventually captured and forced to repent. As the preacher and the two brothers prepare to kill him, he reveals wounds in his palms caused by falling in the woods onto metal spikes, wounds that appear as stigmata to the religious fanatics. Tricking

them by appearing to speak in tongues, Lane dispatches Buster with his own axe, before being shot and killed with a crossbow by the Preacher. Lane's dead body is dragged into the tent circle. In the film's final shots a mixed race straight couple arrive at the junk shop, much to the annoyance of Aunt Idella.

Both titles provide clear evidence of a continuing trend in Gaysploitation horror that makes homosexuality as an explicit element of both narrative and characterisation. Similarly, both films also invert traditional survival horror's dynamic of heteronormativity (as represented in the heterosexual couple and/or the nuclear family) threatened by marginalised, transgressive 'Others', Here conservative and oppressive heteronormativity is turned monstrous. Though the previous titles in this chapter have focused on the sub-cultural anxieties that arise from the recent *acceptance* of homosexuality in Western culture (of a de-gaying of gayness), both *Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror* and *A Far Cry From Home* clearly manifest a very real, violently homophobic reaction encouraged by religious fundamentalism and right-wing family values that is exacerbated by the increasing assimilation of homosexuality into the mainstream.

¹ Gaysploitation Horror 'lite' would be a politically neutered variation, with the relevant films simply fitting the conventions of the sub-genre with little or no political sub-text.

² DeCoteau adopted female pseudonyms in response to a continuing disagreement with Full Moon Pictures' CEO Charles Band as a means of distancing his name from those titles.

³ Web blogs like <http://billylovesstue.blogspot.com>, a blog for 'homos who love horror (and the non homos who love them)' praise it and it has achieved notoriety within US gay magazine publications as *XY* and *Bound and Gagged*.

⁴ *Grizzly Rage* (US, 2006) was co-produced by the Sci-Fi Channel, DeCoteau's latest queer re-tellings of the Edgar Allen Poe short stories and his series of *13:13* serial horrors (2011-ongoing) are entirely financed by Here! TV.

⁵ Figures taken from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0232908/business> accessed 20th April 2012.

⁶ The vampiric metaphor of parasitic (ageing) homosexuals who use their younger male victims or companions as a means to access the 'new' world is discussed further in chapter six.

⁷ Taken from the Region 1 import DVD jacket for *Voodoo Academy* (2000).

⁸ Taken from imdb.com message board for *Ring of Darkness* (2004) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372803/> (accessed 2nd January 2006)

⁹ All comments taken from the following imdb.com message boards <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0445236/> and <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0265105/> [accessed 2nd January 2006]

¹⁰ Such a formation serves to display an equal line up of both male and female characters, suggesting a non-gender-biased pattern of slayings. The triangular pattern also re-situates homoerotic relations between men legitimised by the presence of a woman – converting it into a homoerotic/homosocial triangle.

¹¹ See for instance Lee Anna Mariglia, 'I want to suck your...blood?! Queer Vampires, 1980's American Politics, and Joel Schumacher's *The Lost Boys*' (2006).

¹² However the films are just as much defined by their inclusion of a 'certain type' of female figure - the 'fag-hag' or 'fruit fly' (a straight woman who remains close friends with gay men without any sexual intimacy but with physical closeness) - as they are by the exclusion of femininity.

¹³ Their study considers Delta Lambda Phi, the first gay run fraternity set up in 1986 in Washington D.C. The fraternity is open to all 'gay, bisexual and progressive men' and was formed with the mission statement: 'To enhance the quality of life among Gay, Bisexual and Progressive Men by providing dignified and purposeful social, service and recreational activities'. Taken from the fraternity's website: www.dlp.org

¹⁴ The show has featured only a few out gay male leads, including Charlie David (Toby) and, recently in Season 3, Reichen Liekmuhl.

¹⁵ David Buchbinder's definition of the term in 'StraightActing: Masculinity Subjectivity and (Same Sex) Desire' (1994), is based upon the web-based phenomenon of *Straightacting.com*, an internet dating forum that eschews feminine behaviour in men. Buchbinder applies the concept of performance and Butler's notion of performativity to gay male behaviour and suggests that there is a longstanding homo/hetero binary via which the homosexual male identity negotiates with cultural structures of male oriented power.

¹⁶ One review calls upon viewers to 'consider it Gay-tal Attraction', Louis Fowler, Colorado Spring Independent. Taken from October Moon's website <http://www.octobermoontheilm.com/reviews.htm> (accessed 12 October 2012).

¹⁷ See, for instance, writings on Cronenberg's monstrous narratives on the human body turning upon itself such as *David Cronenberg: Author or Film Maker* by Mark Browning (2007).

¹⁸ In *Rabid*, Rose (Marilyn Chambers) is injured in a motorcycle accident, and a subsequent skin graft underneath her arm leaves her scarred with a vagina-like opening and an increasing sexual voracity which infects her victims with the same insatiable lust

¹⁹ See Cynthia Freeland's article 'Penetrating Keanu' (2002) which discusses *eXistenZ* alongside *The Matrix* (Wachowski Bros, US 1999) as male penetration fantasies.

²⁰ The performance of femininity here is an extra-cinematically queer one, since the role of Dr. Emily Anderson is played by trans-gendered actress Alexandra Billings and is explicitly referenced in the film's 'Making Of' featurette.

²¹ In 2011 in the US the Obama administration attacked the Defence of Marriage Act (DOMA) (passed into law on 21st September 1996) which defines marriage as the legal union of one man and one woman, as unconstitutional and therefore calling for its repeal. As such the Republican leadership has since attempted to defend the law via the

House of Representatives and it remains an area of controversy through the run up to the 2012 Presidential election. Throughout the first quarter of 2012 in UK the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government has held a public consultation on their intentions to allow same-sex marriage.

Chapter Four

Gay Slasher Horror: Devil Daddies and Final Boys

Building on the previous chapter's consideration of Gaysploitation horror's ruminations on gay male emasculation anxieties, this chapter comprises a case study of a single film: *Hellbent* (Paul Etheredge-Outzs, 2004).

Though it can be considered part of the Gaysploitation sub-genre, *Hellbent* is a queer appropriation of the slasher horror formula that looks at the relationship between those penetration anxieties and desired models of masculinity within gay male culture. The film not only queers the traditionally construed 'reactionary' plot structure and character types from the traditional slasher film in its parodying of gay masculine stereotypes, but also queers Clover's Final Girl (1992: 35), supplanting her here is a Final Boy who establishes an almost complete rejection of femininity. In its presentation of objectified, desirable male figures, it addresses the slippage between *identification with* and *desire for* the erotic object that the gay male subject experiences as both pleasurable and traumatic.

4.1 Hypermasculine Parody in *Hellbent*

Paul Etheredge-Outzs' self-touted 'First Gay Slasher film' *Hellbent* (US, 2005) explicitly declares itself as a slasher horror, but it also contains elements of gay parody and its director Paul Etheredge-Outzs arguably comes closer to achieving a radicalism similar to that of Stephanie Rothman's works in exploitation film. *Hellbent*, produced by

Hallowe'en (John Carpenter, US 1978) creators Joe Wolf, Josh Silver and Steven Wolfe¹, takes the traditional narrative format of the slasher sub-genre and introduces gay and bisexual characters in a contemporary West Hollywood locale. The film exploits the conventions and stereotypes of the slasher sub-genre to produce a text that plays with patriarchally constructed definitions of gay male subjectivity and consciously offers a social commentary on them. This is achieved via its display of ironic stereotypes and representations of gay male gender and age anxiety.

Hellbent also employs the tactics that Pam Cook attributes to Rothman:

in displaying ingenuity and in injecting ideas that do not entirely go along with hardcore exploitation principles...the director can also exploit the exploitations material in his or her own interest, and have fun at the expense of the genre. (1976: 57)

However, the film remains problematic in using the exploitation stereotypes and cinematic language that it trades in. In presenting an alternative voice, *Hellbent* runs the risk of perpetuating the very same oppressive structures. Cook points out that despite Rothman's ironic presentation,

[her] exploitation films were problematic for feminists in a number of ways. Not only were the films' use of sexualised images of women a bone of contention, the highly charged subject matter, in particular the relatively graphic depiction of rape and sexual assault, were viewed by many as pandering to sadistic male fantasies. (55)

The same problems arise for *Hellbent*, for despite its use of parody, its adoption of macho performance and costume can be seen to perpetuate, rather than challenge, the masculinity of gay male culture.

Unlike the creators of the aforementioned niche Gaysploitation horror films, the director and producers of *Hellbent* consider it a 'mainstream horror'². Etheredge-Outzs and producer Steven Wolfe wanted to create a film that offered gay audiences an alternative to the low budget 'gay films' that thematise homosexuality as a political issue. An article on the film in *Fangoria* reports:

According to Steven Wolfe (producer), gay cinema has gotten stuck in the rut of studying the lifestyle, never fully embracing a leap into genre fare without becoming issue related. "What is lacking right now are gay films that are just entertainment, and not dealing with any particular issues... We've seen enough coming out stories and suffering people, and it's time to move into the next phase and portray characters who are just out there in everyday normal life like a lot of us are, and don't have a problem with being gay." (Riefsteck, *Fangoria* 2004: 78)

Etheredge-Outzs parallels the gap in the gay mainstream horror market of the late 90s with that for African-American audiences in the 1970s:

the gay market was under-served and ripe for more mainstream type movies. Josh Silver (producer) equated it to the African-American market in the 1970s and how *Shaft* has made it acceptable to make mainstream movies about blacks. (Etheredge-Outzs, 2007)

Intentions aside, *Hellbent* remains a relatively low-budget exploitation horror which playfully presents its stereotypes, as the director admits: 'we pay homage to the recognisable slasher stereotypes – the bad boy, the sex addict, the virgin – but they're more fully formed characters'. Stereotypes, as historically defined in 1922 by Walter Lippmann, effectively render social groups immediately recognisable and legible to spectators:

a stereotype [...] is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our value, our own position and our own rights. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defences we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy. (Lippmann, [1922] 1965: 64)

Further to this, and in relation to gay stereotypes, Richard Dyer states

that:

[they] are associated with invisible social groups e.g. homosexuals, which cannot be distinguished from other groups unless by their own choice [...] The role of stereotypes is to make visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares; and to make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit. (Dyer, 1993: 11)

The masculine stereotypes present in *Hellbent* and Gaysploitation horror in general, whether ironically envisaged or not, not only highlight the *visibility* of a macho gay masculinity but also subsequently render *invisible* femininity and effectively distance the (gay male) spectator from shameful association with it. While *Hellbent* openly and ironically trades in hypermasculine gay stereotypes, the director is quick to state that the defining element of the gay male sexuality within his film is what he terms its 'incidental nature'. For Etheredge-Outzs, gay masculinity is an everyday phenomenon, devoid of political tub-thumping. In his attempt to define 'gay horror', the director questions:

Most audiences will expect a camp version of a slasher - characters growling double entendres as they off each other. This image doesn't describe the film at all. What makes the film gay are simply its characters and their object of affection. (Etheredge-Outzs 2007)

As in De Coteau's films and *ScreamKings'* productions, *Hellbent's* gay male protagonists are played by self-described straight male actors³.

Etheredge-Outzs explains that:

When we began to cast the movie, I stressed that I didn't want actors who played 'gay'. I wanted the sexuality to feel incidental rather than be their defining trait. I envisioned the leads to be regular guys - regular, beautiful guys. Having screaming men is a really hard line to toe. Once you have men shrieking through the house with their hands up in the air, it's going to become something very different. We do have men in peril who are upset, but it's not a camp film; it's very much a 'man's' movie.
(in Riefsteck, 2004: 80)

The use of hypermasculine performance as a method of feminine disavowal is continuous in *Hellbent*. In its presentation of masculine caricatures, the film offers a fantastical gay masculinity yet these hypermasculine types are excused via the plot device of a fancy dress Hallowe'en Carnival. Four of the main protagonists dress as a policeman, a biker, a cowboy and a harness-wearing 'leatherboy' (with sadomasochistic trappings of bondage apparel). The director's reference is the work of 1950s artist Tom of Finland (Finnish illustrator Toukko Laaksonen)⁴, renowned for its display of hypermasculine stereotypes,

Etheredge-Outzs states:

I looked into the homoerotic stereotypes by the artist, Tom of Finland, for inspiration when creating the costumes for the characters. The cop, the cowboy, the leather daddy.
(Etheredge-Outzs, 2007)

Laaksonen's work involves graphic illustrations of men indulging in sex with one another. His images present what Micha Ramakers calls 'hyper-real masculinity' (2000: 38-9) in various caricatured forms and often

exaggerate bodily features, with genitals and muscles magnified to disproportionate sizes. Fetishism of clothing is commonplace and is often used to intensify masculinity via associations with manual labourers, construction workers, lumberjacks and policemen. Ramakers defends this imagery as radical claiming that:

[Tom] held up a mirror to gay men in which they could see themselves as they were not: real men. (38-9)

Laaksonen is acclaimed by Ramakers to have created a new gay stereotype – the macho gay man (41). This stereotype is realised in the policeman (fig. 38-9), a figure with connotations of law enforcement and the control and oppression of others); the leatherman (figs. 40-1), an idealised, masculine yet conversely queer image with an overly muscled, 'armoured body' and sadomasochistic clothing; the cowboy (figs. 42-3), a figure with connotations of isolation and wild sexual potency and the biker (see figs. 44-5), with connotations of rebellion, freedom and the obvious phallic masculinity of the motorcycle itself).



Figs. 38-9 *Hellbent's* and Tom of Finland's eroticised cop.



Figs. 40-1 *Hellbent's* Leather-boy and Tom of Finland's Leather Daddy.



Figs. 42-3 *Hellbent's* and Tom of Finland's eroticised cowboy.



Figs. 44-5 *Hellbent's* and Tom of Finland's biker type.

The leatherman is somewhat ironically envisaged in Etheredge-Outz's film. He is anything but a representation of the hirsute, mature phallicised male who uses his armoured body-as-weapon that is so regularly represented in Laaksonen's works. Instead he becomes a leatherboy as represented by the character of Joey (Hank Harris), the youngest, least sexually experienced and physically inferior of the group. In leather harness, chaps, chains and peaked cap, his thin white body appears as a comedic subversion of the masculine archetype. Yet *Hellbent's* variations of Tom of Finland's other caricatures remain suitably faithful to their original incarnations: Eddie's (Dylan Fergus) policeman is a fantastical version of his own, law-abiding, conservative self (dressing in his father's seventies police uniform allows him to masquerade as a cop for the evening); Chaz's (Andrew Levitas) bisexual cowboy is an unrestrained, indiscriminate sexual pioneer sleeping with anyone he finds attractive; the mysterious biker figure Jake (Bryan Kirkwood) is typically enigmatic and rebellious and is the only character who does not wear a costume through the Hallowe'en celebrations for his biker clothing and accoutrements are his everyday wear.

Tom of Finland's types all parallel gayness with symbols of potency that are clearly informed by Laaksonen's wish to present 'homosexuality [as] the zenith of masculinity' (Ramakers: 134-5). According to Ramakers, Tom's work can be seen as a polemic that sought to rectify:

the injustice of their exclusion from the realm of masculinity – perpetually associated with femininity, he wanted to demonstrate that, first of all, gay men were men, virile men. (81)

Critics have argued, however, that rather than reinstating masculine potency in the gay male, Laaksonen's works simply overwrite it with heterosexist values. Mark Simpson (1994) argues that, rather than allowing for a new definition of gay masculinity, Tom can be held conversely responsible for an erasure of 'gayness' within mainstream culture:

[Tom's] drawings demonstrated a guilt-free (and gay free) world of spontaneous public sex. What should be the most obviously, unapologetically, explicitly gay images [...] become something not very gay at all [...] it casts Tom [...] as a devious pioneer of a paradoxically non-gay gayness. (1994: 133-4)

This resounds strongly with Leo Bersani's concern in *Homos* (1995) that the 'de-gayng of gayness' (43) brought about by the adoption of traditional masculine behavioural traits from heterosexual males thus renders homosexuality relatively invisible.

Hellbent's main narrative premise and source of both its erotic and horrific tension is the invisibility of the film's main killer and the main characters' exaggerated macho (gay or bi) sexuality. The inclusion of costumes as either a disguise or exaggeration of the characters' own traits and desires also works to blur reality, to the point where characters cannot distinguish between it and performance. The film's West Hollywood Carnival setting provides the perfect event where both sex and murder can occur

unnoticed in the assumption that everything is a macabre performance.

Etheredge-Outzs continues:

Monstrous images of violence and gore are as common on the boulevard as drag queens [...] if a killer were hunting the Halloween Carnival, no one could distinguish between the stage blood and the real murders. He could kill, unrecognised in his costume, without attracting much notice from the crowd. (Riefsteck, 2004: 80)



Fig. 46 The exaggerated 'Jock' type.

The tension between reality and illusion also takes in the sexuality of potential partners. Jake the Biker's aggressive and elusive masculinity is read as macho heterosexuality along with that of Joey's love object Jared (Baron Rogers), whose jock identity is exaggerated in his own costume (fig. 46). Such stereotyped traits and behaviours confuse both the characters and the film's spectators. The film's general exclusion of stigmatised gay male effeminacy renders some of the characters' sexualities (and Devil Daddy's potentially sexual/violent propositions) unreadable. They appear 'unspecific' or 'straight-acting' despite the central protagonists' matter-of-fact gay male status. The erotic appeal of *Hellbent* lies then in the possibility of seducing a heterosexual, masculine

male, an element that, as we have seen, is of vital importance to the narrative pleasure of the Gaysploitation horror.



Fig. 47 Tobey poses narcissistically in front of a billboard of himself.

In another sense, the liberating environment of the carnival is, for Etheredge-Outzs, the arena in which the exaggerated femininity of the drag queen is associated with monstrosity, failed subjectivity and unsuccessful eroticism. In choosing to attend the festivities dressed in female drag, Tobey (Matt Phillips) appears to subvert the masculine fancy dress of the carnival but, instead, reveals a world where gay male sexuality is disguised in *both* hypermasculine and hyper-feminine modes. *Hellbent's* drag queen character (fig. 47) is used as a means of literalising gay male anxieties about being thought of *as a woman*. In contrast to *October Moon's* drag figure⁵, *Hellbent's* is considerably more sympathetic and complex. Tobey, a male underwear model, is the fourth gay man in the central group of friends in *Hellbent*. Objectified as a traditionally

masculine spectacle via his muscular physique and handsome face, Tobey drags up for the carnival as a means of escape. Ironically he takes up the guise of a woman, traditionally objectified within heteronormative culture. In *Hellbent*, however, woman is no longer the erotic object of spectacle. Tobey does get his 'night off', much to his chagrin. The stereotypical narcissism of the male model (and perhaps, it is implied, of all gay men) eventually gets the better of this apparent subversion of masculinity. Against traditional slasher horror conventions, feminine characters are completely ignored in Devil Daddy's terror campaign. A feminine victim is, apparently, a less sexy kill. If eroticised death is a metaphor for sex, the victims in Gaysploitation horror must be masculine.

Separated from his friends, Tobey catches sight of Devil Daddy, disappearing down a nearby alley. Desperate for a sexual partner for the evening, Tobey follows him. 'I like your costume!' Tobey exclaims to attract his attention. After turning to glance at Tobey, who remains in full drag, the enigmatic killer walks away. The annoyed Tobey complains, 'What? You got all the candy you need? You superficial faggot!'. Becoming desperate Tobey continues, 'I don't always look like this you know! Here, look!' and throws over his driver's licence at Daddy's feet. Daddy stops, picks up the card, and realises that Tobey is male and attractive. Tobey continues, 'Not bad eh? Tobey Wetherton, eyes green, hair brown, sex: male'. With each revelation, Tobey removes another part of his drag costume including his false eyelashes and his wig, and

eventually pulling down the top half of his sequinned dress to reveal his muscled chest. Upon seeing this, Devil Daddy makes his way back to Tobey. As his large shadow falls on Tobey's smaller body, he reaches down and caresses his face and lips, then smears his lipstick across his face. In relief at having finally attracted someone, Tobey closes his eyes and whispers, 'I'm never doing drag again...' At which point Devil Daddy's hand reaches back out of frame. A medium close-up of shadows on the wall reveals Tobey's head flying out of frame as he is decapitated by Devil Daddy's large scythe.

4.2 The Devil Daddy and Father Figures in Gaysploitation Horror.

Given that the figure of the gay daddy or muscle daddy blatantly references erotic feelings towards the paternal figure, it is worth briefly considering Freud's Wolf Man case and Leo Bersani's reading of it in the 'Gay Daddy' chapter of *Homos* (1995). Freud's case study in *A History of Infantile Neuroses* (1918) centres around a dream from his patient's (who he names the Wolf Man) childhood in which he sees outside his bedroom window a large tree, in the branches of which sit several white wolves staring at the child. Freud elaborates on this dream as a symbolic reinterpretation of the traumatic primal scene. He posits that the child had previously witnessed his parents having penetrative sex *a tergo* (from behind) and was consequently traumatised by the sight of his father's penis disappearing momentarily into his mother's body, which the patient interpreted initially as him being literally castrated by her. Forming a

gendered, sympathetic identification with his father, the patient similarly feared castration himself, and later figures his mother as the source of this fear.

The Wolf Man's initial perception of his mother's 'expression of pleasure' during intercourse leads him to 'acknowledge that what was at issue here was satisfaction' (240). Consequently his desire to receive similar attention from his father is driven by this pursuit of pleasure and represented in his identification with his mother. Freud continues that 'the organ through which he could express his identification with the female and his passive homosexual attitude towards the male was the anal zone' (277). This is signified in the recollection of the dream by the act of the 'little boy produc[ing] a stool as a sign of his sexual excitement [and a potential gift replacement for the missing penis]...judged as characteristic of the sexual constitution already in place.' Freud concludes that this 'shows a greater inclination towards later identification with the female than with the male' building on the patient's confusion between 'that part of the woman's body' that the patient assumes was 'receiving the penis [...] the anus' (277).

Throughout the case history, Freud outlines the oscillating identification with his patient's love for and fear of the father as both the victim of and later the exacter of symbolic castration. The subject replaces his paternal identification with a desire for him, that is retrospectively understood as a

homosexual love for his father symbolised by a desire to be penetrated by him like his mother. Yet his understanding of the mother's vagina as a wound as 'a condition of intercourse with his father' supersedes this desire with the fear of castration that the father now symbolises. Freud argues that his patient's fear of the castrating father, inevitably demands identification with the 'castrated' mother and a further association with a receptive, passive femininity. Freud continues that: [the patient's] fear was also proof, however, that in his later processing of the primal scene he had put himself in his mother's place and envied her relationship with his father. ([1918], 2002: 276-7)

However, far from concluding that his patient developed a wholehearted identification with the passive mother, Freud recognises a contradiction in his relationship with the paternal figure:

The identification of his father with the castrator was significant in that it was the source of an intense unconscious hostility towards him – which went as far as wishing him dead – as well as of the guilt he felt in response to this [...] What was remarkable was that in him a counter-current existed [...] according to which his father was in fact the castrated figure, and as such demanded his sympathy. In the end two contradictory currents existed alongside one another, one of which abhorred the very idea of castration, while the other was prepared to accept it, consoling itself with femaleness as a substitute. (283)

Thus the father figure in the Wolf Man case exists simultaneously as both oppressor and victim. For Freud, the case study provides a clear study of *neurotically conflicted* male homosexuality whereby the subject 'expresses a feminine tenderness, a readiness to renounce manliness if

in return one can be loved as a woman' (282). He continues that 'from the time of the dream onwards he was unconsciously homosexual; during his neurosis he was at the level of cannibalism' (263). The transformation of the Wolf Man's desire for the father into a fear of him, 'was a rejection of the wish for sexual satisfaction from [him]', Freud concludes that the wolf imagery in the dream, 'was an expression of that fear, now repressed desire, 'being gobbled up by the wolf – was simply the reversal – a regressive one, as we shall hear – of the wish for coitus with the father, that is for satisfaction such as his mother had experienced' (240).

In the 'Gay Daddy' chapter of *Homos*, Leo Bersani reconfigures Freud's reading. The Wolf Man's repressed sexual desire for his father and its displacements by the threats of castration is reconsidered as a 'genealogy of gay love'⁶:

The appeal of the muscular, mature male figure – the Gay Daddy is complexly tied up with both the frisson of masochistic desire for the punishing, castrating male-father-figure and remarkably tender paternal feelings for Freud's dreaded castrating father. (Bersani, 1995: 111)

Bersani effectively maps the castration anxieties of the primal scene onto the anally penetrative sex act between gay men, focusing on the traumatic loss of the self in the penetrative act of sexual union.

Countering the terror of physical merging in penetrative sex, the receptive partner's erect penis is instead offered as a token of protection:

We might imagine that a man being fucked is generously offering the sight of his own penis as a gift or replacement for what is temporarily being 'lost' inside him - an offering, not made in order

to calm his partner's fears of castration but rather as the gratuitous and therefore even lovelier protectiveness that all human beings need when they take the risk of merging with another, of risking their own boundaries for the sake of self-dissolving extensions. (1995: 111)

But despite his decidedly emotive re-reading, Bersani points out that

Freud has a very different view of such a union:

For Freud, that decidedly non-gay-daddy, nothing would block the theoretical confirmation of murderous relations among men – based on the still deeper need to keep the sexes distinct and to warn that castration is the precondition of femininity. (1995: 111-12)

Father figures are present in many queer horror films⁷ and are represented as powerful, mature men. These characters are typed as gay daddies by virtue of their age, their responsibilities (they financially support and house their younger partners) and their greater bodily girth and hirsuteness. *Hellbent's* monstrous variation of the gay daddy becomes horrifically imbued with the threat of castration. At one point, a character comments fittingly that he is a 'walking hard-on'. In the words of Chaz, he is a 'Devil Daddy', a phallic monster who carries out symbolic castration by decapitating his victims with a rusty scythe (fig. 48). Devil Daddy's weapon of choice is itself another symbol of the anxiety in regard to ageing that runs throughout Gaysploitation horror. The scythe references recall that carried by the pre-Greek mythological figure of Chronus (or Chronos, meaning time) who is thought to further influence visual incarnations of the figures of Old Father Time and the skeletal representations of the Grim Reaper from medieval carvings. Chronus, father of Zeus, is a Titan proto-God and is himself the personification of

time. He is often depicted carrying a sickle or a scythe, given to him by his mother Gaia.⁸ Together, they are associated with the harvest and reaping, the end of the growing season and, by extension, the progress of time and death. Chronus' castrating scythe and his devouring of his own children represents the threat of time and of death itself. (Willis, 2006: 129-130)



Fig. 48 Devil Daddy in *Hellbent*

Hellbent's characters not only demonstrate a clear erotic (dis)identification with the Devil Daddy figure, as a castrating figure of fear, but also erotically objectify him *because* of the very same pleasurable frisson that same threat affords them in being rendered passive. 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. Indeed the enigmatic Devil Daddy figure becomes a

memento mori for promiscuous gay male cruisers, the scythe becoming at once an attractive phallic symbol that threatens castration as well as a reminder of one's own mortality. The moralistic elements of the slasher horror are reconfirmed in *Hellbent*: sex with strangers is dangerous. The maturity of Devil Daddy suggests a longer (and therefore more infectious) sexual history and death via the transmission of disease. Etheredge-Outzs confirms Devil Daddy's status as erotic threat:

He [the killer] should not look like the typical serial killer. I wanted there to be that confusion, where everyone is reacting to him as this hunky guy, someone a gay man would want to know at this carnival. We wanted him to be very sexy. (In Riefsteck, 2004: 79)

Further still erotically coding the villain in such a way, especially within an anonymous gay cruising narrative, perhaps also draws on gay male anxieties surrounding the dangers of anonymous sexual encounters, in terms of being physically attacked or contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

The monster's paternal status makes him both a figure of gay desire and a figure of oppression - one capable of inflicting trauma upon the gay male subject. The surviving central character Eddie has the most obvious connection and possible fixation with his (dead) father. Alongside this paternal loss Eddie is impaired both sexually (references to Eddie's shyness in picking up men are numerous) and physically (having lost one eye in an accident, now wearing a glass prosthetic, Eddie is confined to desk duties at work). He re-masculinises himself in two ways: by identification with the father (in dressing up 'as daddy' in his father's old

police uniform), and by proving himself successful as a sexually potent man and as an arbiter of the Law as a cop. This re-empowerment is never more phallically realised than in Eddie's use of his father's gun (previously symbolically concealed in his bedroom closet) to defend his male lover from the killer by shooting the Devil Daddy in the film's dénouement. Yet any erotic desire between Devil Daddy and Eddie is met, in true Freudian style, with the violence that separates the two subjects, just as Bersani anticipates:

a terrifying scenario of the relation between father and son as one in which the two are permanently separated, polarized, by a threat of violence that forces the repression of love is then partially rewritten as an account of a gentler exchange between the two, one in which the son's power is improvised as a response to the vulnerability inherent in the very position and exercise of power. (1995: 122)

Prior to his final confrontation with Devil Daddy, Eddie initiates sexual intercourse with Jake and is interrupted by the castrating father figure. Eddie's despatch of this punitive father figure would be a typical narrative trope of the more traditional family horror or slasher film were it not for the deliberate and obvious erotic coding of Devil Daddy as both oppressive figure and an object of erotic desire. The film's sado-masochistic, 'flip-flopping' dénouement⁹ moves between Devil Daddy as sadistic dominator and Eddie as initially masochistic victim (handcuffed to the bed during foreplay with Jake) and later Eddie as sadistic executioner (after many scenes of tantalising foreplay with Jake, Eddie's shooting of Devil Daddy becomes symbolically ejaculatory). Etheredge-Outzs plays with erotic object confusion during the final sequence in which Eddie shoots the

killer. Devil Daddy, having removed Eddie's glass eye with his tongue renders his symbolic and literally 'broken' gaze obvious (his visual impairment prevents him from aiming successfully and also symbolises Eddie's failure to see others' attraction to him). Having trouble in aiming at his attacker, who uses Jake as a hostage and in fear of shooting his lover, Eddie is encouraged by Jake who pleads for Eddie to aim at him, hoping that his poor aim will indirectly hit their assailant, which it does. Thus, in *Hellbent's* denouement, both Freud's and Bersani's readings of the Wolf Man are represented. The eroticism between Eddie and Devil Daddy is met in the violent despatch of the father figure and the transfer of phallic power takes place from father to son. But Bersani's 'gentle[r] exchange [...] of power' is also depicted between Eddie and Jake, where the roles of hero and victim are exchanged between the two men between the sheets.

4.3 Daddy's Final Boy.

Etheredge-Outzs deliberately constructs Eddie as a Final Boy who is positioned both in relation to the film's mature father figures but also as a counterpart to Carol Clover's Final Girl¹⁰, the (often) surviving female victim/protagonist of the slasher horror sub-genre. As her main points of reference, Clover uses the source films, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, US 1974), *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham US 1981) and *Halloween* (John Carpenter, US 1978) (85-6). For Clover, it is the Final Girl who radically charges the slasher horror genre. It is via Clover's

paralleling of the Final Girl with the killer/monster figure, that traditionally gendered binaries are challenged within the slasher sub-genre. As Clover puts it: 'she is abject terror personified' (86) who out-survives her female sidekicks and male counterparts long enough either to be rescued by outside forces (often male) or to dispatch the killer/monster herself by empowering herself (often phallically). The Final Girl in slasher horror is often characterised by her androgyny (she is often tomboyish, or given gender-unspecific names, such as Laurie (*Hallowe'en*), Marti (*Hell Night* (Tom DeSimone, US 1981), Sidney (*Scream*, (Wes Craven, US 1992)) and extremely resourceful (often defending herself with makeshift/domesticated weapons). More vigilant and wary than her peers, she is often 'sexually reluctant' and, at times, she identifies with boys over her female friends. As Clover states, some of these very traits provide the reason for the Final Girl's prolonged survival:

The Final Girl is boyish [...] Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine – not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. [Her gender] is likewise compromised from the outset by her masculine interests, her inevitable sexual reluctance, her apartness from other girls, sometimes her name. (86)

The Final Girl figure diffuses stereotypical gender traits in her possession of masculine characteristics, most notably the active investigating gaze which clearly defines her 'unfemininity':

The active investigating gaze, normally reserved for males and punished in females when they assume it themselves; tentatively at first and then aggressively, the Final Girl looks for the killer. (48)

In her wider discussion of the horror film's audience demographics, Clover acknowledges that a large proportion of slasher horror fans are

adolescent males, their sexuality is rarely referenced. Questioning their investment in the Final Girl, who is often figured as the horror film's sole source of identification, she concludes that the male spectator resolves the problem of feminine identification via both a re-gendering of the Final Girl figure *and* a temporary transgendering via the audiences' identification with her (103). If the male spectator initially assumes the monster/killer's point of view in the slasher films' opening sequences, the trajectory of both the narrative and the eventual shift of point of view from monster/killer to Final Girl marks a transgendered shift in allegiance, 'our closeness to him wanes as our closeness to the Final Girl waxes – a shift underwritten by story line as well as a camera position.' (45).

Clover recognises both the heterosexual, adolescent male's identification with the monster/killer and the homoerotic implications of his transgendered identification with the Final Girl:

She is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved by adult male, the terrors and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality. [She] is a male surrogate in things Oedipal, a homo-erotic stand-in, the audience incorporate; to the extent she means 'girl' at all, it is only for the purposes of signifying male lack. (51)

As she points out, the Final Girl is also *transgendered* in surviving 'agonizing trials' (typically the role of the female victim or damsel who is later rescued by outside forces) but also in saving herself by 'virtually or actually destroy[ing] the antagonist'. Clover concludes:

Abject terror may still be gendered feminine, but [...] to represent the hero as anatomically female would seem to suggest that at

least one of the traditional marks of heroism, triumphant self-rescue, is no longer strictly gendered masculine...

...the combination masculine female prevails over the combination feminine male [this] would seem to suggest that is it not masculinity per se that is being privileged, but masculinity in conjunction with a female body – masculinity in conjunction with femininity. (60)

The gay male spectator's identification with the Final Girl may be, therefore, not so different from that experienced by the straight male spectator. He too identifies with the Final Girl because she is, *like himself*, associated with cross-gender identification in sharing the same love object. In slasher horror films from the 1970s and 80s, the gay male spectator connects with the powerful, strong female figure in a strong pleasurable and empowering identification which also reminds him of his perpetual parallel with femininity by heteronormative culture. The trajectory of identification also stimulates the anxiety or shame that the *gay* male may experience in this conflation with femininity, and the pleasures gained in the film's final masculinising re-empowerment, which effectively valorises (as Clover points out) the 'masculine female' over the 'feminine male' (63).

Klaus Rieser argues that slasher horror eventually reinstates heterosexist inscriptions via the supposedly radical Final Girl figure. According to Reiser, male identification with the Final Girl is not quite as simplistic:

the male spectator does neither straightforwardly nor entirely positively identify with the female victim-hero and thus does not necessarily embrace an antipatriarchal and/or passive position. (2001: 386)

For Reiser, the Final Girl is a 'masculinised rejuvenator of the patriarchal order'¹¹ and he concludes that slasher horror centres around the 'illegitimate (con)fusion' of gendered forms and identification structures. In its flaunting of feminised men and masculinised women, cross-gender identification and the monster 'as spectator', the typical slasher horror's effectiveness lies in its ability to initially mark out 'improper fusions' (388), in Othering them and expelling them outward from the proper and stable symbolic system of subjectivity. Reiser summarises that the slasher horror is less transgressive than Clover suggests, 'difference from hegemony (queerness) is othered while heterosexuality and the sex/gender system it maintains are reinstated' (388).

Rieser's article raises a valuable point in the study of slasher horror and one that is pertinent to the understanding of gay male identification with Final Girls in slasher horror as simultaneously subversive and reactionary. The pleasures of transgender identification for the gay male spectator of traditional slasher horror are similar to those afforded to the heterosexual male spectator, in that they are *remasculinising*. Reiser states that, rather than valorising difference, the slasher horror annihilates it instead. Despite the sub-genre's obvious appeal to both women and gay men by way of identification and in its presentation of difference and queer sexuality, slasher horrors often castigate 'non-hegemonic' masculinity and expel non-normative femininity via their narrative closure.

For Reiser, the slasher film ultimately serves to reinforce heterosexual and homophobic masculinity

Reiser posits that the Final Girl's successful fight over the monster which appears to allow for her emerge victorious as woman into the symbolic only serves to further support patriarchally defined and gendered order.

Where Clover argues that the Final Girl uses her masculinity to overcome the monster, Reiser claims that, after her struggle with the (queer) monster, she emerges into the symbolic as *woman*.

It almost seems as though they [the Final Girl and the Monster] are competing for clarification, for an exit into the symbolic from the polymorphous and confused underground of non-hegemonic gender spaces. (359)

Ultimately, Rieser suggests that (straight) masculine subjectivities are not so much challenged by the shifting identifications within slasher horror as re-confirmed via an 'Othered' and eventual destruction of difference.

Rieser's straight male spectator is pleased to destroy the monster and to eschew any threat that the Final Girl may pose to his masculinity by making her 'his girl'. With this in mind what restorative masculinity is there for the gay male viewer of the slasher horror? The gay male spectator is identified by Rieser, but only in terms of his pleasure in masochistic identification either with (queer) monster or Final Girl. There is no development of the problematic that occurs in Reiser's formulation of the slasher horror narrative's resolution whereby Final Girl figures are usually allowed to survive and emerge as ideologically condoned *feminine*

women. Upon her re-feminisation, what happens to the identifying gay male spectator? Carrying on from where he fails to conclude, the only options Reiser leaves for the gay male subject is to identify with either the (dead or disavowed) monster or with the Final Girl as woman. Further still, Reiser does not discuss tensions that may occur earlier in the slasher horror's formulaic narrative, when the gay male subject may experience (un)pleasure in his imposed temporary identification with the Final Girl also, very much the same as the assumed straight male spectator does. Following Clover's argument, the gay male spectator's identification with passive female characters on screen may not imply an acceptance of his own passivity; by contrast it may offer a chance for a distancing and re-masculinisation of his own gay male subjectivity. However, following Reiser's line of thinking (given the assumed destruction of queer monster as a potential identification point), if the gay male spectator disavows any shameful associations with feminine passivity via the traditional slasher's narrative denouement, when femininity is restored to the Final Girl figure, he must either assume heterosexual identification with the straight male spectator, or 'become woman'. The solution to this dilemma may lie in an analysis of *Hellbent*, which dispenses completely with any implied 'unpleasantness' involved in identifying with the Final Girl, ultimately replacing her with a gay male stand-in, the Final Boy, who is equally gender conflicted and masculinised accordingly.

Reiser challenges Clover on her description of the Final Girl's struggle as one that centres upon gender difference and fluidity, instead claiming that the Final Girl's symbolic trajectory is more akin to the development of an adolescent girl into womanhood/motherhood:

In contrast to Clover, I would also claim that the Final Girl isn't really all that masculine. It is more precise to state that she is lacking in traditional femininity [...] Alternatively [...] the fluidity assigned to her is not so much one between masculine and feminine as between girlhood and full-fledged motherhood. (377-9)

As in Reiser's reconfiguration of Clover's Final Girls 'becoming women', the Final Boy's journey is an allegory of burgeoning sexual development and confidence, and is in effect 'becoming masculine'. He moves from a shy, closeted, dependent and inexperienced feminised youth into a fully-fledged, independent, masculine (but still stereotyped) gay man. In Gaysploitation horror, there is no subversion of the symbolism of the Final Girl, simply an excising and replacement of it. Final Boys do not use their femininity to evade or destroy the killer; they are re-empowered by masculinity by overcoming their lack, associated with shameful feminine passivity. The Final Girl provides a *queer* access point in her gendered androgyny for the gay male spectator and a strong source for identification with powerful femininity. In *Hellbent*, the pleasure offered in the gay male subject's disavowal of femininity becomes extra-diegetic in the displacement of the Final Girl with the Final Boy from the sub-genre.

Like the Final Girl, Etheredge-Outz's Final Boy, Eddie, is one of the least sexually experienced and conservative of *Hellbent's* protagonists. At

several points in the narrative, Eddie chastises Chaz, an openly bisexual and promiscuous friend, for his sexual voracity, and later warns off Tommy, a younger, impressionable friend, against exposing too much naked flesh in his sado-masochistic costume, suggesting he should wear jeans under his bottom-less chaps. Whereas Clover's Final Girl is a tomboy, Eddie is a 'sissy' in several respects. He fails to become a recognised police officer and is relegated to an administrative post while his sister enjoys police officer status. He Oedipally enshrines his dead police hero father, keeping his belongings and photographs in a box in his bedroom closet. This is paralleled with a similar secreted reverence for gay masculine stereotypes for on the *inside* of the same bedroom closet hangs a Tom of Finland-style poster of a 50s male biker (suggesting a gay shame). Eddie's fetishising of dangerous masculinity is practised in secret, despite being shamefully discovered and ridiculed by his sister, when he covertly prints mug-shots of attractive male criminals at work, his sister denounces his behaviour as perverse and childish. Eddie's adolescent worship of such 'bad boys' is eventually realised in his cruising of Jake, a Brando-style biker whom he shyly attempts to flirt with while masquerading as a policeman on the beat, dressed in his father's uniform. Given their initial gender differences, it would seem logical that the Final Boy would use his *femininity* in order to survive but, instead, *like* the Final Girl, he too employs 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.

4.4 The Final Boy's 'Broken Gaze'



Fig. 49 Eddie's glass eye.

In contrast with the Final Girl, who is characterised as unfeminine via her possession of the investigating/voyeuristic gaze, Eddie is initially rendered 'unmasculine' by his failure to master and possess it. This is literalised in his glass eye, which at once represents vulnerability, blindness and symbolic castration. His glass eye, which in turn gives the impression of Eddie's 'normal' appearance and vision, marks out and yet masks his 'difference' and his lack, emphasising Eddie's wish to fit in. Yet, in the very absence of a soft, fleshy eyeball, being replaced by a glass prosthetic, Eddie arguably possesses a less vulnerable gaze (fig. 49). The very fact that Eddie has only lost one eye, that he possesses both real and false eyes, enables him to access both a voyeuristic and

masochistic gaze, those which Carol Clover terms as 'assaultive' and 'reactive' gazes.

Clover rightly points out horror cinema's narrative and formal obsession with eyes that include:

problems of vision – seeing too little (to the point of blindness) or seeing too much (to the point of insanity) [...] the opening eye of horror also announces concern 'with the way in which we see ourselves and others and the consequences that often attend our usual manner of perception.' Horror cinema privileges eyes because [...] it is about eyes. (1992: 166-7)

In her analysis of *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, GB 1960), Clover points out that the eye of horror works two ways: it may 'penetrate, but it is also penetrated' (167). Via a discussion of Laura Mulvey's seminal article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), and her construction of the binary opposition of male subject as possessor of the gaze and the perpetuation of woman as object before the camera 'to-be-looked-at', Clover defines two particular gazes specific to slasher horror (*Peeping Tom*, along with *Psycho*, are set out as its central antecedents). The *assaultive gaze* is the sadistic, voyeuristic gaze that 'hurts' objects before the camera and those looking onto the violent events depicted by it:

This is the narrative's present and causal gaze, its 'doing gaze'. It is also, of course, a predatory, assaultive gaze – in the story's own terms, a phallic gaze. (Clover: 173)

Conversely the reactive gaze is:

The second gaze – the horrified gaze of the victim, or more completely, one's gaze at surrogates for one's own past victimized self – I shall for want of a better term call 'reactive'. (175)

The assaultive, active gaze belongs to patriarchy, and the reactive gaze to the object of spectacle, feminine and vulnerable. Clover later points out the psychologically symbolic structures attached to the respective gazes:

[The] alternation between assaultive and reactive gazes is commonly taken to suggest the interdependence of sadistic and masochistic impulses [...] assaultive gazing is associated with those who hold the camera and reactive gazing with those who stare at the screen after the fact.

Clover later parallels her two gazes with Mulvey's own formulation of the ways in which male centred gazing in cinema looks at women:

A sadistic voyeuristic look, [which is paralleled with assaultive gazing] whereby the gazer salves his unpleasure at female lack by seeing the woman punished, and a fetishistic-scopophilic look [which is paralleled with reactive gazing], whereby the gazer salves his unpleasure by fetishising the female body in whole or part. (Clover, 1992: 206)

Clover suggests, however, that Mulvey overlooks the masochism inherent in what she terms passive 'fetishistic scopophilia' (Mulvey, 1975: 840).

She goes on to reference David N. Rodowick's (1998) reading of Mulvey who defines:

fetishistic scopophilia as an overvaluation of the object, a point which Freud would support. But he would also add that this phenomenon is one of the fundamental sources of authority defined as passive submission to the object: in sum *masochism*. (Rodowick, 1998: 7)

Final Girls (and Boys for that matter) are also arguably in possession of both gazes – being both avenger and victim. Eddie's bin-ocular viewing offers a clear symbolism of his possession of both gazes. As a variation on the Final Girl, he is generically predisposed to possess both, firstly an 'active investigating voyeuristic gaze' (for example in masochistically

witnessing his friends' deaths, discovering of their bodies both dead and *in flagrante delicto*, in his chastising of their promiscuity, and in his eventual destruction of Devil Daddy). Secondly, his possession of a reactive gaze is demonstrated in becoming the passive, 'to-be-looked-at' erotic male as fetishised cop both diegetically and extra-diegetically for the film's voyeuristic spectators while his impaired vision also indicates his 'lack'.

As Final Boy, Eddie suffers the greatest and prolonged trauma in *Hellbent*, clearly displayed via the film's representation of his protracted assault at the hands of Devil Daddy via subjective (reactive) camera. Yet his fetishising and objectifying of Jake, his secreting and eroticising of attractive criminal mug shots at work and his capacity for fetishistic scopophilic looking clearly indicate an active (yet, for Eddie, shameful) voyeurism. The masochism that Clover declares as inherent in such a gaze is literalised in Eddie's vulnerability, his eye having already been destroyed and his vision impaired, and his fetishistic obsession with 'bad boys' suggesting that he (unconsciously or willingly) seeks to be 'hurt'. Eddie's replacement eye (as a seemingly invulnerable glass orb), however symbolically masculine, remains an illusory cover to hide Eddie's true lack, his broken gaze and his partial blindness. *Hellbent's* narrative, if anything, represents Eddie's initial failure to possess the voyeuristic gaze, the displeasure this causes him and his attempts to master and cover up his lack as well as his homosexuality, in order to

'appear normal' (much like Carrie in De Palma's film). Eddie's eye is as false as his seventies 'cop uniform', which affords an eroticised illusion of active, punitive surveillance.

Clover states that 'assaultive gazing never prevails and mean lookers do not survive as such (if at all)' (187), though in this film, *Devil Daddy* is shown to survive. The gaze that prevails in *Hellbent* is the masochistic, reactive look. In one scene, Eddie is leafleting a local tattoo parlour in the run up to the carnival, and follows Jake inside. He watches him being tattooed in the parlour's mirrors, through which Jake's body is broken by the tight framing and by the mirrors' reflections. Eddie's gaze is suddenly met by Jake's (assaultive gaze), upon which he reacts nervously, drops his leaflets and clumsily leaves the store. Eddie's initially fetishising gaze is confronted and instead finds himself fetishised, he returns to the object of spectacle, his impaired gaze is rendered vulnerable in the face of Jake's more 'authentic' masculinity. Eddie's failure to 'see', his symbolic blindness, impedes his sexual gratification. He fails to see when people find him attractive, when Jake returns his interest and when his friends have been killed and yet, ironically, it also eventually saves him from Devil Daddy. The film's final confrontation involves a prolonged scene in which Devil Daddy, having incapacitated Jake, corners Eddie, removes Eddie's appearance of normality (his glass eye) with his tongue, making clear his blindness in a symbolic castration. Eddie's lack of sight comes to represent his symbolic lack of 'I', his failure to possess a sense of self

and his status as a failed (masculine) subject within patriarchy, but his possession of a glass eye also helps operate as an object of phallic imposture. Thanks to his 'normalising' glass eye prosthetic, Eddie covers over his lack: his wounded eye socket, his impaired vision, his unattractiveness as a result of this disfigurement and his failure to possess an apparently 'normative' masculinity. Despite Eddie's best attempts at 'seeming to' possess the assaultive gaze in his utilisation of masculine 'tools' (knives and guns) to protect himself and Jake from the Devil Daddy in the film's final confrontation, he eventually shoots and kills his assailant, not through careful aim, but by aiming squarely at Jake - Devil Daddy's hostage. Eddie's impaired vision and consequent lack of depth perception (he is symbolically superficial in this sense and unable to read beneath the surface or comprehend more than outward appearance and in his failure to 'cruise'), causes his poor aim. Rather than encouraging him to use his good eye to attempt a better shot at his captor, Jake recognises his partner's bent vision and implores Eddie to aim at himself, crying out: 'Shoot me!' perhaps revealing Jake's desire for masochistic wish-fulfilment. One could argue that in his masochistic identification with Jake as victim, who tells Eddie to 'do the right thing' and accept his 'broken gaze', Eddie fails to master the active, assaultive gaze.

In *Hellbent*, tables appear to be turned when Jake's biker figure (previously coded as more traditionally masculine than Eddie) is

incapacitated by Devil Daddy and becomes *dependent* on Eddie for survival; in short, he becomes the 'damsel in distress' to Eddie's new-found hero figure. Having denied him in their foreplay, Jake finally allows Eddie to kiss him in reward for his success; thus Jake is feminised and Eddie becomes the (albeit symbolically wounded) heroic male. Traditional gender stereotypes, at this point at least, appear to remain in operation. *Hellbent's* sting is the failed dispatch of the castrating Devil Daddy who, in the final frame, is seen alive and still in full possession of Eddie's glass eye (with its illusion of phallic empowerment) between his orally castrating and cannibalising teeth.

If Eddie, as Final Boy, possesses any gaze at all by the denouement, it appears to be one that is reactive, masochistic and culturally gendered as feminine. Upon close inspection, what appears to be a castration and re-assimilation of the phallus (Eddie's eye) into the 'eye of the beholder' by the hyper-patriarchal Devil Daddy, proves to be yet another illusory transaction. Unlike many other monster/killers of slasher horrors, Devil Daddy does not possess an assaultive (or indeed a reactive gaze) gaze, there is little or no subjective camera or 'killer eye' in *Hellbent*, and he fails to recognise the true masculinity of Tobey in drag; as Tobey states he is, like Eddie, 'a superficial faggot'. Whether the gay male spectator identifies with Devil Daddy as queer killer or Eddie as Final Boy (as is expected), he identifies with a drive for phallic empowerment that remains fruitless. In the first instance, identification with Devil Daddy is hampered

by the lack of subjective camera shots and, in the latter, the gay male spectator may initially experience a shameful identification with Eddie's femininity and via an investment with his plight for masculine survival the gay male spectator finds a way of disavowing this association with feminine passivity. Consequently, in identifying with Eddie's acceptance of his 'difference' in revealing his wound to Jake, the gay male spectator is simultaneously rendered active in Eddie's passivity as both wounded victim (feminine) and rescuing hero (masculine). Eddie's temporary 'coming out', in displaying his 'difference' and 'lack' to his lover Jake simultaneously passifies him (via this receptive wound) yet in his embrace of an eye-patch upon which Jake comments, 'You look like a pirate', also re-casts Eddie as another stereotyped, active masculine bad boy. It remains to be seen, however, whether this new *costume* is another means of 'covering up' Eddie's superficiality and feminine 'lack'.

4.5 Conclusions: Sleeping with the Enemy?

It remains clear then that the central tenet of Gaysploitation horror is the valorisation of heterosexually coded macho masculinity. In addition, the sub-genre opts to revere masculine femininity over feminine masculinity, whether in the form of straight-acting performance, in the perpetuation of straight male conversion fantasies, or the celebration of active, penetrating masculinity. Gay writer John Rechy has argued that the performance of machismo achieves the same purpose as female impersonation, 'the queen protects herself by dressing in women's

clothes and the bodybuilder protects himself in muscles – so called men’s clothes.’ (in Higgins, 1994: 250) Does the conflation of symbols of heterosexual masculinity with the promiscuity (and implied feminine masochism) of homosexual desire truly achieve a destabilisation of the traditional image of masculinity? Gaysploitation horror, as typified in *Hellbent*, may well reverse the gender of its victims, but it effectively demonstrates the same disavowal of femininity that many slasher horrors are accused of, and even more so in the gender reversal of the slasher films’ traditionally surviving character, the Final Girl who, in *Hellbent*, becomes a Final Boy. Both excessive femininity (here represented by gay male effeminacy, drag) and masculinity visualise the gay male horror spectator’s oscillation between not-masculine and not-feminine. This is further confused by the eroticised multiplication of death scenes that objectify male victims in Gaysploitation horror, a move away from the overwhelming number of women victims in typical slasher horror with which they are closely affiliated. The death scenes in Gaysploitation horror are unlike those shown in traditional slashers, as Clover states of typical slashers:

The death of a male is nearly always swift; even if the victim grasps what is happening to him, he has no time to react or register terror. He is dispatched and the camera moves on. The death of the male is moreover more likely than the death of the female to be viewed from a distance, or viewed only dimly...or indeed to happen off-screen and not be viewed at all. (35)

But in Gaysploitation horror, male slaughter supplants the eroticised female death, relegating the female victim off-screen or implicit. The

spectacle of killing men is largely presented as an erotic penetration fantasy, with the victim's macho masculinity both valorised and threatened. One could be mistaken for reading the extinguishing of oppressive, heterosexist machismo as radical; however, if the 'death' of machismo exists within Gaysploitation horror this does not necessarily symbolise its destruction. The equation of 'killing with fucking' (Clover: 177-8) would suggest that the murdering of machismo instead symbolises rather more of an erotic fantasy, of bedding and/or *becoming* macho men. Unlike the gay male spectator's parodic valorisation of *Carrie's* powerfully abject femininity (discussed in chapter two), the masculine drag of *Hellbent* does not function as a parody *alone*, but also operates to bring the gay male spectator closer to the erotic object with which he erotically (dis)identifies. In his *overidentification* with heterosexist machismo, straight-acting stereotypes and traditional masculinity, the gay male spectator's desire *for* the erotic masculine object also becomes a desire *to be* it, via a symbolic (and sometimes literal) incorporation of the heterosexual male love object.¹² For the most part, in the films discussed in this chapter, assimilation occurs at surface level only (in wearing the clothes and behavioural traits of heterosexist machismo), or in conversion fantasies (in bedding straight men). Gaysploitation horror trades in the erotic tease of macho performance, whereby the viewer can (dis)identify with 'straight acting' gay masculinity and they can enjoy the illusion of sleeping with the enemy and the (similarly illusory) promise of accessing phallic potency that it symbolises. Conversely, via identification with the

same men as victims on screen, the gay male spectator can also masochistically enjoy being penetrated (killed) by phallic males, in a narcissistic fantasy of symbolically becoming, fucking and being fucked by an idealised masculinity.

¹ Etheredge-Outzs first termed *Hellbent* as such during his online campaign via Fangoria and the film's website, in which he appealed to fans to come up with the title for the 'first gay slasher film'.

² In the screener notes for the BFI London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2005, an interview with Paul Etheredge-Outzs states that *Hellbent* was created to fill a gap in the 'gay market [...] for more mainstream type movies'.

³ In the DVD's Making of Featurette, actor Hank Harris admits his own reservations were unfounded as a straight actor once he found out that the other actors were all straight and consequently were 'playing gay'.

⁴ While they may do this, they also reference pop-cultural iconography such as the Village People, a successful disco/pop band from the mid to late 1970's, who also dressed in costumes similar to those found in *Hellbent*.

⁵ *October Moon's* drag figure is a two-faced, bitchy peripheral figure named 'Chantal' (Chad J. Morrell) who threatens the closeted gay male with a fear of exposure.

⁶ This is not to state that Freud's paternal figure in the Wolf Man case was indeed a homosexual or that the father figure seduced the patient. Leo Bersani simply maps the dynamic between Freud's Primal father/son to gay male relationships that may reflect younger gay male subjects' desire for more mature, symbolically paternal gay male types.

⁷ *Leeches!* features a punitive Coach character who forces steroids on his young swim team charges; *Voodoo Academy's* Reverend Carmichael controls and voyeuristically spies on his young religious trainees and *Wolves of Wall Street* features Eric Roberts as a lupine head of a demonic law firm, who only takes on attractive male employees. *October Moon* features an absent but influential father figure as it is revealed that killer Eliot's father left his mother for another man; *Socket* features a daddy and bear-cub relationship, and in Bruce La Bruce's *Otto; or Up*

with *Dead People* young zombie Otto barely-remembers his own father as he stares at the meat carcasses in his butcher shop window

⁸ Chronus' father Uranus feared being overthrown by his children and confined them inside Gaia; upon being born, Cronus castrated his father Uranus in revenge. Together with his sister Rhea, Chronus ruled over the Titans but, repeating his father's fear of being overthrown, Chronus ate his children one by one, save Zeus who eventually deposed his father. Taken from *World Mythology (Reference Classics)* by Roy Willis ed. (2006) p. 129-130.

⁹ Eddie and Jake, prior to the confrontation with Devil Daddy indulge in foreplay in which Jake uses Eddie's father's handcuffs to tie him to his headboard while they continually flip-flop in being physically on top and underneath.

¹⁰ Reifsteck's article in *Fangoria* states that 'Eddie [...] is what Etheredge-Outz describes as his 'Final Girl character'. 'He's a 'guy from a police family who is a little uptight, but has a fascination with the bad boys on the Strip', (2004: 79)

¹¹ Here Reiser references the work of Christopher Sharrett, 'The Horror Film in Neoconservative Culture' in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, Barry Keith Grant Ed., (University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 270

¹² Freud and Lacan's interpretations of identification in relation to oral male homosexual cannibalistic fantasies, via Diana Fuss's article 'Oral Incorporation: *The Silence of the Lambs*' (1995) are mapped out in chapter five.

Part III:

Homosexuality at the
Margins of Art Horror

Chapter Five

‘Death is the New Pornography!’:

Gay Zombies: Homonormativity and Consuming Masculinity

5.1 On Gay Zombies

Having previously touched on the collapse of identification and desire present in queer horror’s presentation of desirable masculine forms, this chapter’s focus on the emergent figure of the ‘out’ gay zombie on film develops the conflation of identification/desire. This slippage is depicted via the grotesquely comic representation of the gay zombie’s desire to consume and cannibalise masculinity in order to ‘fit in’ not only to heteronormative structures but to frequently alienating gay male subcultures too.

The gay zombie is a visibly ‘out’, yet sympathetic, monster who has difference worn or writ out upon his skin and flesh which paradoxically works both to marginalise him due to his difference and to assimilate him into the horde. So too, then, the homogenous nature of the zombie horde also bears parallels with the homo-ness inherent in homosexuality. As such, the zombie allows for a critique both of the often cruel, divisive nature of the gay scene and the symbolically ‘dead’ cruising culture. Whilst on the one hand, the figure of the zombie can symbolise a monstrous queerness, alternatively it can offer a subversive identification to the queer spectator as a counter-cultural icon. This chapter’s discussion of the zombie moves from

reactionary representations which foreground fears of homosexual or feminine infection, to self-critical gay zombie narratives which centre on anxieties around fears of ageing, gay decay, or the oppressiveness of monogamy. Finally, it turns to a satirical appropriation of the figure in *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* (Bruce LaBruce, CA/GE 2008) that further develops queer horror film's erotic preoccupations from soft to hard-core pornography and reflects a turning around of these anxieties into a celebration of one's sexually transgressive potential.

While queer representations of the undead in the moving image have long favoured the vampire¹, conversely, cinematic incarnations of the gay *zombie* have, until recently, remained few. While its undead siblings - the vampire, the intangible ghost and the figure of the golem (dead flesh reanimated) - all emerge from a shared heritage in the Gothic literature, the zombie, on the other hand, is thought of as a decidedly *non-literary* monster; as Kim Newman points out, the zombie does not emerge from high culture (1996: 350-1). Kyle Bishop concurs, suggesting that despite the zombies' close affiliations with the literary undead, their 'limited emotional depth, their inability to express or act on human desires and their primarily visual nature make zombies ill-suited for the written word; zombies thrive best on screen' (2006: 196). He argues that it is precisely due to zombies' inability to express themselves, being bound to physical action, that they 'must be watched'. This suggests both a compulsion to look at the figure of the zombie and a

wariness of a monster that must be kept at a remove, for fear of integration or protection against contamination. Similarly, the guardedness inherent in homosexual panic is not far removed from this. In this chapter, my objective is to understand how the zombie figure can be used both as a cipher for homosexuality and for a sub-cultural critique *within* western gay male culture in recent queer horror before focusing finally on the shambling, semi-articulate, gay zombie from Bruce LaBruce's melancholic and pornographic zombie satire *Otto; or, Up With Dead People*

5.2 Zombies: The Bottom-Feeding Uncanny

In relation to their cultural standing and symbolic sexual and economic power, the vampire remains a clear 'top' to the zombie's 'bottom'. While the attractive vampire seduces, bites and renders its victims submissive in order to satiate its desires, the marginalised zombie is a passive, sometimes pathetic, creature that bears the visible scars of its own previous bodily penetration. The zombie manifests a somnambulistic, perpetually threatening and liminal sexuality that is bound to the corporeal and is treated with comic repugnance as an anti-erotic object. Gregory A. Waller (1986) concludes that zombies are not 'sexual beings' at all, in that they rely on an even more basic feeding instinct (flesh rather than blood) than the vampire.

In comparison to the vampire, who is almost always placed at the top of the capitalist hierarchy, the zombie generally represents the proletarian masses.

Historically linked to aristocracy, the figure of the vampire is often interpreted as a metaphor for capital. Franco Morretti points out that Bram Stoker's archetypal literary vampire in *Dracula* (1897) 'is a true monopolist: solitary and despotic [who] no longer restricts himself to incorporating (in a literal sense) the physical and moral strength of his victims. He needs blood [...] his ultimate aim is not to destroy the lives of others [but] to use them' (2006: 91-2). Morretti quotes Karl Marx's theory of 'capital [as] dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking labour and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (Marx [1867] 1996: 257). He later compares the vampire to the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). For Morretti, Shelley's creature symbolises the proletariat that the vampiric capitalist feeds from as, 'complementary, figures; the two horrible faces of a single society, its extremes: the disfigured wretch and the ruthless proprietor. The worker and the capital.' (83)

Constructed from the body parts of dead villagers, Frankenstein's reanimated corpse is arguably one of the first representations of the *zombie-like* undead in literature. Never termed a *zombie*, the creature is more akin to a *golem* (the Hebrew term for a being of inanimate material made animate²), Kyle Bishop points out that, although the zombie shares similarities with both literary creatures, neither is technically a zombie. Although Frankenstein's monster is configured as a singular menace, he symbolically represents the sum of the many parts of the abject (criminal as well as corpse) dead. Much

like the individual zombie, lost within the horde, he too is denied individuality.

Morretti points out:

Like the proletariat, the monster is denied a name and an individuality [...] he is a collective and artificial creature. He is not found in nature, but built. Reunited and brought back to life in the monster are the limbs of [...] the 'poor'. (85)

Unlike Frankenstein's reanimated corpse and the sugar cane plantation automaton zombies of *The Magic Island* and *I Walked with a Zombie*, contemporary zombies are *not* productive. From George A. Romero's cycle of 'Dead' films onwards, the undead are identified with consumption rather than production. Once zombified, the slaves' fragile, rotting physicality and mindlessness becomes *counter* productive, developing into compulsive flesh-eaters. In its ravenous corporeality, the zombie is arguably most closely affiliated with the cannibal. Commencing in 1968, Romero's still ongoing cycle of socially critical zombie films were the first to conflate the figure with cannibalism. Their impact was such that flesh eating was quickly established as a core trait of the cinematic zombie:

Romero [...] added a previously unheard of dimension to the zombie myth: cannibalism [...] From that moment onwards, cinematic zombies would almost always be flesh-eaters. (Russell: 63)

Until Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the zombie was cast as a 'slave-like' automaton, an undead creature that existed solely at the command of its master. According to Peter Dendle, Romero was responsible for 'liberat[ing] the zombie from the shackles of a master, and invested his zombies not with a function to serve, but rather a drive' (2001: 6).

Tony Williams argues that zombie violence seen in Romero's films is a result of 'socially conditioned repression, in which the family is a key constituent of the state machine' (1996: 122). At this point Romero's 'ghouls' in *Night* (not specified as zombies) are not depicted explicitly or symbolically as the result of a consumerist capitalist culture. These reanimated corpses are more indicative of the aggrieved masses of American society (a monstrous version of the unease demonstrated by the American public, connected to the rise of McCarthyism and student anti-war protests from the same year), the exception being the cannibalisation of the Cooper's middle class mother and father, by their undead daughter Karen (Kyra Schon), who feasts on their innards. Romero's film depicts the ultimate destruction of the nuclear family, where one's offspring actually consumes those that gave them life. *Night's* denouement also echoes both a cinematic and folkloric past of the ethnic Other/undead, as the film's black hero and sole survivor Ben (Duane Jones) is shot by the gathering crowds of white, human vigilantes clearing the land of the undead who seemingly mistake him to be a ghoul and is thus an obvious commentary on American racism.

The concept of the zombie as the ultimate consumer is fully established in *Dawn of the Dead's* (US, 1978) shopping mall locale as a symbolic place of worship. The film centres upon a group of survivors, who manage to find safety in the administrative offices of the mall. While both zombies and

humans alike remain transfixed by the mall's materialism, the survivors attempt to clear the building of the undead, so that they alone can have sole access to its possessions. Romero's film parallels the human survivors' greed and the undead's drive to inhabit the mall based on a retained memory of the place as important and cherished. The film's final surviving female, Francine (Gaylen Ross) asks her partner Steven (David Emge), 'What are they doing, why do they come here?'. Stephen replies, 'Some kind of instinct, memory of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives'. The mall itself is symbolically linked to the zombies themselves, a place of consumption that consumes its shoppers. Romero's social critique in *Dawn* collapses the zombie's flesh-eating with the consumerist rapaciousness of the capitalist subject. If Romero's zombies lose their individuality *en masse*, their capitalist cannibalism reveals a contradictory desire to regain individual subjectivity via consumption, but also, conversely, a desire to 'fit in' with the consumer community. Indeed, in the individual's aspiration for difference from others, a certain element of homogeneity is achieved resulting in a clonish sameness. It is zombie's homogeneity that is integral to queer appropriations of the figure and, as I will demonstrate, bourgeois white male homosexual culture also encourages a sameness defined by materialism, being accepted into the 'scene' and a gym body ideal.

Kyle Bishop points out that zombies are intrinsically 'connected to the human, once being human themselves – they symbolise the suspension

between human life and death'. He continues that they provoke 'an *uncanny* fear whereby once "familiar" human subjects, friends and relatives become fearfully "unfamiliar" in their clumsy and voiceless reanimation' (204). Freud's essay on *The Uncanny* (1919) concerns itself with 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what once was well known and had been long familiar' which is turned uncanny by being 'estranged [excluded from conscious thought] only through being repressed' ([1919] 2003: 147). In his discussion of E.T.A. Hoffman's *The Sandman* (1816) as an uncanny narrative, Freud borrows from Ernst Jentsch's *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906). Jentsch points out that a major phenomenon of the uncanny is the inability to distinguish between an object's inanimate/animate status playing upon a:

doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate, and conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness. ([1906] 1997: 8)

He goes on to reference examples such as wax figures, automata, dolls and, eventually, the corpse, all of which can induce an uncanny effect in the subject. In this sense, one can understand the corpse, and in particular the zombie, as a *revenant*³, as a manifestation of this same uncanny sensation.

Freud assigns the fear of the inanimate turning animate (and vice versa) to childhood anxieties. He suggests that the infant does not strictly distinguish between the animate/inanimate status of objects such as dolls or stuffed

animals, often believing them to be alive in play. For Freud, the perturbation experienced by adult subjects witnessing the human automaton or life-like automata is merely a 'reactivation' of childhood fears that were believed to have been overcome. The uncanniness of the zombie combines both Jentsch's understanding of the inanimate (lifeless) becoming animate (alive) and, conversely, the threat of the animate (living) being rendered lifeless, alongside Freud's notion of the repressed familiarity of a known person who has returned to consume us. For Bishop, the cinematic representation of the zombie is 'simultaneously the ultimate foreign other [...] and grotesque metaphor for humanity itself.' In the eyes of the zombie, 'one sees oneself' (204), and the zombie becomes 'Othered' precisely *because* of a fear of the dead returning and, more specifically, a fear of the 'known dead', or dead *kindred*. As a *familiar unfamiliar* creature, the zombie represents both sameness and difference.

The zombie in the moving image is often reduced to a comic and pathetic monster. More often than not, it is satirically deployed as a representation of 'mindless' conformity or consumption. Jamie Russell describes the zombie as:

an utter cretin, a vampire with a lobotomy [...] a buffoon who stumbles around on the margins of horror cinema messily decaying. There are no aristocrats or celebrities among zombies, no big name stars, just low-rent, anonymous monsters. (7-8)

It is precisely the cinematic zombie's vulnerability and pathos that provide both a means of comic relief (of the body grotesque and its brain-dead stupidity) and a satirical metaphor for cultural dis-ease. Since the early 1980s (particularly in US releases), the zombie's threat has lessened. Inspired by the period's 'mainstreaming' of the zombie, most notably in the video to Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (John Landis, US 1983), where the zombie reaches its most accessible representation in performing backup for the singer in his shambling dance troupe, zombie films also developed a less threatening presentation. *Return of the Living Dead* (Dan O'Bannon, US 1985) instigates the sub-genre's preoccupation with a camp, comically repugnant style whereby the hunger for 'brains' and 'flesh' is channelled into comedies of abjectivity and disgust. The trend for the excessively absurd, gross-out zombie continues through such titles as *Brain Dead* (Peter Jackson, NZ 1992) and *Re-Animator* (Stuart Gordon, US 1985), films which hasten the decline of the zombie figure into the shambling clown-monster of the mid to late 80s and early 90s.

Kobena Mercer's study of Landis' *Thriller* video highlights the transient nature of Jackson's star persona as paralleled with the figure of the monster (both werewolf and zombie), suggesting that elements of Jackson's performance and the zombie itself encroach on borders of both race and gender:

Neither child nor man, not clearly either black or white and with an androgynous image that is neither masculine or feminine. (1994: 35)

Mercer suggests that the proliferation of the zombie figure and the mainstreaming of the horror genre in the early 1980s led to a more parodic depiction of the monster. This distances the viewer via self-conscious and often comedic representation which allows for counter-cultural identification:

It's a parody of a parody [...] Rather it creates a simulacrum of a story, a parody of a story, in its stylistic send-up of genre conventions. *Thriller's*' mimicry of the gender roles of the horror genre provides an anchor for the way it visualizes the sexual discourse. (40)

His study proves important for the study of zombie as a representation of both sexual and racial otherness, as it maps Jackson's sexual and racial ambiguity onto the zombie as a liminal figure. In Landis' film, the zombie is both racially ambiguous and between life and death. Mercer concludes that *Thriller's* zombie is particularly radical in its rejection of sexuality:

the undead corpse, does not represent sexuality as much as asexuality or anti-sexuality, suggesting the sense of neutral eroticism in Jackson's style as dancer. (43)

In European zombie horrors from the 1970s and 1980s, it is not the zombie figure per se that is coded erotically. Rather it is the sexually charged methods in which the zombie *attacks*, tears open victims and consumes flesh that are emphasised alongside the zombie's own body as essentially *penetrable* and *penetrating*. Ultimately, the zombie's sexuality is grounded in the objectification and fragmentation of the body and of the corporeal in all its messy goriness. The cycle of European zombie films foregrounds the

figure's conflation of *sex* with *death*. The soft-core nudity present in the zombie films of Jesús Franco, Lucio Fulci and Jean Rollin from the 1970s and early 1980s⁴ are heavily influenced by the increasing availability and popularity of pornography at the time and, similarly, the aesthetic of the 'fantastique' which, as Russell puts it, is 'a sub-genre with a predilection for the erotic.' (88). In exploitation titles such as *Zombie* (Fulci, IT 1979) and *Zombie Holocaust* (Marino Girolami, IT 1980), the female body is shown frequently in states of undress and under threat of attack by the shambling masses of the undead. Such films' presentation of the naked body also references its fragile, bare and exposed state. The thin surface of the skin and the flesh beneath are easily torn apart and internal organs exposed. The zombie film's visualisation of the vulnerable body also reconfigures it as a site of eroticised, penetrable sexual wounds. As Russell points out:

The zombie genre's inherent anxieties about the messy corporeality of the flesh [...] create a disturbing link between physical pleasure and physical pain. These films frequently link sex with bodily trauma [...] it seems as if bloody wounds and sexual orifices are on the verge of becoming interchangeable (133).

Lucio Fulci's films often feature zombies thrusting fists and sinking teeth into the fragile bodies of their victims who, in turn, writhe in the implied orgasmic intensity of being turned inside out and devoured. Whereas the erotic pleasure of zombie attacks remain implicit in these European titles (for the most part zombies do not have sex), with queer horror's representation of the gay zombie, the erotic potential of the body as a penetrable/penetrating site of jouissance is explicitly realised. Gay zombies uphold the figure's

corporeal repugnance and its brain dead stupidity, while allowing for a subcultural critique of gay masculine stereotypes.

5.3 So what's so *Queer* about the Zombie ?

Hell is overflowing and Satan is sending his dead to us. Why?
Because you have sex outside of wedlock. you kill unborn children.
You have man-on-man relations. Same sex-marriage. How do you
think your god will judge you? When there is no more room in hell, the
dead will walk the earth. (*Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, US 2004))

Queer narratives that embrace the zombie in order to revel in homosexuality's difference may also use the figure to critique the homogeneity and homonormativity within homosexual subcultures. To reiterate, homonormativity, in Lisa Duggan's formulation of the term, refers to the upholding of 'dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions' giving rise to 'a gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2003: 179). Gay zombie narratives often foreground differences *within* the amorphous horde, playing down the symbolism of infection (and its obvious connection with AIDS signifiers and the gay community) and, instead, focusing on sub-cultural tensions, critiquing stereotypes and highlighting the psychological trauma of 'fitting in'.

A cold, abject body, the zombie is literally an animated corpse, with no illusory veneer of life. Julia Kristeva suggests that the ultimate in abjection is the corpse itself: 'the corpse [...] is the utmost of abjection. It is death,

infecting life. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit, cadere, Cadaver' (2-3). In the zombie, the internal is externalised; organs spill out of the body. It is in the zombie's affinity with decay, decomposition and the body's physical dilapidation that we can begin to draw parallels with a monstrous queerness.

The infectiousness of the zombie also opens up the figure as a symbol of a quickly spreading epidemic of death, decay and *queerness*, which is passed from individual to individual in a viral fashion via a bite. The zombie's bite brings death, decay and a desire to feed on the flesh of others. It both poisons and frees the subject to pursue repressed desires. The concept of zombie-ism as sickness, with its signifiers of bodily wasting, weeping sores and signs of rot, clearly offers it as an AIDS allegory, alongside the vampire. The metaphor of the AIDS patient as the dead or 'living corpse' has been acerbically rendered in zombie films such as *I, Zombie: A Chronicle of Pain* (Andrew Parkinson, GB 1998), in which the infection and decay of zombie-ism is directly paralleled with sexually transmitted disease. After anonymous sexual encounters, the central character is eventually reduced to masturbating alone because of his decaying appearance and his penis eventually falls apart in his hands.

Like the vampire, the zombie's capability for *unnatural reproduction* also opens the figure up to queer interpretation. As a reanimated corpse that continues to 'live', the zombie establishes an undead community via viral communication, which echoes the community of infection referenced in Lum's *Indelible*. It is by virtue of these alternative methods of unnatural reproduction (infectious bites or scratches) that, according to Bishop, the zombie figure threatens 'society's infrastructure' (202). Through queer appropriation, the zombie, who is simultaneously undead and decaying, also offers an alternative to heterosexual, reproductive futurism. In the very same figure, the image of the crumbling, decaying body of the (homosexual) zombie is a signifier of ageing and mortality - the eventual consequences of an anti-reproductivity that the gay man stereotypically represents yet it continues uncannily to thrive. Todd Haynes' New Queer Cinema film *Poison* (US, 1991), features a section entitled 'Horror', a black and white 1950s mad-scientist sci-fi parody, in which the parallels between visible signs of bodily infection and decay are highlighted as indicators of the (implied) abjection of homosexuality within heteronormative culture. 'Horror' parodies the McCarthyist fear of the unseen threat of secret Communism and veiled homosexuality. With the signs of horrific difference displayed on the surface of the monster's skin, difference can be acted upon by avoidance or destruction. Judith Halberstam (1995) points out that the Gothic text plays on surface as fragile, a false indicator of the subject's apparent wholeness. According to Halberstam, the horror film's presentation of torn skin reveals

the fragility of constructed identities that are ripped apart in monstrous mutilation. The gay zombie is a visibly 'outed' monster forced to inhabit its decaying flesh for eternity. The zombie can 'be watched', rendered visible and set apart in order to protect others from infection and conversion.

5.4 'Zombie or not, I know a show-tune-lovin' friend of Dorothy when I see one!': Gay Zombie Narratives.

In zombie conversion narratives, there is a clear difference between those in which homosexuality is symbolic and those in which it is made explicit. The latter group typically demonstrates elements of broad comedy. In the short film *Flaming Gay Zombies* (FronkandDeGo Films, 2007), a young, closeted gay man achieves erotic fulfilment dressing in corsets and panties in the privacy of his bedroom. After finding a 'fabulous pair of sunglasses' by the roadside, he begins to display outrageously camp mannerisms alongside an overwhelming desire to bite his male lovers, turning them into zombies who eventually eat him alive. *Gay Zombies!* (Sadya Lashua and Aaron Mace, 2007) is a comic narrative about two straight teenage boys' discovery that their neighbourhood is being taken over by homosexual zombies whose defining characteristic is not only their drive to consume living male flesh, but their excessive display of stereotypically effeminate behaviour (donning pink crop tops and clutching onto their Prada bags, even in death) that instils more fear in the victims than actually being eaten (Fig. 50).



Fig. 50 *Gay Zombies!* in Prada and crop tops.

Gay director Michael Simon's short film *Gay Zombie* (US 2007) features Miles (Brad Bilanin), a young gay zombie who 'outs' himself on the West Hollywood dating scene. His newfound living friends perform 'makeovers' on him using caulk to fill in his rotting wounds. Having seen a new side of the zombie, one of the friends, Todd (Ryan Carlberg), begins dating him. Eventually Miles' desire for human flesh and anger at not being accepted gets the better of him and he kills and eats a member of a morning yoga class, to the horror of his boyfriend who regards his cannibalism as tantamount to cheating and splits up with him. *Creatures from the Pink Lagoon* (by gay filmmaker Chris Diani (US 2006)), is filmed in the style of a 1950s black and white 'creature-feature', and portrays a group of gay friends on holiday who are terrorised by homosexual zombies that emerge from a nearby lake. Diani's film follows collegiate sissy Phillip (Nick Garrison) who is jilted by his promiscuous butch boyfriend Bobby (Bill Morrison), due to his

penchant for cruising in an infamous roadside rest stop. There Bobby and a horde of libidinous gay men, are turned into ravenous zombies after being stung by giant radioactive mosquitoes from a nearby chemical treatment plant and the undead descend upon the partying friends. Diani's slapstick pastiche is an outright lampoon of 50s atomic anxiety sci-fi and, once again, Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. Phillip's friends are all comic caricatures ranging from show tune-loving African American Stan (Lowell Deo) to Randall (Phillip D. Clarke), a bitter, older queen. Only the film's promiscuous gays are susceptible to infection by the mutant mosquitoes and therefore to zombification, driving home its warning against cruising. With its comic fusion of parody, camp melodrama, musical (at one stage, the friends and the zombie hordes stop to perform stiffly a dance routine to a show tune) and outlandishly amateur gore, *Creatures of the Pink Lagoon* ridicules both feminine *and* macho stereotypes of gay men.

More seriously, Jeff Erbach's *The Nature of Nicholas* (CA 2002) is a coming of age, arthouse horror, which explicitly portrays decaying zombie-ism as both as a symbolic visualisation of gay shame and as a monstrous projection of infectious homosexuality by an oppressive heteronormative structure. The film centres upon the homoerotic relationship between two ten year old boys living in a rural farming area in Canada. Nicholas (Jeff Sutton), a blonde, well-mannered and bookish boy, develops a crush on his best friend, Bobby (David Turnbull), a more outgoing, athletic young straight boy. When

Nicholas kisses Bobby gently on the mouth he reacts with disgust and leaves in shame. The following day Bobby's zombie doppelgänger visits Nicholas in the early stages of decay, much to his delight and horror. With each visitation, Bobby begins to turn green and eventually rots (fig. 51). Eventually Nicholas conceals Zombie-Bobby in his playhouse. As Bobby begins to deteriorate more rapidly, Nicholas calls Bobby's parents in desperation, only to become more confused as Bobby answers the telephone.



Fig. 51 Zombie-Bobby in *The Nature of Nicholas*.

With Zombie-Bobby safely ensconced in his gothic shed, Nicholas begins to fall out with the healthy version of his friend. Disgusted with the idea of Nicholas caring for his zombie double, Bobby begs him to 'let it die' as the zombie represents part of himself that he states is 'just plain wrong'. Meanwhile, Nicholas begins to have spiritual visitations from a ghoulish vision of his dead ex-military father (Tom McCamus), dressed in officer's regalia. The spirit seems aware of the homoerotic relationship between the two boys and makes pains to steer Nicholas into 'straight' relations with girls,

speaking through various living characters by tearing into their flesh with surgical pincers.



Figs. 52-3 Nicholas begins to decay; Nicholas's repressive hut.

As Zombie-Bobby becomes more and more catatonic, he begins to resemble a life-size doll, which Nicholas eventually hides under his bed. Nicholas, too, slowly becomes 'sick', developing a greenish pallor and his skin beginning to rot (fig. 52). Nicholas' dead father soon brings an end to his son's despair.

Appearing to him one morning, he leads his son to a remote barn on the roof of which reads his name, 'Nicholas' (fig. 53). Inside the barn he encourages his zombified son to lie on a dust-laden bed and chains him down. In the film's final sequence, repression is victorious. Nicholas is framed walking hand in hand with a young girl into school on a brightly sun-lit morning, but his face appears blank.

The Nature of Nicholas's zombie-double motif clearly represents repressed homosexual desire and the shame demanded by heteronormativity. Melissa Carroll reads the figure in Erbach's film both as a monstrous representation of heteronormative disgust and as a potentially subversive creation. The

zombie 'Other' in *Nicholas* represents the heterosexist fear of a queer infection that threatens a normative, reproductive future promised by the figure of the child. But it also can function as a symbol of resistance, whereby the children embrace the critical potential of the zombie body:

Their bodies are sites of discomfort that actually embrace the 'inhuman' in order to critique the figure of the human, which proves to be more monstrous than any perceivable threat. (Carroll, 2008)

Both child-zombies are suspended between life and death, human and monster, an assumed heterosexuality and repressed homosexual desires. Their adoption of the monstrous body's duality allows for an exposure of the enforced hopelessness of a patriarchal culture that calls for them to conform and assimilate to the heterosexual norm, or be expelled from it in their destruction. Carroll argues that the zombie-children fuse together in the same body the two death drives that Lee Edelman distinguishes in *No Future* (2004). The first is associated with the figure of the child that 'enacts a logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order' and the second is 'bound up with [...] the figure of the queer' (2004: 25) who comes to represent the antithesis of reproductive futurism and the child as a symbol of it. The zombie, with its own alternative methods of reproduction, rejects a heterosexually-enforced identity and is thus a means of embracing difference. Erbach's film suggests that the zombie is a counter-cultural figure through which the queer subject can celebrate his marginalisation and, simultaneously, reject his 'monstrousness'.

5.5 'So they can do our hair, *before* they eat our brains!': Insatiable Homosexual Cannibalism

Zombies act upon very primal instincts; though already dead, they eat to 'survive'. They can be understood to be an embodiment of the 'id', ruled entirely by appetite. Their insatiable drive to cannibalise their victims can be read as a sublimation of an equivalent sexual drive. Such an 'unstoppable' or 'insatiable' drive calls to mind Leo Bersani's discussion of homophobic AIDS' imagery in 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' (1987). The gay zombie may, in fact, represent the return of a repressed feminine appetite in the *already annihilated* gay man. In his insatiable desire to consume the living (so often paralleled with sexual desire), the flesh-eating zombie and the homosexual become conflated. The slippage between homosexuality and cannibalism (and identification and desire) arguably finds a filmic origin in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (US, 1991), which features dual queer monsters. The gay-coded Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), while not cannibalising his female victims, skins them in order to make a human dress by which he can symbolically transcend his own maleness. While conversely, the apparently bisexual, psychiatrist cannibal Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) ingests parts of his male and female victims. In 'Oral Incorporations' (1995) Diana Fuss discusses this slippage between homosexuality and cannibalism via Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), which can also inform a useful reading of the flesh eating gay zombie.

Freud initially mentions cannibalism briefly in his first edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), suggesting that the remnant of aggression in the sexual instinct 'is in reality a relic of cannibalistic desires – that is, it is a contribution derived from the apparatus for obtaining mastery' ([1905] 1991: 72). Discussing the phases of sexual development, he describes the first as the oral stage, or 'cannibalistic pregenital sexual organisation', in which the infantile subject's sexual activity is not separated from the ingestion of food. The primary object of both activities are said to be identical, collapsing desire and identification since the subject's 'sexual aim consists in the incorporation of the object' ([1905] 1991: 116-17).

Freud's major discussion of cannibalism, however, occurs in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), which combines Charles Darwin's hypothesis of the 'primitive horde', consisting of a powerful 'father' who surrounds himself with a harem of females, with the origins of 'totemism'⁵ in an event wherein the father's sons are cast out from the tribe. Jealous of the father's power and access to the tribe's females, the outcast brothers then conspire to murder and consume him. Thus patriarchal power is incorporated cannibalistically by the 'brotherhood', who seek the father's potency and strength. Freud argues that the motives behind cannibalism among primitive races are driven by the belief that in the incorporation of a person's body, or parts thereof, the cannibal 'acquires the qualities possessed by him.' ([1913] 2001: 95).

Freud's depiction of the 'murder of the father' and the cannibalising of his

body, and therefore his phallic potency as a 'totem meal', summarises his concept of cannibalism as oral incorporation:

Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength ([1913] 2001: 165).

Freud continues that the cannibal murder of the father by the brotherhood was not without remorse for they also 'love[d] and admired him too' (166).

The suffering they felt in relation to the act resulted in the brothers' renunciation of much of the power and privilege that their father's death awarded them:

[the sense of guilt] coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group. They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem [animal], the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women ([1913] 2001: 166-7).

Freud infers a homosexual motivation behind the siblings' cannibal desires, stating furthermore that their renunciation of their kinswomen was another indicator of their homosexuality:

In this way they rescued the organization which had made them strong – and which may have been based on homosexual feelings and acts, originating perhaps during the period of their expulsion from the horde. ([1913], 2001: 167)

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud elaborates the process whereby cannibalistic desire and incorporation fantasies are paralleled with a transformation of desire into identification. Here

identification itself resembles the subject's initial oral phase in which the longed-for-object is incorporated by eating and, as such, is also consequently annihilated in its being consumed. Freud argues that the cannibal's desires are fixated at this oral stage:

The cannibal as we know, has remained at this standpoint; he has a devouring affection for his enemies and only devours people of whom he is fond ([1921] 2010: 105).

Diana Fuss develops Freud's analysis of cannibalism to argue that:

In the history of Western psychoanalytic representation of the ravenously hungry, insatiably promiscuous male invert, gay sex has always been cannibal murder (1995: 84).

She discusses the conflation of cannibalism with gay male sexual desire in *The Silence of the Lambs* as a film that is 'all about the horrors of identification, identification as self mutilation, identification as decapitation, identification as oral cannibalistic incorporation' (92). The central drive of the identification process is an introjective impulse to assimilate the object, to consume and become nourished by the very qualities that draw the cannibalistic subject to it initially. Compelled to repeat the act of identification/incorporation in order to compensate for inevitable disappointment, the subject is plunged into a continual cycle of destroying and assimilating the 'rival in whom the subject sees itself reflected' (92). The (gay) cannibalistic subject consumes the 'Other', whom he erotically desires and disidentifies with. In *Homos*, Leo Bersani argues that this drive towards cannibalism is felt more strongly by the gay male subject, as evoked in Jean

Genet's *Funeral Rites* (1948), with its equation of gay 'rimming' with cannibalism. Bersani states that the 'fury of anality reinforces the murderous impulses of orality' and that devouring another man reflects the gay man's desperate attempt to become the desired masculine ideal instead of the stereotypically feminine gay (158-160). By considering oral incorporation as an extension of (and perhaps parallel to) anal incorporation, Fuss reclaims the *oral eroticism of homosexuality*, 'alongside the scene of intercourse *per anum* between men, modernist culture offers quite another spectacle of male homosexuality, one based on oral rather than anal eroticism.' For Fuss, both mouth and anus have castrating potential as 'each comes to symbolise the gaping, grasping hole that cannibalistically swallows the other' (84). Via Freud's and Fuss's understanding of oral incorporation as a simultaneous desire to annihilate and homoerotically consume the other, the zombie's symbolic potential as a potentially queer monster is usefully understood.

Before considering the symbolism of *fictional* cannibalism in Berlin in the film *Otto, or; Up With Dead People*, it is useful to consider the sado-masochistically infused real life 'love story' between the Berlin-based German homosexuals Armin Miewes and Berndt-Jurgen Brandes. In 2002, via internet-based forums for people with cannibal fantasies, Miewes advertised for a man willing to be eaten in order to satisfy what he states was a 'life-long desire to consume another human male'⁶. Brandes, who had an overwhelming desire to have his penis bitten or cut off and eventually

consumed by another, responded. Eventually Miewes successfully butchered and ate Brandes after cutting off his victim's penis and cooking it for them to eat together. Miewes also filmed the event with a camcorder, both for his own personal pleasure, but also to prove Berndt a willing victim. During his trial, Miewes indicated that his cannibalism was born out of a desire to remain 'connected' with another person, even after death. Speaking of an early childhood fantasy, in which he developed homosexual desire for an imaginary 'brother', Miewes connects his fear of isolation with his incorporation fantasy:

The boys were always people I would find attractive, then I'd imagine them as my brothers. Then I thought if they were to become a part of me...I'd have to eat them...The first bite was of course very strange. Now I was getting the feeling that I was actually achieving this inner connection with his [Brandes'] flesh.

At Miewes' trial, psychologist Professor Klaus Michael Beier argued that the defendant's desire was for ultimate physical union with another man, only achievable via oral consumption:

[Miewes] chose a highly specific form of fetishism where the desire for attachment and comfort will be achieved by contact to the fetish, [which is] male flesh from a person he knows and likes and who voluntarily wants to be eaten by him. (*Interview with the Cannibal*, 2007)

Brandes' forum responses to Miewes revealed an overwhelmingly masochistic desire to both be punished (mutilated) but also to experience a jouissance-filled fantasy of 'losing himself' in the act of being cannibalised, by becoming part of another person via oral assimilation. The erotic

motivation for both was supported by the fact that the two men had sex together twice before the cannibalistic acts were performed. In effect, Miewes and Brandes' cannibalistic desires were erotically inspired and based upon a jouissance similar to losing oneself in the union of penetrative sex⁷. Beier continues that, in the case of Brandes, his desire was born out of a wish to 'sacrifice himself...his genitals and his body...it was no longer enough just to imagine it'. Such language resonates with Bersani's assertion that for gay men 'the internalized phallic male [is] an infinitely loved object of sacrifice' (1987: 328) and foreshadows LaBruce's *Otto* in which a young flesh eating gay zombie longs for a similar connection. The fear that drove both men's cannibalistic desires was arguably that of isolation and the need to find a connection with another subject and somehow retain it.

The zombie as sexualised Other represents a celebration of the corporeal erotic, rendering the entire body as an erotogenic zone that is both penetrable and penetrating. It is in this re-sexualisation of the monster's body that the zombie's potential for homosexual appropriation emerges. Does the recent emergence of sympathetic gay zombie figures perhaps represent a radical acceptance of the conflation of cannibalism and homosexuality or a horrific representation of the gay shame provoked by such monstrous depictions? I hope to show that the forlorn, isolated gay zombie's nihilistic drive toward (un)death places him in a tension between exclusion *from* the communal (and from life itself) and a desire *for* the communal, a

carnivorously motivated desire to identify with (and consume) others *like* himself.

In LaBruce's self-described 'melancholic existential gay porno-zombie movie' (2008), *Otto; or, Up With Dead People*, his zombie anti-hero represents a self-loathing, nihilistic, sexually indifferent and apolitical gay male subjectivity desperately seeking masculine company. The director satirises the politicised zombie metaphor and re-works it within the themes of his oeuvre: the marginalised subject who is fetishised by, what LaBruce calls 'reactionary revolutionaries'; the eroticising and consumption of hypermasculine iconography and the conflation of hardcore pornographic tropes with anti-capitalist proclamations. The eponymous Otto (Jey Crisfar) is unlike other horror film zombies, in that he is not part of a consuming horde; instead La Bruce sees him as a return to Whale's film's lone proletarian creature, the 'rebel', the 'outsider' and the solitary, marginalised individual:

In *Frankenstein* the monster becomes a very sympathetic figure. It's the townsfolk, an angry thoughtless mob, who are portrayed quite negatively... But Otto I intended to make into more of a misfit, who didn't relate to the other zombies (LaBruce, 2008).

LaBruce's generically hybrid film fuses melodrama, music video, existential drama, fictional documentary, pornography, gore-saturated horror and satire. The film dramatises the anxieties faced by Otto when he fails to assimilate into the horde and, instead, re-establishes his individuality and his marginalisation. In *Otto*, the mob not only represents violent zombie-phobic

humans, but also the harsh exclusivity of a zombie community (albeit a fake one) that also demands conformity. The conventional formula of the zombie narrative is to pitch an Us (humans) vs. Them (zombies) opposition, before revealing the zombies as the return of the repressed, as undead versions of ourselves in our human potential for monstrous violence. *Otto* transforms the binary into an Us (the film's gay 'fake zombie' actors) vs. Us (gay 'authentic' zombies) opposition, pitting homosexuality against *itself* in a critique of gay subcultures. More importantly, LaBruce's self-reflexive and parodic narrative offers a critique of the banal deadness of gay male subcultures, particularly those of the very homogenous clubbing scene in Berlin.

LaBruce is often acclaimed with having been instrumental in the creation of the HomoCore movement. The word 'homocore' was first coined by G.B. Jones and LaBruce in the queer punk zine, *J.D.'s*. (Issue 1, 1985); combining 'homosexual' and 'hardcore', it was used to describe disenfranchised queer punks. LaBruce's development of the movement was born out of his response to a gay scene he claims was 'bourgeois and dead' (2004: 8-17). LaBruce is a multiply dissident artist, with a Marxist-Feminist, anti-capitalist stance on the commodification of the individual within capitalist heteronormativity. He began making films during the emergence of New Queer Cinema in the early 90s as coined by B. Ruby Rich (1992). As such, he has often been referred to as an *enfant terrible*⁸ of that movement and his

works have never been regarded as positively as those of Gregg Araki, Todd Haynes and Tom Kalin. His self-marginalised position within New Queer Cinema is something that both amuses and infuriates LaBruce:

I don't have a lot in common with a bunch of rich kids who have degrees in semiotic theory, who make dry, academic films with overdetermined AIDS metaphors and Advocate men in them. I've never felt comfortable with the new 'queer' movement' (1999: 14).

LaBruce is also troubled by the reclaiming of 'queer' as an activist identity, which he considers a stumbling block in liberating homosexuals: 'No I am not queer, and I don't know why they had to go and ruin a perfectly good word, either. They are *so gay*.' (1999: 15) LaBruce has often felt estranged and alienated from gay or queer communities:

[I] do not now feel, nor have I ever felt, part of any gay community [...] I never quite understood why everyone tried to look like everyone else, and which if you didn't conform to the precise uniform and the Pavlovian behavioural patterns and the doctrinaire politics, you were treated with a contempt that you might expect to be reserved for some kind of enemy. (1999: 13-14)

In his films, LaBruce's recurring character types include bourgeois homosexuals and radical leftists – his 'reactionary revolutionaries'⁹. He often casts his (usually male) central protagonists as outsiders, exiled from both heteronormative culture *and* from the conformity of bourgeois homosexuality. Simply put, LaBruce is a profoundly political director who satirises homonormative as much as heteronormative cultures.

LaBruce's films also reveal a fascination with both punk and skinhead fashions. *No Skin off My Ass* (CA/GE 1991) stars LaBruce himself as an effete punk artist who falls in love with an indifferent, pretty, neo-Nazi skinhead who does not identify as gay, yet has sex with other men. The violent skinhead figures in *Skin Gang* (CA/GE 1999) are shown to be *homosexuals* who enjoy sex with one another as a prelude to their violent attacks on other gay men and racial minorities. LaBruce argues that 'each of the movies examines identity politics, emphasizing that homosexual identity is fluid and can be separated from a strict gay politic' (interview with LaBruce, 2008). Such contradictory fusions of politics and sexuality are not offered as simple irony; instead LaBruce represents the oppressed and the oppressor in the same person with an element of sympathy. LaBruce sees his neo-Nazi skinheads and the extreme left-wing would-be terrorists from *The Raspberry Reich* (CA/GE 2004) as characters with 'a certain zombie quality' (2008). For the director, the extension from metaphorical zombies to literal ones was a logical step, as is its development as a sexually active being which allows for pornographic content¹⁰. The hypocrisies of supposedly liberal and alternative movements, the erotic representation of violent and oppressive character types and the central protagonist's marginalisation from various communities all reappear in *Otto; or Up With Dead People*.

Otto is unlike the stereotypical cinematic zombie and different from the other gay zombies depicted in the film. Unlike the film's groaning skinhead automata, Otto is a semi-articulate creature whose confusion is portrayed as amnesia. He represents a newer generation that had:

become somewhat more refined...they had developed a limited ability to speak and more importantly to *reason*. It was a time where zombies had become, if not commonplace, but un-extraordinary... Each new wave of zombie was beaten down and killed by the living who found them to be an irritating and irksome reminder of their own inescapable mortality and their own somnambulistic, conformist behaviour.

The 'wave' of zombies to which the film's narrator, lesbian director Medea (Katharina Klewinghaus), refers is perhaps a reference to the many cinematic representations that have waxed and waned in popularity in recent decades. It is to Romero's particular 'wave' of zombie figures that Otto bears closest resemblance as, from the outset, LaBruce sets up his own socio-politically inspired version of the 'Us vs. Them' opposition. This variation on the zombie figure takes its cues both from Romero's development of the sympathetic zombie Bub (Sherman Howard), a zombie who begins to regain memories, and has some control over his motor functions and access to basic speech from *Day of the Dead* (Romero US, 1985) and from the depiction of the confused teen-vampire in *Martin* (Romero US, 1977). *Martin's* deliberate portrayal of the vampire, here a sexually charged, bored teenager (John Amplas) is a deliberate disavowing of cinematic vampire lore. Unafraid of garlic or crucifixes, he casts a reflection and is without pointed teeth – he simply makes practical use of hypodermic syringes and razors in

order to drink from his victims. Such vampirism is rendered so ordinary that the spectator begins to question its traditional meaning, deliberately avoiding an explanation of whether Martin is an actual vampire or merely a teenage serial killer with a vampire fetish. The realistic, verité style of *Martin* is intercut with flashback or fantasy sequences, and is shot in black and white on 16mm grainy film stock. Cutting between the less stylised, colour footage of Martin's life in the industrial mundanity of Pennsylvania and the fantastical, romanticised images from more cinematic flashbacks, imbues *Martin* with a 'film-within-a-film' intertextuality. Thus the reality of Martin's vampirism is questioned both narratively and formally.

Similarly, LaBruce's film asks the spectator to question the actual existence of real zombies by ambiguously presenting Otto as (possibly) the only authentic zombie among fictional zombie actors, while never offering or discounting either a supernatural or rational explanation for his undead status. LaBruce also borrows Romero's stylistic use of colour and black and white to swap between an apparent reality and the fictional world by literally including the conceit of two films being made within the overarching narrative. With an undecided title, *Otto; or Up With Dead People* we are unsure of which film we are watching: *Up With Dead People* the 'political-porno-zombie-movie' fictional art-film on the rising up of a horde of gay zombie insurgents (with its pretentious, art-house black and white aesthetic),

or *Otto*, a documentary film on a troubled adolescent who is convinced he is a zombie (with its colour digital video style) (figs. 54-5).



Fig. 54 *Otto*



Fig. 55 *Up With Dead People*.

The two eventually become interchangeable in LaBruce's overarching narrative, as scenes from each of the films are often juxtaposed with one another, shown out of chronological order. Both are 'directed' by the film's

radical feminist filmmaker Medea Yarn, whose name is both an anagram of avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren (whose film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (US, 1943) is visually referenced in the opening moments of *Up with Dead People*) and a reference to the cannibalistic Medea from Greek mythology. LaBruce interweaves Medea's films in fragmented form, presenting behind the scenes sections of the making of her films alongside scenes from the films themselves and including elements from Otto's journey to Berlin existing outside of the faux documentary conceit. As the sum of its parts, LaBruce's film is essentially a pseudo-documentary about Otto, a young zombie who travels to Berlin, a city itself haunted by ghosts and guilt through the previous generations of both world wars and its recent history of terrorism from both the radical left (the Baader-Meinhof gang) and the radical right (Neo Nazism).

5.6 Otto: the 'Hollow Man'

LaBruce declares that his intentions for the character of Otto were, from the outset, deliberately ambiguous:

I wanted to make a zombie who was a misfit, a sissy and a plague-ridden faggot. I deliberately leave it open to interpretation whether Otto is supposed to be a 'real' zombie or merely a screwed up, homeless, mentally ill kid with an eating disorder, who believes that he's dead (In Hardy, 2010).

Otto is first visualised superimposed over a montage of images of raw meat, war combat, explosions and atomic mushroom clouds. Otto shambles towards the camera. A slight adolescent, with a grey complexion, dirty brown

hair and milky blue eyes, he has a decidedly blank face with bruises and congealed blood on his face and lips. Despite his wasted appearance, Otto is at a far remove from the abject corpses typical of the zombie film. His look strikes one as more of a cultivated more *deliberate style* than that of the rotting corpse. Indeed, his wasted schoolboy aesthetic is clearly reminiscent of punk and the opposition to the skin archetype seen in LaBruce's early works.

In Otto's first direct-to-camera address from Medea's documentary, the anti-hero states:

It's not easy being the undead – the living all seem like the same person to me and I don't think I like that person very much...I was a zombie with an identity crisis and, until I figured it out, I was stuck eating whatever non-human flesh was available.

The 'sameness' to which Otto (and LaBruce) refer to can be read to symbolise that of conformist homosexual culture from which both feel alienated. Alongside his 'identity crisis', Otto is an amnesiac, with occasional flashbacks to what he refers to as 'the time before'. Throughout the narrative, he longs to rediscover his 'true self' and to reconnect with other people in order to determine what has brought him to this point. In one sense, his journey as a neophyte zombie might be understood as the (re)discovery of his sexuality, yet from early in the narrative he seems drawn to other male zombies, thus his homosexuality is a given. Together with his resolute declarations of his true zombie-ism, this would suggest that Otto is sure both

of his sexuality *and* of being undead. It is his sense of not belonging, and of his failure to fit in with the fake 'dead' sub cultures offered to him in Berlin, that causes him to question his identity.

In several interviews, other characters discuss Otto's function as a *tabula rasa* (both for Medea and extra-diegetically for LaBruce). Actor Fritz Fritze (Marcel Schlutt), who plays Fritz, the revolutionary leader of skinhead gay zombies in Medea's film *Up With Dead People*, discusses his rival zombie lead:

I considered his particular mental illness a response to a materialistic world that had become soulless and deadening. He [Otto] was the 'Hollow Man', the empty signifier, upon which she could project her political agenda...

For LaBruce too, Otto is a blank slate, onto which he can project his own personal anxieties about alienating effects of homosexual society. He presents Otto as the perfect victim, rejected by heteronormative and homosexual culture. Upon first meeting Medea, Otto is cast as an actor in her zombie film (as a 'fake-zombie') and, at first, he appears to fit in seamlessly into her zombie imitator-group. Medea comments on his appearance:

He looked extremely abject. He vaguely reminded me of the other boys I had already cast - lonely, empty, dead inside. In a way he fitted the typical porn profile – the lost boy, the damaged boy, numb, phlegmatic, insensate boy, willing to go to any extreme to feel something, to feel anything... But there was something different about Otto, something more... 'authentic'.

Otto's 'authenticity' can also be read in terms of his *difference*, not only from humans but from the other zombie-actors too. Still there remains an ambiguity as to whether he is more proficient at acting than Medea's other 'zombies', really a zombie, or merely a psychotic who believes he is a zombie. Medea and Fritz both identify his persona as a reaction against an oppressive capitalist system, from which they believe he is retreating into a narcoleptic state. The authenticity of the zombies Otto meets on his journey through Berlin is questionable. The presence of Medea's 'actor-zombies' undermines the authenticity of all zombies within the film. The legitimacy of the homeless zombies that Otto encounters also remains dubious, not to mention the pseudo-documentary and Otto's own claims of zombie-ism.

As with Romero's films, the zombies in *Up with Dead People* represent the once-consumed masses returning to consume 'the living', which LaBruce (via Medea) recasts as conformist bourgeois homonormativity. The zombie, like the homosexual, has arguably been so thoroughly assimilated into the dominant culture that it has taken on normative traits and become conventional, even banal. Like contemporary homosexuality in some Western cultures, these gay zombies are simultaneously tolerated and intolerable. They may be 'commonplace', but Berlin is hardly a utopia for the undead. As Medea states, the *gay* zombie is considered even more abject to their oppressors, who then take to 'zombie-bashing':

When it was discovered that the gay undead craved the flesh of man – they were hunted down and murdered even more ruthlessly than previous generations. Gangs of marauding street youths stomped on the head of zombies and set them on fire.

Such ‘zombie-bashing’ occurs in the fictional *Up With Dead People*, where Maximillion (the film’s anti-hero Fritz’s zombie lover) is attacked and killed by a gang of *A Clockwork Orange*-style (Stanley Kubrick, US 1971) youths. Zombie abuse also takes place in the faux-agitprop documentary of *Otto*, as the eponymous anti-hero is subjected to both a ‘stoning’ by infantile youngsters and a more violent attack in the film’s final sequence. LaBruce’s deliberate casting of largely Middle Eastern/Arabic actors as the ‘stoning’ children and as Otto’s assailants in the final zombie-bashing sequence, clearly references the ‘real-world’ gay-bashing and the homophobia of governments and religions in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. The zombie-bashing that occurs in *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* is generally meted out by a gang of largely brown-skinned young men as exactors of threatening violence upon a largely white, male community of gay zombies. In this sense, *Otto* seemingly reverses the racial elements of the traditional Western zombie narrative which itself appropriated the folklore surrounding the Haitian ‘zombi’. But *Otto*’s inversion of the black/white binary does not subvert the dynamic. Although the zombie - human opposition is switched, *Otto*’s white zombie is still threatened by oppressed non-whites.

Otto; or, Up With Dead People's reflection of a Germany that is rife with homophobic violence, but notably at the hands of a 'brown skinned' youth, represents the contemporary controversy within Germany surrounding Turkish, Arabic and North African migrants. A 2010 poll cited in *The New York Times* (October 13th 2010), found that one third of those Germans questioned called for the repatriation of foreigners (of which Germany currently has seven million to date (November 2012)). Fifty five percent also agreed that 'Arabs were not pleasant people'. In addition to right-wing extremism, mainstream anti-immigration rhetoric has seen a recent surge in popularity. Thilo Sarrazin's book *Germany is Destroying Itself* (2010), a polemical text, which criticises Muslim communities for the lowering of Germany's education standards as well as making many anti-Semitic remarks, has become a German bestseller. On 16th October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel addressed a conference of the Christian Democratic Union Party, concluding that 'this [multicultural] approach has failed, utterly failed'¹¹ and that the ideal of people from differing cultural backgrounds living 'side by side' does not work. This weakening of the taboo preventing the condemnation of foreigners within German culture has seen a corresponding rise in the denunciation of such inflammatory rhetoric. In 2010, queer academic Judith Butler refused to accept the Berlin Gay Pride Civil Courage Award. In doing so, Butler referred to the current rise in anti-foreign sentiment within German lesbian and gay society, arguing that such feelings are not confined to heterosexuals but also prevail within its white

gay politics and their 'archaic, patriarchal, [and] homophobic' media campaigns. The German left group SUSPECT, a collection of 'queer, trans, migrant, black people, people of colour', supported Butler's rejection of the prize stating that:

It is this tendency of white gay politics to replace a politics of solidarity, coalitions and radical transformation with one of criminalization, militarization and border enforcement, which Butler scandalizes [...] Unlike most white queers she has stuck out her own neck for this. (Butler, 20th June 2010)

LaBruce's depiction of gangs of Islamic youths that turn on Otto can be read as a satirical reference to such racist fears on the part of privileged white gays, an assumption that ignores the existence of homosexuals of colour¹². But zombie-phobia is exhibited not only by the religious right and certain ethnic groups, but also by almost all the non-zombies Otto comes across. In one scene, when he travels across Berlin on the U-Bahn, a number of passengers enter Otto's carriage. In reverse shots, their disgust is made clear. A young woman who sits opposite Otto holds a tissue daintily to her nose, coughing in apparent disgust at his odour. In a reverse reaction shot from Otto's queer-coded point of view, in which the frame is tinted pink, he sees this woman as a zombie and she winks at him knowingly. Upon her departure, most interestingly, two young gay men then enter the carriage and sit opposite Otto. Glancing at him, one surreptitiously whispers to the other, and then both look back at him and laugh.

5.7 The Meat Market - Illness, Community and Zombie-ism

Otto's conviction that he is a zombie is, at times, pronounced an illness. In the brief flashback of 'the time before'¹³ (ironically romanticised in an idyllic love scene), he is portrayed as a seemingly well-adjusted young gay man, cavorting on playground swings with his partner Rudolf and leaping semi-naked with him into bright blue swimming pools (fig. 56).



Fig. 56 The 'time before'.

When Otto eventually remembers and relocates Rudolf, they arrange a meeting. During this sequence, there are various references to Otto's 'illness', however, LaBruce lowers the volume of the dialogue track and begins to distort it with non-diegetic screeching noises, which effectively act as interference to their conversation and the viewer's understanding of Otto's past. Only fragmented lines of dialogue are audible and offer some explanation as to Otto's condition, but not enough to allow any sufficient conclusions. Despite the interference, what remains audible are references

to: '...the hospital'...the loony bin... eating disorders...melancholia ...schizophrenia', and, most ominous of all, 'disorders of the soul'. *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* may also implicitly reference AIDS, given the connections with homosexuality, HIV, the abject throughout horror film history and in the visualisation of Fritz's 'recruitment' of zombies through viral infection¹⁴. However, the character's discussions of Otto's illness seem limited to mental disorders only. Zombie-ism as an AIDS metaphor is perhaps too simplistic for LaBruce¹⁵; instead, it appears more appropriate for Otto's 'disorder of the soul' to be grounded in the cultural anxiety and psychological trauma caused by his temporary amnesia of 'the time before' and his failure to 'fit in'. Otto's suffering does not stem from the body or from his sexuality. Instead, it remains psychical as proven by: his lack of memory (and consequently his lack of subjectivity); his rejection from mainstream heterosexist culture and conformist gay male subcultures; his estrangement from his family (his father in particular) and as Rudolf's spurned lover. Otto's crisis is not corporeal but radiates out from an 'identity crisis'.

In a lengthy diatribe incorporating Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964)¹⁶ (which Medea's girlfriend Hella Bent (Susan Sachsse) is later shown reading) and LaBruce's own political article 'A Message from the Purple Resistance Army (PRA)' (2006), Medea proposes Otto as a both a victim of capitalist society and as a revolutionary subject within it:

A certain repression is forced upon its citizens, upon which advanced capitalism is predicated, characterised by a deadening or stupefying effect – a kind of zombie-state. A person who functions normally in a sick society is himself sick, while it is only the non-adjusted individual who can achieve a healthy ‘acting out’ against the overly strict restraints and demands of the dominant culture.

Clearly, as a homeless vagabond who believed he was dead, Otto was conducting his own – one-man revolution against reality.

If, as Medea states, a person who conforms within a sick (capitalist) society ‘is himself sick’, Otto’s zombie-ism is deemed an illness only by conformists themselves. But this melancholic shambling zombie is at a far remove from the politicised ‘gay Che Guevara’ that Fritz idealises in *Up With Dead People*. Indeed, Otto seems to be the consummate *apolitical* figure. He is unconcerned with the corporate machine of capitalism, the co-option of resistance and the imperialism of European history, and seems more preoccupied with his own interior psychological void. Unlike Medea’s anti-capitalist zombies in *Up With Dead People*, Otto himself has been consumed yet, nevertheless, has survived. Otto’s apolitical indifference masks his longing to follow the ‘smell of human density’ and to be accepted into a community of others *like himself*. Otto’s drive is to seek out a like-minded community and to be accepted by others. In the film’s opening sequence he hitchhikes to Berlin, attracted by ‘some over powering smell...the smell of flesh ...Berlin’, only to be disappointed by what he finds.

Through the film’s fake zombies, LaBruce references a fashionable trend within popular culture, which celebrates the figure of the zombie in events,

theatrical performance, installation art and literary parodies¹⁷. If the zombie is adopted to highlight difference and revel in the pride of marginalisation, it also conversely evokes an assimilationist ethos that is essential to the figure. To wear zombie-drag en masse, paradoxically declares both difference *and* conformity. Otto is considered by non-zombies to be indistinguishable from other gay zombies, but *within* a gay subculture that has adopted the zombie skinhead look, he is considered 'different' and further marginalised. LaBruce describes gay cruising: 'it really is pretty much like night of the living dead. People are in a kind of somnambulist, zombie-like state; people are in a sexual trance almost. It's not really about the individual' (Castillo, *The New York Times*, 26th May 2010). If the homogenous gay club culture is depicted as 'dead', the truly dead Otto, in his possession of speech, free will and autonomous thought, seems the *least* zombie-like of the film's characters.

Shaka McGlotten's article, 'Dead and Live Life: Zombies, Queers and Online Sociability' (2011), reads LaBruce's film alongside his previous research on gay male online sociality, that aligns itself with a deadened, zombified existence as a response to the effects of technologically-influenced isolation, fractured gay subcultures and the disappearance of the communal.

McGlotten's term 'dead and live life' characterises the narratives recounted by his online interviewees that criticise the normative templates offered to queers that, for him, allow for 'the different ways we might feel more or less alive' (2011: 182). McGlotten reads LaBruce's film as offering an

understanding of 'queer sociality which [...] is animated by death, reflecting strange configurations of death-in-life'. He continues that Yarns and LaBruce's narratives are twin polemics that comprehend 'sites of death in life as potentially vital' for queer identification. Indeed, the film's ambiguity also works not only to question the authenticity of Otto's zombification, but also to draw parallels *between* the apparently living and dead. Yarns' clichéd, monotone, pretentious art-film is, arguably, as zombified as Otto himself. McGlotten suggests that zombies are anti-communal, in the sense that they are establishing different ways of *unliving* that can challenge heteronormative and homonormative existence. He suggests that zombies' sociality offers a queer alternative, as 'they do not possess the reflective self-awareness or empathetic identification as the hallmarks of meaningful intimate connection with oneself and others' (182). LaBruce's zombie depicts not only the fear of loneliness, but how to *live* with it. McGlotten sees Otto as indifferently in control of his destiny, not really expressing a desire to connect with himself or others; his journey is a resolutely passive one.

Ultimately, Otto's connections with others, including the counterfeit undead, prove alienating. In one scene, he is picked up by a gay, fake zombie outside a club that is ironically named *Flesh*. Its façade is symbolic of a hellish, cannibalistic meat market where young men are preyed upon for sex. The fly posters on the main wall of the club advertising that evening's 'Zombie Night: Dress to Bare Flesh', clearly reference zombies as modish. As Otto is about

to enter, another male customer opens the door, knocking Otto to the floor. With close-cropped hair, a black bomber jacket, and a tight white t-shirt with red braces and black jeans tucked into Doctor Martens, he is a classic skinhead. The man apologises to Otto in an obvious pick-up attempt: “Hey don’t go in there, it’s *so* dead...shame because you put so much effort into your ensemble...really, really cool!”. He sniffs at Otto commenting, ‘Wow! You even smell authentic!’, to which Otto smirks cheekily. In close-up, the skinhead also appears to be wearing zombie make-up, with fake blood around his mouth, whitened skin and Kohl ringing his eyes. Eventually Otto follows him home to his apartment.



Fig. 57 The zombie ‘bottom’, devours a skinhead.

A cut to the skinhead’s bedroom reveals a starkly white minimalist space, with posters above the bed displaying erotic images of white men in various states of undress reading “SKIN SEX WORLDWIDE” and “SKIN SEX

PARTY". As Otto's trick undresses, he reveals his heavily tattooed and pierced naked body before disappearing into the bathroom for some time. Returning, he sits on the bed and begins to kiss Otto as blood begins to trickle from their interlocked mouths and the scene fades to black. A fade-up reveals Otto sitting at the side of the bed. The apartment is a scene of carnage (fig. 57). The white sheets, walls and posters are splashed in arterial spray, bloodied handprints and gore. Stepping up onto the bed, Otto turns his victim over and walks towards the camera and stares directly into the frame. In the background of the shot, the corpse of Otto's 'trick' then begins to move. He props himself up on the bed with his entrails lying on his stomach. Looking at Otto he exclaims, 'That was amazing...can I see you again some time?', upon which Otto leaves. In this 'biting' satire on the deadliness of gay clubbing culture in Berlin, Otto turns the tables on the city's 'meat-market', whereby the usually consumed 'twink' becomes the consumer.

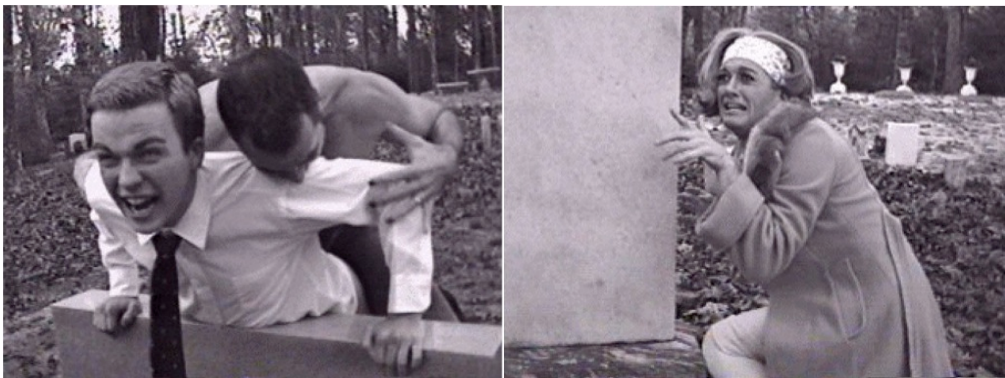
5.8 Conclusions: Gay Zombie Sex as anti-communal.

LaBruce's biography *The Reluctant Pornographer* (1997) ironically underplays the influence of gay pornography throughout his works. The original cuts of many of his films include hardcore gay sex, later excised under various theatrical and home entertainment release stipulations¹⁸. The performance of actual sex adds to LaBruce's low-budget, realist, and exploitation aesthetic. Moreover, such frank depictions also affect a critique

of the representation of sanitised sex produced by North American gay porn studios. For LaBruce, these porn studios perpetuate an unrealistic representation of gay sex, valorising a hypermasculine body image ideal, whereby the body becomes an eroticised object in a capitalist mode of industrial production:

gay porn [is] fascist in that it has the same iconography as the Third Reich: the idea of the perfect body. It's body fascism. They're often fucking like pistons, very mechanical [...] with its slick monolithic aesthetics, its cold production-line uniformity, and its easy propagandistic appropriation of the gay agenda [...] it's all about glorifying white male supremacy and fetishising domination, cruelty, power and monstrous authority figures (In Hays, 2007: 185).

The eroticising of death is commonplace within queer horror and, as Medea declares in *Otto*, 'Death is the new pornography'. Sex has been supplanted by the death that has previously represented it. In *Otto*, LaBruce *replaces* the female body as object of erotic spectacle prevalent in earlier European softcore zombie films, with that of the male but, further still, *explicitly* links physical pleasure with physical trauma. For LaBruce's zombies, fucking and killing become literally interchangeable.



Figs. 58-9 *At Twilight Come the Flesh Eaters* (1998)

Gay zombie porn is first visualised in Vidkid Timo's *Night of the Living Dead* parody, *At Twilight Come the Flesh Eaters* (US 1998), which juxtaposes a low-budget, black and white porn rehash of Romero's socio-political horror with behind the scenes sex between the porn film's crew and cast in colour. *Flesh Eaters* segues its comic set-pieces into formulaic sex scenes (fig. 58-9). Oral and anal sex occurs in the fictional porn world of Timo's film, but *Flesh Eaters* (unlike other zombie-porn) does not feature the penetration of bodily wounds. Conversely, the hardcore straight zombie porn film, *Porn of the Dead* (Rob Rotten, 2006), features explicit sex between porn stars and grotesquely made-up female zombies, who are penetrated anally, vaginally and via wounds in their deteriorating flesh¹⁹. Rotten's film pre-empts LaBruce's championing of the sub-genre's queer expediency that 'zombie porn is practical: you can create your own orifice'. The director has long since upheld the radical potential of zombie pornography:

I believe that zombie porn is the wave of the future, and that we will soon routinely see porous, corrupted flesh being penetrated by legions of lascivious zombies. So get ready for a revolutionary zombie porn extravaganza! (LaBruce, 2008).

Indeed, LaBruce's camera, like that of the European softcore zombie film, opens up the body. It sexualises the various orifices and inner 'piping' (the intestine, the vagina and now the anus) while simultaneously revealing the human subject as an empty shell that will, nevertheless, *do* for sex. Russell writes that the Italian zombie film exposes:

the body's inner mechanics to the audience's gaze [...] the body's materiality and its status as an object. These zombie movies offer us

something more horrific: a vision of the body's essential emptiness...nothing but a bloody mess of tubes and piping. (136)

Similarly Peter Dendle suggests that sex between or with zombies symbolises an 'unapologetic revealing of humanity' (2001: 6) in the exposure of one's physical innards. The opening up of the body to externalise one's guts represents sharing one's inner feelings with others in an exchange of the self with another individual or within a community. In terms of queer horror, the gay zombie opens up the entire body's potential to both *penetrate* and *be penetrated*. In one significant scene, Fritz returns home to find his lover Maximillion (Christophe Chemin) dead, having shot himself in the head. He is later reanimated as a zombie but, rather than being repulsed, Fritz begins to passionately kiss him, and Max returns his kisses with an infecting bite upon the neck. Having turned Fritz into a zombie and then eating his intestines, Max is later shown sitting quietly awaiting his lover's return to consciousness. Fritz eventually awakens, fully zombified, but still horny, upon which Max proceeds to penetrate the hole in his undead lover's stomach with his penis, effectively fucking him into (and *in his*) immortality. Setting aside the male body's dual oral and anal orifices, an entirely new erotic entry point is ripped in Fritz's stomach – direct to the site of digestion (fig. 60). Consumption, digestion and assimilation seem to be the order of the day in the symbolism of this sequence which itself becomes a satire of *gastric* incorporation. If we understand the zombie's drive to consume living flesh as a literalising of desire for the love object, gut-fucking is an extension

of this desire while satirising the (gay) zombie's penchant for unnatural procreation.



Fig. 60 Gut-fucking in *Otto, or; Up With Dead People*.

Literally planting seed into his partner's stomach, Maximillion bypasses the mouth and or anus. There is a particular emphasis in the scene on the nourishing potential in the act of gut-fucking, which calls to mind Armin Miewes' own cannibalistic desire to become one with, and be gastronomically enriched by, Brandes through the digestion of his flesh. The frequent scenes of 'reanimation' and 'recruitment' in LaBruce's film, represent zombies as both incredibly potent and fertile. This symbolic impregnation of Fritz, taking Max into his stomach, is a comic literalising of the zombie's unnatural reproduction.



Fig. 61 Dead Homonormativity

Initially, to the spectator as well as Medea, Otto seems as soulless and empty as the other zombies, who symbolize the perpetually empty consumers of capital (fig. 61), but, instead, he becomes consumed by the seemingly radical systems that critique capital themselves. Otto is often visualised as both reluctant consumer (opting to eat roadkill is a post-human adaptation of his previous vegetarianism) and the to-be-consumed. The zombie's psychological and corporeal emptiness is demonstrated not only in the queer zombie's rapacious appetite for flesh, but in the scenes of erotic bodily penetration, both of which visualise them as soulless hunks of flesh. As such, Otto and his fellow zombies' emptiness is symbolic of the deprivatised subject under capitalism, requiring a loss of individuality, emotions, thoughts and, eventually, bodily parts. Given the potential for undead sex to strengthen relations and increase a sense of the communal between gay zombies (however radical or destructive its intentions) within narratives like *Otto*, for LaBruce sex *between* zombies is, nevertheless, shown ultimately to alienate. While the camera eroticises the internal in a 'frenzy of the visible'²⁰

that provides an initial jouissance, it ultimately proves to be distancing. For LaBruce, there seems to be little physical trauma or pain involved in the scenes of evisceration or death. Rather than lingering on and highlighting the sensational *unpleasure* caused by painful, seemingly traumatic sex, LaBruce's low rent aesthetic renders it almost mundane, banal and hollow.²¹

The film's final group orgy, described by LaBruce as the 'Orgy of the Dead' (2008), appears, at first, to be a frenetic, fantastical scene of group sex between the remaining cast of revolutionary zombies from *Up With Dead People*, in which the writhing mass of naked male zombies almost fuse into one undead circle of sex. In such sequences, the conflation of violence and sex is amplified into the fusion of sex and death. Breaking her visual and generic code, Medea shoots the scene switching between black and white scenes of zombie sex juxtaposed with colour images of military carnage, explosions and extreme close-ups of raw chicken carcasses being butchered. LaBruce's cheap aesthetic, when coupled with comically obvious juxtapositions, clearly offers the objectified male body as an object of economic exchange in what essentially remains a curiously unerotic sex scene. If sex is used to connect with the communal, it is ultimately proven to be a disappointment.

After the final wrap of *Up With Dead People*, Otto's romanticised love-making with Fritz in his crisp clean bed sheets seems to promise a redemption of some sort, a reconnection with masculinity and the gay community. His pallor, scars and bruises seem to disappear in the healing white light of Fritz's bedroom and, for a moment, Otto appears 'normal'. However, the morning after reveals the promise of redemption to be false. Fritz wakes to find a note on his pillow, on which is sketched a gravestone reading 'Otto: RIP'. Otto is later shown leaving Berlin to journey north seeking further connections. In the film's final shots he is shown hitchhiking on a country highway, speaking direct to camera and in voice over on his decision:

I really didn't know what my destination was.
But something told me to head north.
The cold doesn't bother me, in fact, I find it comforting,
It preserves my flesh.
Maybe I'll find more of my kind up there and learn to enjoy the
company. Maybe I would discover a whole new way of death.

LaBruce's film suggests that death is neither an end nor an answer. Instead, Otto continues in a limbo-like state, never knowing others like him, never knowing where to go, unable to separate reality from fantasy and never experiencing the 'suicidal ecstasy' (Bersani, [1987], 2010: 18) connoted in the combination of sex and death. McGlotten rightly states there is little evidence of Bersani's melodramatic 'shattering of the self' (1984: 38) in *Otto*, nor is there a clear referencing of Edelman's anti-futural 'death drive'. Instead, he sees in *Otto* a passive indifference to such polemics (such as

Medea's radical political posturing). But this apathy seems to achieve empowerment. To summarise, McGlotten reads Otto's zombie 'Other' as a site of queer identification with apathy. Otto is able to 'enact a freedom from the responsibilities and obligations that are the ordinary stuff of life' (185), to ape heterosexual 'coupledom', to seek out one's soul mate, or to indulge in gay male promiscuity. He reads Otto as a powerful 'fantasy/model of an agency that is empowered as it is automatized', seeing it as a more useful approach to zombie theory that has in the past, for him, only operated as a metaphor for racial and political difference, infection, consumerism or the savage proletariat drone. McGlotten champions LaBruce's zombies as 'compelling site[s] for identification' (182). While I agree with McGlotten's enthusiasm for LaBruce's reinterpretation of the zombie, I would argue that this has always been the case for the figure of the zombie, which has long been offered as a site of 'Othered' identification for the dispossessed minority, and that the recent overt sexualisation of the zombie's physicality now merely offers up the figure for a more explicit queer appropriation.



Fig. 62 The queer rainbow in *Otto*.

Otto's final lonely journey is also seen by McGlotten as 'speculatively optimistic' (182). In its refusal of self-immolation, living on as if in limbo, his conclusion that Otto's search for 'a whole new way of death' can be seen as a radicalised acceptance of one's own indifference towards life yet being inspired to live it anyway. To me this seems too flaccidly optimistic.

McGlotten reads Otto's indifferent sociality as a radical uncaring form of connecting with others, albeit driven by an automated desire to do so. Yet if Otto's final search is presented as utopian fantasy, given LaBruce's cynical tone and the film's overt nihilism, I would counter that this too is a futile act. Otto's zombified status (whether the result of an actual or symbolic suicide) can be seen as an act of self-divestiture. However, the drive to devalue the self becomes meaningless in the (hypocritically capitalist) economic exchange of Otto by Medea who re-values him as her muse. The act of 'going north' is still associated with death and blackness, particularly in a

religious sense.²² We can read Otto's journey in two ways: as a symbolic suicide or a journey of discovery into the unknown, both of which will eventually prove unsatisfying. Otto ironically continues:

At one point I did consider ending it all, like at the end of *Medea's* movie. But how do you kill yourself, if you are already dead?

In this final shot, by a rural roadside of saturated yellow fields and blue skies, a rainbow appears behind Otto's head (Fig 61). Framed in this way by the most venerable of queer symbols, Otto's words take on a new resonance. LaBruce's ironic rainbow, I would suggest, simply resets Otto on a seemingly indifferent drive (on 'Auto' as McGlotten puns (190)) to connect with others like himself, which reveals the desire to fulfil societal demands for the communal and which is ultimately doomed to fail.

¹ See *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (Roman Polanski, US 1967), *Vampyres* (Jose Larraz, SP 1974), *Interview with the Vampire* (Neil Jordan, UK 1992), *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, US, 1982). Vampire as homosexual is discussed further in chapter seven.

² First seen in Hebrew scripture (*Psalms* 139:16), the golem is thought to describe a shapeless mass or 'embryo', then in Polish Jewish folklore in the 1600's via Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1915) which influences Paul Wegener's adaptation in *Der Golem* (1914) and *Der Golem wie er in die Welt kam* (*The Golem: How He Came Into the World*) (1920).

³ *Revenant* is understood to mean a ghost or animated corpse who is raised from the dead and terrorises the living and is taken from the Latin word *revenit* (to return) and the French *revenant*, meaning 'returning'.

⁴ See *Zombie Lake* (Jean Rollin, FR 1981), *Oasis of the Living Dead* (Franco, SP, 1982).

⁵ See William Robertson Smith's *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* [1885] (Beacon Press 1963)

⁶ Taken from an interview with Miewes from television documentary *Interview with a Cannibal*, aired on Channel Five, 2007 (RDF Television and Five Co-production)

⁷ Brandes also slept with rent boys in his home city of Berlin, whom he pleaded with to torture him even asking them to bite off his penis.

⁸ See, for example, Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada*, (MacGill Queens Press 2006) p. 262

⁹ Taken from LaBruce's, 'A Message from the P.R.A.: Purple Resistance Army', exhibited in International Contemporary Art, Summer 2006.

¹⁰ Familiar with the conflation of zombie and porn, early in his career LaBruce co-starred in a short film entitled *Interview With A Zombie* (CandyO, US, 1989) as a gay member of the undead.

¹¹ As reported by Matthew Weaver in *The Guardian*, 17th October 2010 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed>).

¹² LaBruce clearly mocks this neglect by casting Gio Black Peter (a young Guatemalan actor) as Rudolf, Otto's lover.

¹³ The event that the 'time before' implies is suggested to refer to Otto's zombie-ism. The film's musings on suicide in the denouement perhaps offer such conclusions retrospectively. If we take his zombie status metaphorically, we can understand it to represent the 'time before' his retreat from either oppressive cultural structures, or indeed the 'time before' his break-up with Rudolf.

¹⁴ In LaBruce's films, the representation of masculinity is often fused with a skinhead body type (thin, gaunt, pale, white and lean, wiry, racially privileging Caucasian men with shaved heads) which can be understood to echo the hair loss undergone by sufferers of AIDS as a side-effect of medication for the disease.

¹⁵ LaBruce states that his late sexual development perhaps led to his lack of exposure to the viral contraction of AIDS; "between 1978 – 1982, I should have been getting into hardcore, promiscuous sex. That was right when

AIDS really hit, before anyone knew anything about it and started having safe sex.’ (Butt 12 p. 8-17 (2004)).

¹⁶ Marcuse argues that what he terms ‘advanced industrial society’ offers its subjects false needs, whereby a society’s individual subjects desire objects that have little or no actual worth – thereby integrating them into a system of production and consumption. This leads to the creation of a ‘one dimensional’ universe, in which the critical subject’s individual’s thoughts and behaviour lose their oppositional elements. pp. 11-12

¹⁷ These include social website www.crawlofthedead.com which advertises zombie pub crawls and marches, including Iowa’s *City Zombie March*, the *Zombie Walk* in London and Canada and World Zombie Day, London, October 2008. The zombie is figured in art exhibitions, undead still-life and performance art with LaBruce recently exhibiting his ‘Untitled Hardcore Zombie Project’ at the Soho Theatre, London in 2009. Literary appropriations include Seth-Grahame Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (2011).

¹⁸ *Skin Gang* and *The Raspberry Reich* were produced and financed by hardcore porn producers, Wurstfilm, who contracted LaBruce to release both hard and soft-core versions.

¹⁹ See Steve Jones (2011) ‘Porn of the Dead: Necrophilia, Feminism and Gendering the Undead’ for a wider reading.

²⁰ In *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (1989), Linda Williams states that the frenzy of the visible further covers up the true artificiality of pornography. The zombie film’s externalising of the body’s interior can be read as a similar attempt to authenticate human subjectivity via corporeal exposure.

²¹ In the more recent hardcore film, *LA Zombie* (La Bruce, GE/CA 2010), a gay alien zombie (Francois Sagat) reincarnates human corpses in necrophilic sex via his life-giving black semen. In the more redemptive *LA Zombie*, the dying and the undead are actually brought back to life or restored in an intact human form, not zombies.

²² In Jeremiah 46-20, the north is paralleled with evil and darkness: ‘out of the north an evil shall break forth [...] destruction cometh; it cometh out of the north’. The north is considered the last place that spirits and the dead would be risen again and criminals were often buried in the northern part of many graveyards in the Christian church. Donald A. Mackenzie, *The Migration of Symbols* (2003) p.39.

Chapter Six

Castrating the Queer from *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, SE 2009)

This thesis's investigation into an emerging sub-genre of queer horror with a largely overt presentation of homosexuality would seem to suggest an explosion of celebratory queer sexuality within contemporary horror, yet this is not the case. Horror films that are produced/directed by and for gay male or queer identified subjects are still few in number. However, one may argue that the Horror genre itself is queer by its very definition, and that texts which open themselves up to queer interpretation need not necessarily be defined by a gay or queer authorial presence. Perhaps it is in the nature of the Queer horror sub-genre to elude categorisation (sexual or otherwise) and in this same disavowal of essentialist identity, it is perhaps all the more *queer* for it.

As with *Carrie*, this thesis now returns to a film adaptation of a literary horror text. Unlike the queer re-readings of *Carrie*, I argue that *Let the Right One In* (Alfredson, SE 2010) conversely dilutes any representation of transgressive queer sexuality in the process of translation from book to film; and subsequently from the foreign language film version to an American remake. A paratextual reading of the central film's approach to marginalised sexuality and gender, whether paedophilic, homosexual or transsexual, reveals a problem in assuming a queerness of the Horror genre per se. This chapter considers *Let The Right One In* as a return to a metaphorical, suggestive presentation of queerness in an age of

supposed sexual enlightenment and, while it finds many of the aforementioned anxieties and pleasures of Queer horror still present, it sees a *transgressive* and *implicit* queerness at odds with each other and questions which has the greater potency.

Comparing De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) with *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rätten komme in*) (2009) reveals that the two texts share many similarities in terms of their appeal to gay male audiences: both have bullied young protagonists who are depicted as abject, misunderstood outsiders who find encouragement from their guardian-like gym teachers. Foregrounding the pain of assimilation; both texts centre on a Grand Guignol staging of the revenge of their abused central characters (in *Carrie's* Prom scene massacre and in Eli's rescue of her young human companion Oskar in the *Let the Right One In's* swimming pool finale).¹

I have previously proposed that queerness is inserted into *Carrie* via various reading strategies, most explicitly so via the pornographic inserts in Charles Lum's *Indelible* (2004). Whereas King's novel is arguably a 'straight' horror (largely non-transgressive) text that is queered extra-textually via the many cult appropriations of De Palma's film, with *Let the Right One In* the source novel's presentation of sexual transgression, explicit castration and homosexuality is largely removed. This chapter will focus centrally on Alfredson's adaptation of John Ajvide Lindqvist's horror novel *Låt den rätten komme in* (2004) as a film that does not explicitly

retain or foreground the transgressive, queer potential of its source material but instead, renders its queerness implicit and almost 'unlocatable'. I want to argue that both film adaptations of Lindqvist's novel (Alfredson's Swedish version and *Let Me In* (Matt Reeves, US 2010), its independent American remake) have, at most, had their queerness castrated and, at the very least, seen the transgressive content watered down and barely alluded to².

The main focus of this analysis centres on the differences between the novel and the film adaptations' depiction of the castration of their vampire protagonists, Eli (Lina Leandersson) in *Let the Right One In* and Abby (Chloe Moretz) in *Let Me In*. This in turn alters the consequential reading of the character's gender status. Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* more importantly provides an incident whereby literal castration is replaced by symbolic castration both diegetically and non-diegetically. I want to consider whether, if castration itself is eliminated together with other related transgressive and queer elements, Alfredson's film can retain any oppositional capability? If the novel's inclusion of explicit castration cuts a monstrous feminine wound into its young *male* vampire subject, and further conflates (passive and masochistic) femininity with homosexuality, how then does the suggestive homoeroticism of the film compare? I want to consider whether an *unlocatable* queerness as conveyed in the art film's conventional elision and ambiguity is indeed more subversive and potent than the source novel's explicit representation of paedophilia and

homosexuality. More importantly, what are the wider effects of this elision, this castration of gayness? Are gay male subjects, as Leo Bersani states in *Homos* (1995), in danger of 'losing identity' (31-33) via assimilation and acceptance? Or does gay subjectivity become more potent via this unspecificity?

In order to answer these questions, I will subject Alfredson's film to a queer reading, using a paratextual approach in order to restore oppositional elements to this heteronormatively castrated film. By reinstating castration into the narrative, homosexuality can be brought back into the equation. It is this handling of castration, however, that remains of vital importance to an analysis of Lindqvist's original story which features grotesque recollections of infantile castration and transgressive sexuality. However, Alfredson's film (which Lindqvist also adapted) contains merely a fleeting reference to castration and its references to the characters' homosexuality remain at most implicit. Reeves' remake all but omits it completely. I want also to discuss the relevance of the psychoanalytic theory of castration to *Let the Right One In*. Reading across from Lindqvist's original work to Alfredson's film adaptation and taking in extra-textual influences of distribution and production, I hope to bring out the queerness that is 'barely there at all' (Hutchings, 2004: 65).

I want to argue that the consequence of the masking, concealment or covering up of various transgressive elements can be seen to operate in the films' final sequences, in which both child vampires Eli and Abby remain boxed up, contained and protected by Oskar (Kåre Hedebrandt/Owen (Kodi Smit-McPhee) their human, daytime guardians. Further still, I want to suggest that if masking operates as a form of repression, of covering up, it eventually causes a re-emergence (or reapplication) of the same repressed sexual energies, through (and onto) the various texts and has an impact on each successive adaptation's masking of homosexuality.

6.1 Textual Overviews.

Lindqvist's novel sympathetically deals with the complex queer relationship between its protagonists, 12 year-old Oskar, and Eli (a 120 year-old castrated boy vampire masquerading as a young girl) and with the taboo of paedophilia. More of a *pulp horror*, the novel is confident in its presentation of both monstrous and alternative sexualities. Set in the early 1980s in an economically depressed suburban Sweden it follows Oskar, a bullied young schoolboy and his awkward but tender relationship with the seemingly young vampire Eli, his new neighbour. Yet vampirism is not the only secret Eli harbours, as the two become closer it is revealed that Eli is in reality a castrated boy named Elias. Oskar's shame at his homosexual feelings for Eli makes homosexuality, instead of a closeted vampirism, his main source of anxiety. As Eli supports Oskar in his fight

against his tormentors, the vampire grows distant from his ageing companion Håkan, a paedophile who remains with his un-ageing young charge.

In its treatment of Eli's castration, troubled gender, and homosexual desire, the novel is clearly a transgressive text that revels in the sexually grotesque and monstrous. Lindqvist's text is defined by its clarity of exposition favouring the explicit over the implicit. It delights in Gothic reminiscences of Eli's cannibalistic castration, Håkan's monstrous paedophilic urges and his later transformation into a permanently aroused, burnt undead corpse and his subsequent attempted rape of the 'young' Eli. The novel avoids allusion or suggestion, focusing instead on shockingly unequivocal descriptions of sexual trauma, murder and overt references to homosexuality.

The German novelist and homosexual rights campaigner Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' influential short story *Manor* (1885) exhibits some close parallels with Lindqvist's story. Ulrichs' tale is of a homosexual romance between a 15 year old young boy named Har and Manor, a 19 year old sailor whose love continues in death after Manor meets his death fishing in a terrible storm. Manor returns from the grave as a vampire to be with Har climbing into his bed, dripping wet to embrace his lover, before suckling blood from his breast:

Manor lay his head on the spot where Har's breast pounded. His chilly lips searched the soft swollen chest about Har's heart. His

entire chest throbbed to the beat of his heart. Manor began to suck his teat, filled with yearning and thirstily, like an infant at its mother's breast. (Ulrichs: 39)

Their (now supernatural) love is imbued with a necrophilic eroticism that the village abhors. Growing ever weaker from this nightly bloodletting, the dying Har begs his mother to bury him with his lover. *Let the Right One In*, like *Manor*, does not take the traditional form of the vampiric narrative centred around the vampire's attack upon (usually female) victims, the discovery of its true status and its eventual destruction. Instead both texts seem to tell the tale of two youths who love each other in life, with the narrative tensions set around the persistence of love and the vampire's *survival* rather than his/her death. More obviously, both narratives recast homosexual desire as other-worldly, abnormal yet free from repression in undead form and both finally represent the masochistic elements in homosexual desire in a symbolically romantic death or suicide.

Lindqvist's novel delivers a more shockingly transgressive recounting of transgendered monstrosity and homosexual desire by conflating it with paedophilia. Presented as a 'father-figure' from the novel's outset, Håkan's desires for children in the novel configure him as a homosexual paedophile. Building on the uncomfortable tension present in exchanges between Håkan and his 'daughter' Eli in which he professes a 'longing to hold' her, further flashbacks expose Håkan's guilt-ridden abuse of young boys and male prostitutes (2004: 43-49) prior to his meeting Eli. Despite this, the novel's portrayal of Håkan is somewhat sympathetic, as his

(largely) repressed paedophilic urges are shown to sicken him. He has a loving relationship with his 'charge', whom he sees as his elder and not a child at all:

It was the best of all possible worlds. The young, lithe body that brought beauty to his life, and at the same time lifted him from responsibility [...] And he did not have to feel guilt for his desire; his beloved was older than he. No longer a child. (2004: 214)

However, the novel makes no attempts to mask Håkan's guilt as a frustrated pederast whose predilection for young male victims overwhelms him. In one scene he masturbates while spying on boys changing after gym class:

Two of the boys had taken off their Speedos and were bending forwards into their lockers to take out their clothes. His groin area contracted in a single cramp-like movement and the sperm shot out in to the corner, spilling onto the bench he was standing on. (2004: 130)

Håkan's monstrous inner desires eventually become literalised later in the narrative. After disfiguring himself with acid after bungling an attempt to murder and procure the blood of a young victim, the arrested Håkan offers his own blood to Eli as she perches on the window ledge by his hospital bed. After later falling several storeys, Håkan does not perish and instead lives on as an grotesque, perpetually aroused zombie figure,

[His face] was a clumsily fashioned mass of naked flesh with one single red eye thrown in as if for fun, a ripe cherry to top a rotten cake. [...] Håkan's penis stood out from his body to one side, craving attention, its stiff swollenness crisscrossed with veins. (2004: 430-1)

Håkan's lust is thus reconfigured as a mindless *drive* to rape Eli. The novel's pity for Håkan is clearly swept aside in this transformation of the guilt-racked guardian into an undead, engorged sexual deviant.

This is not to suggest that Lindqvist does not hold back details concerning Eli's gendered origins until some way into the narrative (387), but when it *is* revealed following a repeated series of signposting comments from Eli ('I'm not a girl' (137, 187-9) there is little doubt as to his existence as both a vampire and a castrated male. In an exchange between the two from Lindqvist's novel, a cold and wet Eli spends the night sleeping beside Oskar after having seemingly dispensed with Håkan; Eli then begins to consider replacing him with Oskar. Oskar returns Eli's 'affections' by proposing that they commence dating as boyfriend and girlfriend, something which perturbs Eli. The scene plays upon the readers' knowledge of genre and vampire lore in assuming, at this stage, that what Eli wishes to conceal is vampirism. Oskar courts Eli while they lie together in his bed ('Eli will you go out with me'), before Eli eventually responds to Oskar's request to 'go steady' by protesting:

'Oskar, I can't. I'm not a girl.'
Oskar snorted. 'What do you mean? You're a *guy*?'
'No. No.'
'Then what are you?'
'Nothing.'
'What do you mean "nothing"?'
'I'm nothing, not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl. Nothing.'
(187-9)

In the novel's revelation scene in which Eli reveals both his vampirism and his male gender, Eli seems desperate to make Oskar see that that

his difference is something that Oskar shares, that they are the same. Eli encourages Oskar to empathise, to 'Be me a little...', via a joining of their minds. He projects his memories into Oskar, who vicariously experiences Eli's past. In these memories, the pre-castrated youth, Elias, is described as an androgynous 'little boy, only eleven years old, the most beautiful child that they had ever seen' (387).

Lindqvist's novel presents Eli's castrated male gender as its central narrative problem. Significantly, Oskar's confusion and anxiety about his feelings for Eli as a *boy* begin to surpass those about vampirism. Oskar questions his female teacher about romantic feelings between two men:

'What if it's two guys?'
'Then that's friendship. That's also a form of love. Or if you mean...well two guys can also love each other in that way.'
'How do they do it?'

'You have to form a covenant with someone, a union regardless of whether you're a boy or a girl.' (208-9)

Oskar begins to feel ashamed about being associated with a feminine masculine boy and, even more, having feelings for him:

When he said his name aloud he remembered that it was wrong. Elias. *Elias. A boy's name*. Was Eli a boy? They had kissed and slept in the same bed and...

...That he could somehow accept that she was a *vampire*, but the idea that she was somehow a *boy*, that could be...harder. (212)

Oskar's being bullied then begins to take on connotations of homophobic abuse. As the novel explicitly references homosexual feelings between the two protagonists, Oskar's shame begins to overwhelm him:

He knew the word. Fag. Fucking fag...To think, it was worse to be gay than to be a...

She...His name was Eli. But it was too much. Regardless of what Eli was, it was too much. He just couldn't. Nothing about her was normal. (399)

Alfredson's film offers a more commercialized and accessible version of the novel's explicit transgressions. *Let the Right One In* is a film of cutting, elision, aversion and the implicit. Its title alone, borrowed in truncated form from The Smiths' song 'Let the Right One Slip In' (whose singer Morrissey's own bisexuality can also be argued to inflect the film's treatment of ambiguous sexuality) is further masked in *Let Me In* (2010). The first film excises explicit references to: castration, Eli's male origins, Håkan's paedophilic tendencies and his revival as an undead pederast. Anderson even made the decision to have Lina Leandersson's (Eli's) voice dubbed over by Elif Ceylan, an older voice actress, in order to give the character a deeper, more mature voice. Yet the choice of actress over actor serves to further mask Eli's male origins. Lindqvist removes most of the explicit references to homosexuality, castration and paedophilia in his screenplay, but does Alfredson's film retain the potential for queer interpretation and identification in its representation of castration and sexual difference?

Alfredson's and Lindqvist's adapted screenplay for the Swedish film adaptation masks many of the novel's controversial elements. It pares down the book's narrative sidebars, excising the detailed trail of Håkan

and Eli's previous murders by detective, Staffan; removing the novel's investigating homicide detective, and omitting other minor characters (Staffan's son Tommy and many of Oskar's schoolteachers). The brief glimpse of Eli's scar in Alfredson's film can be construed in many ways (female circumcision, self-harm, vampiric androgyny) or missed altogether. The plot simplification is an understandably vital component of the novel to screenplay transition in order to fit audience expectations and meet the standard running time requirements of the feature film. However while Alfredson's adaptation makes deliberate moves to include some of the novel's more controversial plot elements and themes, its coy presentation of them results in what appears to be an avoidance of an outright confrontation *with* the transgressive.

In the film Eli's male gender origins are not revealed leaving the vampire's ambiguous comment, 'I'm not a girl' open to suggestion. The novel's pivotal flashback revealing Eli's castration, which in turn, results in the unequivocal restoring of the male gendered pronoun to him, is reduced to an almost subliminal flash cut of Eli's oddly scarred asexual genitals. So too, Alfredson's interpretation of Håkan's (Per Ragnar) paedophilia is again only hinted at, a subtle presentation that has to be competently read by the viewer in order to uncover its taboo. This is not to suggest that Alfredson's film completely castrates the novel's transgressively queer aspects; rather, it recasts its queerness along the lines of *implied* difference and ellipses. However, in doing so it risks the

transgression becoming so subtle it becomes overlooked and rendered impotent.

Matt Reeves' adaptation of Lindqvist's novel (co-adapted with Tomas Alfredson) *Let Me In* (2010) succeeds even more in its use of lack to cover up lack. Reeves' film relocates the action to a Reagan-era 1980s New Mexico, drawing parallels with the suburban squalor of Lindqvist's *Blackeberg*. Reeves renames his central characters as Owen and Abby. The era's Cold War values are reflected in the film's mise-en-scène: a perpetually bleak, wintery and insular Southwest. The Reagan administration's effect on social deprivation is seen in the plight of Owen's mother as a low-income single parent dependent on alcohol and right wing religion. Cold War capitalist iconography is also present in the retaining of the gift of the Rubik's Cube from Owen to Abby (from Lindqvist's novel), an object that symbolises Eastern Bloc ingenuity and Western capitalism in *symbiosis*. Yet while Reeves also includes Abby's protestations and questions in reference to gender ('Would you still like me if I wasn't a girl?'), to all intents and purposes she remains female. This is mainly due to Reeves' decision to omit the key reverse reaction shot featured in Alfredson's version (in which Oskar glimpses Eli's scar which indicates his castration). Instead, the shot of Owen's surprised face suggests that his shock is brought about by the absent signifier of sexual difference: Abby's vagina.

Reeves' adaptation also transposes the father's dysfunctional alcoholism onto Owen's mother. Avoiding the complexity explanations for his parent's split suggested in the novel and first film, it blames the neglectful mother. Following the pattern of increasing masking across the texts, Reeves' framing out of Owen's mother is less forgiving. Often blurring focus on her in mid or close-up shots, she is continually edged out by tight framing or the cluttered *mise-en-scène* and often filmed in extreme long shot so that her face is never fully visible. This desperate disconnection suggests an emotional distance between mother and son, a result of her depression, but also hints at Owen's disassociation with shameful femininity. This becomes obvious in the alterations that Reeves makes in his depiction of Owen's bullying by tormentors who repeatedly refer to him as a 'little girl' or 'she' (as opposed to being called 'piggy' in Linqdvist's novel). In Reeves' version the shame associated with women is felt more acutely, and perhaps informs his film's eventual visual detachment from monstrous femininity.

6.2 Covering up: Masking Queerness and Castration

For Richard Dyer (1988), the figure of the vampire throughout history encodes a symbolic projection of monstrous homosexuality. Although his understanding of the vampire does not automatically render it homosexual³ he reads an inherent potential for homosexuality in the monster's breaching of private physical and symbolic spaces. Seduction, attack and feeding usually occur in private, specifically in the bedroom: 'It

is at night when we are alone in our beds that the vampire classically comes to call... in an age which considers the sexual to be both the most private of things.' (1988: 56). Dyer draws further parallels between the idea of vampiric secrecy and the closet: 'being lesbian/gay is something one must keep to oneself. [It] accords with the idea of the authenticity of private sexuality.' (1988: 57). Yet despite the vampire's closeted secrecy in traditional vampire narratives, the monster is usually revealed by the recognition of widely acknowledged 'traits' or 'tell-tale signs'. As such, Dyer's reading of the vampire as homosexual also relates to the Gothic motif of doubling: the vampire appears 'normal' yet conceals a monstrous secret, his/her vampirism/queerness. He concludes that vampire narratives are often imbued with a sense of gay shame and self-loathing revealing, 'a mix of distaste for homosexuality with a recognition that it cannot be resisted.' (1988: 63)

Sue Ellen Case has argued that the reading of the queer vampire that, for her, is 'historically constituted as unnatural' (1991: 18) and is inevitably rooted in the cultural moment. Case considers the 1980s vampire as an encoding of cultural fear of infection, contamination, 'pollutions' and 'viral disease', and in particular AIDS: 'a construction that signifies the plague of their sexuality'. If the vampire-as-homosexual is a metaphor for all things aberrant, this is entirely dependent on what is deemed unnatural at particular points in history: 'nature isn't what it used to be, and likewise the undead have altered with it' (20). Ellis Hanson similarly suggests that

the vampire in popular culture reflects and provokes 'homosexual panic', particularly in relation to association with infection in connection to the AIDS crisis, for example: 'AIDS has helped to concretize a mythical link between gay sex and death' (1991: 324). Vampire symbolism is also evident in media representations of gay men suffering with AIDS, an iconography that has escaped from the generic confines of the horror film or gothic literature and been mapped onto the AIDS documentary⁴. This association of AIDS with a horrible monstrosity is but a new addition to an already stigmatised past of 'essentialist representations of gay men as vampiric [and] as a threat to wife, children, home and phallus' (324-5). Most interestingly Nina Auerbach suggests in *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995) that 'every age embraces the vampire it needs' (145). Whereas, at one time, the vampire may once have been configured literally or metaphorically as a symbol of lethal homosexuality, it can be argued that the figure's subsequent assimilation into mainstream culture has led to its appropriation by homosexual subcultures. So why would Lindqvist as the screenwriter of *Let the Right One In* and the directors of both it and *Let Me In* choose to excise the novel's explicit depiction of a homosexual relationship?

Such a masking of castration, paedophilia and homosexuality, one could argue, is an explanation for the film's surprising crossover box office success. With each subsequent adaptation, the bolder, more explicit aspects of Lindqvist's novel have been smoothed out. In the case of the

first film this may have been done in order to obtain a more accessible 15 rating⁵ in the UK and an even more universally appealing 11 rating in Sweden⁶. Yet it was still assigned a more exclusive R rating⁷ across North America. Anders Marklund points out in his analysis of Alfredson's film's US poster (Fig. 63) that *Let the Right One's* R-rating is perhaps not only a consequence of its genre, but also a result of its 'foreign language, art-house' status (Marklund: 51-54). The North American poster's single endorsement quote inserts 'fangs' which covers over their absence in the film, 'Sensational! Director Alfredson does a great job of sinking new fangs into familiar vampire elements'.



Fig. 63 *Let the Right One In's* US poster.

Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* has garnered both a cult following and significant critical appraisal, including Roger Ebert's accolade of 'the best modern vampire movie' (Chicago Sun Times, 13 August 2009) and election as Best Film of 2009 by the readers of mainstream UK film magazine *Empire*. While critically praising the film's revitalising of the vampire figure *and* genre, horror fans have commented on the film's accessibility as one that 'transcends the genre'⁸. Noting this alternative pitch, *Little White Lies*' review of the film finds it 'a more timid beast than the novel [...] capturing its essences, while tuning out its excesses' before concluding 'it's an anti-horror movie' (Bochenski: 8).

In an interview the removal of the novel's subplots are excused by Lindqvist as a means of paring down the complexity of the narrative; or as a matter of taste required by 'pragmatism'. The novel's imagery of a terribly burned, quasi-zombie paedophile with an erection, and its implications of childhood sexuality would clearly not please the film censors. Lindqvist insists that his omissions are due to the brevity of the feature format and a wish to treat the film as a separate text: 'this is a movie script. I couldn't possibly be sentimental about the book'. He defends excising Eli's restorative bath of blood featured in the novel on the grounds that it 'seemed to be striving for an effect, so I decided to remove it' (Bochenski: 8)

On the film's avoidance of the obvious paedophilia between Eli and her older male companion Håkan, Lindqvist defends its elimination in what seems to be a romanticising of the controversial relationship:

In the novel Håkan is a pronounced paedophile. I think that child molesting is used carelessly in television and film. It's too complicated a matter to use as an emotional special effect. The film suggests that [he] is an old aged lover to Eli. Maybe Oskar is becoming the same in the future? [sic]

Similarly, Lindqvist defends the decision to omit Håkan's survival after his seemingly fatal fall from a hospital window, living on as an enraged zombie-like vampire bent on obtaining sexual gratification from Eli:

there are a lot of subplots, and the zombie Håkan is removed from the film because this would be confusing – there would be two threats towards Eli, both Lacke trying to trace Eli and Håkan. That was a little bit too much to do for the film. (in Blake, [Twitchfilm](#), 2011).

The taboo in representing paedophilia is excused, arguing that the mortal Håkan's aging (when Eli does not) makes his love for Eli seem less paedophilic and possibly to be repeated again by Oskar. His transformation in the film from the undead Håkan of the novel, and the omission of his attempted rape of Eli, is excused as merely a means of simplifying the film's narrative. Alfredson's film also omits all references to Håkan's sexual inclinations towards young boys (and Eli in particular), which encourages viewers to read him as a paternal figure. J.M Tyree concurs that 'in the film Eli moves into the estate with a male companion that some mistook for her father, but who is in fact her lover whose pedophilia [sic] takes an even more monstrous turn' (2009: 35) In an

educational publication for A-Level teaching of the film, Film Education normalises the film narrative. The teaching pack assumes that Håkan is Eli's father:

Despite being a vampire Eli in many ways appears to be a typical adolescent. Just as we see arguments between Oskar and his parents we also see Eli arguing with her father. Consider the way in which the character of Eli's father is represented in the film. (4)

This particular interpretation is understandable, given that Alfredson's film suggests that Håkan is a father-figure, denied respect and love by his demanding 'daughter'. In doing so, it presents their relationship as a single parent with child, parallel to that of Oskar and his mother.

Alfredson's film suggests that Håkan was, at some stage, like Oskar - a young boy in love with Eli. Whereas Eli's immortal status keeps him in a pubescent body, Håkan continues to grow old and thus becomes an involuntary paedophile, not a sexually charged predator, but a lonely and pathetic figure.

Similarly the visualisation of Oskar's mother, Yvonne (Karen Bergquist), is also masked to some degree, perhaps revealing a disconnection with femininity brought on by its shameful associations. Alfredson includes scenes in which Oskar's relationship with his mother is shown to be warm, yet, somewhat detached due to the financial and work demands placed on her as a single parent. Due to the camera's low height, frequently placed at his eye level, Oskar's mother is usually cut off both visually and symbolically by the tight framing. One scene, however, reveals a parallel

between the two. In mid shot Oskar and his mother, dressed in nightwear, both brush their teeth whilst preparing for bed and wandering around the house. The shot intercuts between the two as they begin to mimic each other's actions, smiling while furiously and comically mirroring the other's brushing. The mise-en-scène of the apartment's boxy, claustrophobic domestic spaces suggests a protective but oppressive maternal space. This indicates Oskar's identification with the maternal as an affectionate but somewhat overwhelming connection that in turn threatens to assimilate him, thus provoking Oskar's romanticisation of his father as erotic object, masculine role model and symbol of escape. Oskar's eventual separation from his mother in Alfredson's film marks a more tender, less blameful Oedipal trajectory in which he attempts, and fails to reconnect with the masculine paternal (his estranged father and the school's gym teacher Mr. Avila) as a source of identification. Before leaving with Eli, Oskar peers in on his mother sleeping – her face now fully obscured by bed sheets.

The relationship between Eli and Oskar in Alfredson's film can also be read as a normative one (regardless of Eli's vampirism). Eli appears as a darkly attractive female figure who masculinises the initially feminine Oskar. Outwardly she looks the same age as Oskar, despite her revelation that she has 'been twelve years old for a long time...' and she provides a heteronormative beard for the couple's relationship. Whereas both film adaptations foreground Eli's/Abby's vampirism as the couple's

central stumbling block, Lindqvist's novel presents Eli's maleness as its central narrative problem. Alfredson's masking of the novel's paedophilic content, and its refusal to explicitly discuss Eli's castration, similarly avoids such implications in the older male vampire Eli's grooming of a twelve year old boy. Yet some reviews of Alfredson's film caught a whiff of childhood abuse⁹. While praising the film's artistic merit, one particularly right-wing, Catholic blogger, 'Austin', whose online blog 'The Art of Apologetics' prides itself on offering alternative views on mainstream film and literature, comments that: 'the point of view of the movie is that of a pedophile [sic] and as such the movie is sick'. But Austin even suggests that the film's presentation of 'sex offenders' indicates behavioural traits that can be recognised in order to protect children from harm. Eli's masquerade as an 'innocent' girl is paralleled with sexual predators who use online chat rooms to 'groom' young victims while pretending to be a young person, sometimes swapping gender identity. The blogger concludes that the first film shows that 'sexual perpetration is repetitive' (Friday 17 April, 2009 *The Art of Apologetics*), in that Eli (the abused) effectively becomes the abuser in her seduction of the younger Oskar.

In Alfredson's film the resemblance between Håkan and Oskar is foregrounded. Oskar's vengeful tree stabbing is juxtaposed with Håkan's first on-screen murder, linking his violent acts to Oskar's desires. A montage of close ups shows Håkan preparing the various paraphernalia

for his first abduction. He successfully abducts and ties up a young man in the nearby icy wood. Backlit by distant streetlights, Håkan is silhouetted in long shot as he strings his victim upside down from a branch before slitting his captive's throat, letting the steaming blood pour out into a readied funnel in order to catch the fluid. The distant barking of a dog becomes louder and it enters the frame furiously barking at the fumbling Håkan. In his haste, he knocks over the container, emptying the blood into the white snow.

A cut to Oskar in close up parallels Håkan's preparation with his own, as the young boy is shown concealing a knife as he prepares to leave his apartment. A mid-shot then shows him in the forecourt of the apartment blocks, lit by the yellowish lights of the apartment and pans left as he walks to face some apparently unseen assailant. Oskar calls out, 'What are you staring at? Are you staring at me?' as if he is threatening to defend himself. As the camera continues its movement, the 'assailant' is revealed to be a tree stump covered with stab marks, which Oskar has inflicted during previous visits. He continues to threaten the inanimate trunk, beginning to stab at its flank, crying out threats of 'Scream! Squeal!' in a ritual that suggests he is repeating the same words that Conny's gang have used on him. Oskar stops momentarily, spinning around as if disturbed by another presence. The camera pans quickly to the right to reveal a climbing frame on which stands Eli, who has witnessed Oskar's staging of his fantasy. The juxtaposition of these scenes of interrupted

violence clearly parallels the two and also works to suggest that Oskar will take the place of an old and weary Håkan as Eli's next companion. But without the novel's open presentation of Håkan's erotic predilection for young boys or the explicit representation of castration, Eli's erotic relationship with both humans is depicted as straight. Yet it still remains to be seen whether the move towards the implicit retains a subversive edge which may arguably render it all the more transgressive in its evocation of an *unspecified* queerness.

6.3 Oblique Otherness: Art House Horror

Let the Right One In clearly signals its *art horror* intentions, taking on the tropes of the art film set out by David Bordwell in *The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice* (1979). Arguing that 'art cinema motivates its narratives by two principles, realism and authorial expressivity', Bordwell observes that the genre typically features episodic narratives and loosens the chain of 'cause and effect' (99), while often presenting psychological traumas that stem from 'moral dilemmas' and 'personal crises'. Whereas Hollywood cinema resolves such problems with narrative closure, within art cinema they are often (in an appropriate pun) 'left dangling' (99).

Joan Hawkins (2000) champions 'art horror's' potential to highlight the tensions within the art film form and its valorization as a 'higher genre'. She describes the paracinematic movement which celebrates the study of trash and cult cinema in the same regard as the canon of worthy cinema

often attributed to academic study. In particular she considers the stylized ellipses of films such as *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, GE 1919), *Vampyr* (Carl Dreyer, GE 1932) and *Les yeux sans visage* (Georges Franju, FR/IT 1960). Hawkins points out that art horror's potential provides:

the best vantage point from which to study the cracks that seem to exist everywhere in late-twentieth century 'sacralized' film culture. Precisely because it plays so relentlessly on the body, horror 'low' elements are easy to see. (28)

In this sense, then Hawkins' definition of art horror's combination of the suggestive and the explicit corporeal lends itself well to a study of *Let the Right One In*. Notwithstanding the first film's coy bloodletting, for the most part shot at a distance or in suggestive shadow, *Let the Right One In* does indeed employ the metaphorical style of art cinema which, as William Paul suggests, is 'more metaphorical...more open to the exegetical analysis of the academic industry.' (1995: 32). Art film can be recognised for its visualising of metaphor, the foregrounding of suggestion and the privileging of the implicit over the explicit. Though the art film's realism and adult appeal leads art horror in the direction of transgressive sexuality, and its horror directs it to violence and trauma, it remains somewhat oblique and open to interpretation.

In his analysis of *Nosferatu*, itself an unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's 1893 novel *Dracula*, Thomas Elsaesser discusses the implied homosexuality of Count Orlok (Max Schreck) the film's central vampire figure, but also sees Murnau's own homosexuality as 'crucial to his films'

notably in his reading of *Nosferatu* as a 'tale of love, longing and guilt and self-abjection' (2001: 13). Elsaesser argues that 'vampires in the movies are usually bisexual' and Murnau's is no exception. Both Murnau's own sexuality and the Weimar cinema's theme of 'damaged German masculinity' (13) are said to encourage queer interpretations of *Nosferatu*.¹⁰

Elsaesser argues that *Nosferatu*, though not explicitly homosexual, strongly registers the ambiguous sexual attraction between Orlok, his human 'slave' Knock (Murnau's version of Stoker's Renfield) and Thomas Hutter (the film's version of Stoker's Jonathan Harker played by Gustav Von Wangenheim). Although the film maintains the novel's erotic connection between the vampire and Ellen (Greta Schröder, portraying Stoker's Mina) throughout, it is undercut by the implication of homosexuality between the Count and Knock which Elsaesser sees as 'the homosocial story of Thomas being befriended by Knock, whereupon the older man introduces his friend to the very "experienced" queen'. Dyer (1990) observes that Orlok is visualised very much as the Weimar 'queen' figure or *Tante* (auntie), replete with velvet smoking cap, long draping gowns and an imperious demeanour that casts both Harker and Renfield as more masculine working class *Buben* (boys) (35)¹¹. *Nosferatu's* unauthorised adoption of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* saw the production company sued by Stoker's surviving widow Florence, who demanded that many of the prints and negatives of Murnau's film be destroyed prior to a

settlement in 1925. In 'Vampyres, Ghosts and Demons' (2008) Mark Le Fanu also highlights the many departures of Carl Theodore Dreyer's 1932 *Vampyr* from Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) that leave the moving image versions as what he terms 'pseudo-adaptations'. While *Nosferatu* and *Vampyr* can be seen as interpretations of original literary forms by other 'authors', *Let the Right One In* undergoes its translation from book to screenplay at the hands of its original author.

Due to its art film strivings, Alfredson's moral treatment of vampirism and murder becomes suitably complicated (notably in the differing monstrosity of Eli and Håkan). The film also remains oblique in its presentation of its characters' motivations and origins, blurring the line between Oskar's desire for revenge and Eli's desire to live. The film's final images of Oskar leaving Blackeberg on a desolate train, with Eli apparently hidden in his luggage, also appear fittingly metaphoric of a journey into the afterlife. Yet it remains even more elusive in its references to Eli's gender, castration and the homoerotic feelings between its two protagonists.

Most significantly, Alfredson's omission of the novel's explicit representation of Eli's castration from the first film obviates the shame Oskar feels about his homosexual feelings for his friend. By reducing Eli's revealed castration to an oblique, single, ambiguous shot of a scar, the film allows her to remain female in the spectator's understanding. Instead of functioning as a grotesque reminder of Eli's castrated male genitals

(and his birth as a vampire) the scar becomes a more ambiguous signifier which works to counter the identification of Eli as a homosexual male.

Lindqvist insists on the difficulty of transposing the novel's portrayal of the love between Oskar and Eli onto film:

It's more difficult for [Oskar] to accept that Eli is a boy, but...he has to be with Eli no matter what – monster, male. There is a message in the story that...love conquers everything. And of course this degree of love conquers all is absent from the movie. (Bochenski: 8)

Consequently many viewers have interpreted the relationship between Eli and Oskar as a heterosexual teen romance. Andrew Schenker's review of *Let the Right One In* describes Eli as 'the new girl at his apartment complex' who 'feeds on blood' and declares that it is this 'bloodlust [...] what links that young couple'. He concludes that the film's treatment of their relationship is somewhat anodyne rather than transgressive: 'a near naked spooning between the two pre-teens is cute rather than indecent' (Schenker, 2008). However, other reviewers, such as Anthony Quinn make allowances for the film's ambiguous treatment of gender, hinting at its plot revelations that parallel the film's elusiveness, reading the film 'as a metaphor of inchoate sexuality [with a] tension between knowing and not knowing' (*The Independent*, Friday 10th April, 2009) further echoing the tropes of the art film.

6.4 Castrating the *queer* and its effects.

Steven Neale summarises that the horror film is 'centrally concerned with the facts and the effects of difference' (1980: 43-4), the

difference between the genders and the difference between the monstrous 'Other' and the human 'Us'. For Neale it is the very 'problematic of castration that underpins the horror film' (44) and its representation of these differences. Peter Hutchings counters that the horror genre's predilection for all things castrated has been over-estimated:

One obvious problem with focusing on castration as horror's key problematic, the issue with which it is supposed to engage, is that, in terms of its narratives, horror is a remarkably castration-free zone [...] in literal terms, it is barely there at all. (2004: 64-5)

Hutchings criticises the symbolic interpretation of 'blindings, decapitations, limb dismemberments and the removal of teeth' as an indicator of 'manufacturing significance [in criticism of the genre] rather than discovering it' (2004: 65). Effectively he calls for a rejection of psychoanalytic readings of symbolic castration, enacting a castration of castration, if you will, within horror studies, championing instead a focus on literal scenes of actual castration. While the recent releases *Hostel II* (Roth, US 2007) and *Teeth* (Lichtenstein US, 2007) continue to add graphic depictions of penile dismemberment to the horror genre¹², in Alfredson's film and more so in Reeves' remake both castration *and* homosexuality seem 'barely there at all'.

I want to suggest that *Let the Right One In* provides evidence of a horror film that considers both literal *and* symbolic castration. The castration of castration has severe repercussions for any queer readings of Alfredson's film. Reading Eli as a girl (and therefore, as Freud would have it, always

already castrated) means that both the castration and the queerness explicit in a homosexual relationship are relegated to mere spectral suggestion rather than being grounded in the film's brutal 'reality'. The treatment of Eli's wound corresponds to the Freudian interpretation of the castration complex as a method of comprehending sexual difference in the subject's relation to another. Whether the victim is a castrated girl or boy, sexual difference does indeed seem to be marked out. On the one hand, the gay spectator can engage with a normative, Freudian reading of phallic difference existing between boy and girl and, on the other, he can recognise a difference from heterosexual norms in his identification with Oskar and Eli's own shared (homo)sexuality, an identification that becomes associated with feminine passivity.

Laplanche and Pontalis summarise Freud's definition of castration anxiety as a complex caused by the infantile subject's attempts to resolve differences between the sexes:

The phantasy of castration [...] is produced in response to the child's puzzlement over the anatomical difference between the sexes (presence or absence of the penis): the child attributes this difference to the fact of the girl's penis having been cut off. (2004: 56)

In *The Sexual Theories of Children* (1908) Freud outlines the 'inestimable value' that the penis has for the male child in understanding sexual difference,

already in childhood the penis is the leading erotogenic zone and the chief auto-erotic object; and the boy's estimate of its value is logically reflected in his inability to imagine a person like himself without this essential constituent. ([1908], 1991: 193)

In *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year Old Boy* (1909), Freud focuses on a patient he calls Little Hans who, aged five, developed a phobia initially described as a fear of being bitten by a white horse. This was later elaborated into anxieties about horses falling down and, eventually, a fear of large animals and vehicles. Freud's study of the discussions between Hans and his father, who plays an integral part in the study, traces the phobia to castration anxiety. This is represented in a 'series of interchangeable substitutions' (90) whereby the castrating object (for Freud, the father) is re-imagined in anxiety-provoking symbols, such as large animals. In summary, Freud suggests that the father is the imagined perpetrator of castration; the boy surrenders his erotic desire for the mother, whom he understands to be castrated, as a result of the father's confirmation that girls do not possess a penis. Later the boy disavows any castrating threat posed by the father, believing instead that he will eventually possess a 'larger' penis, and the phallic power attributed to it, handed down by the father. In this case study Freud also outlines the importance of the genital zone, particularly the penis, for homosexuals:

The high value set on the penis by the homosexual male seals his fate. They cannot dispense with a penis in the person who is to excite them to sexual intercourse and so...they attach their libido to 'the woman with a penis', the youth whose appearance is decidedly feminine. Homosexuals are thus people for whom the erogenous significance of their own genitalia makes it impossible to manage without a sexual object corresponding to their own person. ([1909]. 2002: 90-91)

In 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood' (1910) Freud

later argues that the responses to the trauma of castration anxiety differ *between* the sexes. The signifier of sexual difference between the not-castrated boy and the already-castrated girl:

when a male child first turns his curiosity to the riddles of sexual life [he understands] that it could be missing in other people whom he feels he resembles so much [and he eventually comprehends that] little girls had a penis, but it was cut off and in its place left a wound. ([1910] 1989: 460)

Barbara Creed reinterprets Freud's analysis of the Little Hans case, focusing on both the psychoanalyst's and the father's role in asserting the castrating function of paternity. Creed challenges Freud's deliberate avoidance of the role that the mother plays in the infantile subject's formulation of his phobias, drawing attention to the discussion between mother and child which clearly posits her, at the very least, as the initiator of the castrating threat¹³. Becoming aware that Hans had begun touching his penis, his mother threatens him with castration stating, 'If you do that, I shall send for Dr A. to cut off your widdler. And then what will you widdle with?' (1993: 88). Indeed, Creed points out that Hans does indeed attribute the possession of a larger (horse-like) penis to the mother, and understands *her* penis as different, with the potential to castrate. According to Creed, Freud actively encourages Hans' father to inform the child that 'his mother and all other female beings had no widdlers at all' (1993: 93), but as she concludes, 'difference is not the same as absence...Hans knows – quite rightly – that women do have widdlers, but that they are different. They are retractable, mysterious and deadly' (88-104).

Developing his work on castration anxiety in relation to the Wolf Man case in *The History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918) Freud later summarises that,

The threats or hints of castration he had received had actually emanated from women, but this did not delay the end result for long. In the end it was his father at whose hands he feared castration. On this point heredity triumphed over accidental experience; in the pre-history of the human race it was certainly the father who carried out castration as a punishment, subsequently reducing it to the practice of circumcision. ([1918], 2002: 284)

Throughout the Wolf Man study Freud claims that the anxiety brought on by the patient's witnessing of his parents' copulation as a child (from which he initially deduces his mother's castration) results in the recurring dream of the wolves which threaten to devour the patient. Freud concludes that the patient's simultaneous love for and fear of the father as the victim of and exacter of symbolic castration eventually indicates the replacement of paternal identification with a homosexual desire for the father. But this desire is subsequently repressed and replaced by a fear of castration that the father now symbolically poses.

The Wolf Man's libidinal desire for his father is repressed into the unconscious driven by the subject's fear of his own castration and later transformed into an animal phobia: 'his latest sexual objective, the passive attitude towards his father had succumbed to repression; fear of his father in the form of the wolf-phobia, had taken its place' ([1918],

2002: 240). To reiterate, Freud suggests that the suppressed negative Oedipus complex, his 'wish for coitus with the father, that is for satisfaction such as his mother had experienced' (240) allows for a masochistic identification with his 'castrated' mother during the dream. While perceiving a castrating threat, the Wolf Man also felt sympathy with his father upon interpreting the 'loss' of his father's penis in penetration as castration. The patient 'abhorred the very idea of castration' he was also 'prepared to accept it' of himself, consoled by an acceptance of 'femaleness as a substitute' for it ([1918], 2002: 283).

For Freud, castration revolves around a threat to remove the penis. Thus its presence symbolically offers the subject completion. Freud's later return to the topic in 'Inhibition, Symptom and Fear' (1926) is coupled with a reinterpretation of both the Little Hans and the Wolf Man case (of which the latter will prove important to depictions of Oskar's father). In it, Freud maintains that 'castration is at the source of the anxiety that produces repression' in a reversal of his former theory, declaring that it is anxiety that causes repression and not vice versa. Reconsidering both cases, Freud concludes that 'the fear in animal phobias [in Little Hans being bitten by a horse, in the Wolf Man case the subject's wolf-phobia] is the ego's fear of castration' ([1926], 2003: 176). In this sense I want to suggest that the masking that in Alfredson's and then to Reeves' film versions is in fact a form of repression that attempts to turn away the novel's transgressive elements - infantile sexuality, homosexuality and

paedophilia - a repression which ultimately fails bringing about a 'return of repressed' (Wood, 1985: 204) sexual energies.

In 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (1958) Lacan clearly differentiates the penis from the phallus, the ever-elusive signifier of authority within the symbolic order that defines language, society and subjectivity: 'The phallus is not a phantasy...nor is as such an object...it is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolizes.' ([1958], 2001: 218). Lacan argues further that both men and women are subject to symbolic castration. All subjects experience this trauma, he persists, precisely because 'the relation of the subject to the phallus is established without a regard to the anatomical difference of the sexes' (218), though they may experience it differently. Unlike the Freudian account, which dwells on genital castration, this 'symbolic castration' is of the 'imaginary phallus' and threatens not the physical body but the subject's sense of self. Lacan defines castration as the symbolic lack of an imaginary object and thus it 'is insoluble by any reduction to biological givens' ([1958], 2001: 216). For him the phallus represents the painful break in the binary relationship between mother and child. The child understands that the (symbolically lacking) mother desires something beyond the child himself, the imaginary phallus. As a consequence, Lacan writes, that the child attempts to become the phallus for the mother: 'If the desire of the mother is the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire' (221). Later the child is forced to relinquish this desire when he

perceives that his father possesses the phallus. The little girl seeks a phallic surrogate from the father in an imagined baby, the boy enters into a competition with the father to *possess* the phallus in order to become whole. But Lacan argues that the phallus is an elusive signifier and can never be truly 'possessed...' (221) subjects merely 'seem' to possess it.

Lacanian theory understands the castration complex as the moment in which the child first perceives that the 'Other' is not complete, and this is very much the case in the dynamic between Oskar and Eli. Oskar attempts *to seem to have* the phallus (via his phallically charged strike back at the bullies during the frozen lake sequence) having been previously feminised by his 'lack' (of masculine power and of father), and Eli (despite being symbolized by his lack) eventually *becomes* the phallus for Oskar at the film's end, compartmentalized as an 'object' of luggage belonging to his daytime keeper. One could argue that Lindqvist's novel seems to revel in the Freudian play of an anatomically focused castration anxiety, while Alfredson's film takes a symbolic Lacanian approach.

Considering Peter Hutchings' criticism of the application of both Freudian and Lacanian theories to films that feature symbolic castration over any actual instances of it, Justin Ponder (2008) warns against a slippage between the two. Ponder's article focuses on the final sequence from Eli Roth's *Hostel II* (2007). Here the film's victim Beth (Lauren German) turns on her torturer Stuart (Roger Bart), a character who Ponder understands

to have been already been figuratively castrated in his emasculation by his more powerful wife, and castrates him literally. Ponder argues that Roth's film represents the potency of the non-phallic power belonging to the 'castral' body, that of the 'already-castrated' subject who refuses to give in to castration anxiety and thus is free to access the power associated with the phallus. Challenging the power of the penis, Ponder suggests that the spectacularly visualised scenes of literal castration such films such as *Hostel II* and *Teeth*, comic in their outrageousness, hark back to instances of real-life castration performed as a means of accessing the higher social status and purer consciousness unbound by sexual desire.

Historically, Gary Taylor points out, the meaning of castration was not, as Freud suggests, penectomy (the removal of the penis) but, instead, orchietomy or gelding (the removal of the testicles) as the source of potency:

Freud's theories about castration anxiety [...] can hardly be an accurate description of 'patriarchy' because they misrepresent almost the entire history of castration and almost the entire history of patriarchy. (2000: 60)

Taylor goes on to point out the cultural privilege of medieval eunuchs, credited with a higher plain of consciousness and installed in the upper echelons of court society. As unthreatening individuals, they were often trusted courtiers, relaxing the boundaries between men and women.

Bearing this in mind, Ponder argues that in accepting one's literal

castration it becomes possible to deny one's symbolic castration. Such a subject can achieve empowerment via a non-phallic authority:

The literally castrated subject may lack nothing and enjoy fullness, ceasing sexual desires, eliminating the final threat psychoanalysis can levy against it [...] rejecting the penis, the subject forsakes the penile desires that make one subject to others, the Law of Desire that proves one has been symbolically castrated by the Other, is disavowed. (2008)

6.5 The Castrating of Castration.

In both Lindqvist's novel and Alfredson's film, Eli's masquerade as a girl is largely motivated by castration (here a combination of penectomy and oriechtomy). In Freudian terms, the sexual difference between the two protagonists is marked by Eli's lack of male genitals. However, as Eli repeatedly points out to Oskar, he is 'not a girl'. In Lindqvist's novel, Eli is clearly a boy, in Alfredson's film, Eli's gender remains undisclosed and in Reeves' *Let Me In*, Abby's gender remains female. In order to determine whether Eli's castration defines his/her gender and, further still, whether it symbolises a lack of phallic authority, I want to compare the three texts' respective treatment of castration and gender difference.

In Lindqvist's novel, the horror of castration is represented largely via the perspectives of both Oskar and Eli as adolescent *boys*. Oskar's early understanding of female genitalia and difference is expressed with disgust and confusion, with descriptions that have connotations of castration. Thumbing through pornographic magazines, he comments on the naked female body as a supposedly pre-castrated subject:

In the middle of the bushy hair between her thighs there was a strip of pink flesh, with a groove down there. *How do you get in there?* He knew the words from talk he had heard, graffiti he had read. Cunt. Hole. Labia. But it wasn't a hole. Only that groove. (2004: 109)

Though Oskar's description clearly associates the vagina with a forbidding otherness, rather than a threatening hole which explicitly references lack, her 'groove' suggests the presence of a scar. However, the description Oskar offers of Eli's genitals, after witnessing her undress towards the end of the novel, suggests a clear difference between Eli's literal castration and the female body as 'already castrated'. Eli is described as a youthful androgyne, a 'sapling' that contains no visible presence of a scar, indicative of any trauma:

Between the legs she had...nothing. No slit, no penis. Just smooth surface. (2004: 383-4)

Eli's previous associations with 'nothingness' may evoke connotations of 'lack'; however, the lack of any scar further distances the threat of castration and his doll-like smoothness instead suggests an asexuality or a transcendence of gender. Even before Eli's genitals are revealed, his continued avoidance of gender categorisation foreshadows this association with '[I'm] nothing', in the sense that, having already been castrated, Eli is uncastrateable and, as such, seemingly escapes the limits of being only one of two sexes. Moreover Eli perhaps is the physical representation of a pre-genital omnipotence – a bloodsucking Peter Pan. As a vampire, Eli exhibits a hyperpotency regardless of her gender and, as such, castration allows him/her *to seem* to possess phallic authority without having a penis.

The depictions of Eli/Abby in all three versions do not associate him/her with phallic imagery (there are no outsized canines or use of penetrative weapons). Eli is associated with the phallus by the very absence of the penis which it symbolises. Can Eli be understood then to be a subject who has come to terms with his/her symbolic lack?

In comparison to the aforementioned pivotal scene from Lindqvist's novel in which Eli climbs into bed with Oskar, the dialogue from the same scene transposed into Alfredson's film is shortened. It removes Oskar's alarm at the implication that Eli is a boy and, consequently, also Eli's elaboration from 'not a girl' to 'not a child. Not old. Not a boy' which, in the novel, are set out as multiple refusals. As Eli lies behind Oskar in his bed, lit by moonlight, the pair are tightly framed in medium close up.

Encouraged by Eli, Oskar does not turn to face his friend, but instead lies horizontally in the frame, facing front, his eyes closed throughout most of their conversation. Eli, propped up by her elbow, remains in central focus and it is her expressions and reactions that the viewer is encouraged to identify with via this positioning. Having just lost Håkan, Eli's mournful expression is clear to the viewer, but not to Oskar who remains unaware of her loss (in all senses at this point). Her agitation is clear as she sits up at Oskar's proposal, 'Will you be my girlfriend?' before replying, 'Oskar...I'm not a girl...I'm nothing'. This more succinct response encourages the audience to assume Eli's aversion is in reference to her vampirism, another piece of privileged narrative information that the

viewer possesses. However, as the camera racks focus between the two Oskar's reply is telling; rather than pursuing Eli's curious answer, he does not open his eyes or become startled but indifferently comments, 'Oh...Will you go steady with me or not?' This unconditional offer, if potentially progressive in terms of its indifference to Eli's gender or the social reprisals that it may bring, seems to reference her vampirism rather than her sexual difference.

It remains to be seen whether this 'nothingness' can be construed as possessing the same transgressive empowerment in the implied uncastrateability of Eli or, indeed, whether it reconfigures the same disempowerment symbolised in the female subject's 'lack'. The smooth surface of Eli's genitals described in Lindqvist's novel symbolises a 'smoothing over' of the truly traumatic castration that is eventually uncovered via a mutually shared flashback between Oskar and Eli, whereby the very physical elements of the act of castration are grotesquely elaborated. The novel's conceit of connecting minds allows Oskar to experience Eli's memories via detailed flashbacks, in which he witnesses Eli's childhood in a medieval European village as a young, feminine looking boy. In one significant flashback, brought about by a shared kiss, Oskar experiences the traumatic moment of Elias' castration and his conversion into a vampire at the hands of a cannibalistic vampire nobleman. With Oskar taking Eli's place in flashback, he experiences his own symbolic castration via this traumatic repetition. Oskar experiences

the jouissance-filled ecstasy implied in the traumatic passivity of being literally (but via flashback, symbolically) castrated and partially devoured:

Cold fingers grasp Oskar's penis, pulling on it. He opens his mouth to scream 'Noooo!' but the rope prevents him from forming the word, all that comes out is 'Aaaaa!'... Then, the pain.

A red-hot iron forced into his groin, gliding up through his stomach, his chest corroded by a cylinder of fire that passed right through his body, and he screams, screams so his eyes are filled with tears and his body burns.

...opens his eyes and sees....the bowl the man is holding in his hands, the bowl he brings to his mouth and how he drinks...

...More time...Endless time. Imprisoned. The man bites. And drinks. Bites. And drinks. Then the glowing rod moves up into his head and everything turns pink as he jerks his head up from the rope and falls...(2004: 389-91)

These explicitly elaborate, and somewhat queer (in that everything 'turns pink'), flashbacks of Eli's castration from Lindqvist's novel are replaced in Alfredson's film by a more elliptical montage of extreme close-ups of Eli's bloodied eyes staring into Oskar's. The departure from the flashback allows Alfredson to intercut between the eyes of the younger and a seemingly older version of Eli (Susanne Ruben) to those of Oskar, further confirming Eli as a centuries-old *female* vampire which works to avoid homoerotic implications.

Later after Eli's entrance to Oskar's apartment is permitted, she stands bloodied before her guilt-wracked friend. In tight close ups Alfredson cuts between Oskar's blonde cleanness and Eli's dark bleeding eyes. Recognizing the look of horror on Oskar's face, Eli appeals for

understanding: 'You're just like me, you would kill if you had to'. Oskar's staunch denial is quickly rebutted by Eli's recollection of his fantasies to stab his tormentors in the film's opening scenes. With that he relents as Eli pleads with him to 'Be me, for a little while'.



Fig 64.

In close up, Eli lowers herself over Oskar's face, her tangled sticky hair falling down over her brow (Fig. 64) As the focus softens, Eli's eyes, still streamed with blood stare down into Oskar's as a cut shows his own stare back up at hers in extreme close up, he shuts his eyelids as the shot fades to black suggesting a lapse of his consciousness. A cut to Eli, rising slightly, now shows Ruben's older, wizened version of Eli with a careworn, ancient face. Via these intercuts, Alfredson implies that the audience (but not necessarily Oskar) is seeing Eli for the very first time, in her true age. A cut to Oskar, later by himself in his living room as Eli showers, provides a clear jump forward in time that conceals any elaboration on the shared experiences or memories. The oblique editing of such sequences clearly indicates Alfredson's intentions to adopt an art film aesthetic, masking homosexuality with ellipses. According to

Lindqvist, such indirectness offers a 'transcendence of genre and gender' (Bochenski: 88) and can therefore be read as more 'affirmative'. Yet this same strategy virtually blots out the novel's sexually transgressive content in Matt Reeves' version.

The scene in which Eli's genitals are revealed to both Oskar and the reader/viewer occurs similarly in all three variations of the narrative, but with increasing subtlety. Oskar puts on some music as he waits for the bloodied Eli to change in his mother's bedroom and, out of curiosity; he takes a peek through a crack in the door jam just as Eli undresses.

Lindqvist's novel delivers a detailed description of Oskar's glimpse at Eli's genital wound. More importantly, the gendered description of Eli after this point begins to become deliberately confused as Oskar's, and the reader's, view of Eli 'as girl' is questioned. In this transitional period, Eli exists, in Lindqvist's description, as both girl and boy. The novel's play on Oskar's previously forbidding description of the vagina as 'a groove' or 'dark hole' is punned on as Eli's gender change is likened to a change of needle on a record player, with the image of the vinyl disk being stopped and started again providing a symbolic gender change:

Eli...watched the LP's dark hole in the middle as if
hypnotized...pushed her finger on it so it came to a stop....
Eli quickly pulled his hand back and the record sped up, kept
turning. Oskar saw that his finger had left a damp imprint behind.
(2004: 391)

From this point Eli is referred to in the masculine gender by the novel's narrator, no such linguistic gender identification exists in Alfredson's film,

which, instead, refuses to label Eli and merely suggests something abnormal about his/her physical being. In both film adaptations Eli/Abby seemingly remains a girl. Oskar's/Owen's curious and embarrassed glimpse can be read in a typically Freudian sense to literalise the differences between the sexes marked out by castration.

The same scene in Alfredson's film, includes a brief shot/reverse/reaction shot, of Eli's lower torso and genital area as the dress is slipped on, highlighting Oskar's startled response. The flash cut lasts all of one second (Figs. 65-6), but is enough for the spectator to witness a seemingly abnormal physical difference or genital scarring. This fleeting view, as I have already stated, is not a definitive confirmation of Eli's gender, nor affirmation of castration (male or female), but it is enough to signify (some kind of) sexual difference. We may read Oskar's response as a typically Freudian scenario, in which the male subject recognises his difference from the female subject, via the 'fantasy' of castration rather than a literalising of it.



Fig 65.



Fig 66.

In recognising the significance of Eli's scar as castration, the novel emphasises the two protagonists' similarity. Failing to recognise this results in a rather more normative adaptation of the text. In *Let Me In* the revelatory scene remains intact, except that the reverse shot to the object of Owen's surprise gaze (Abby's naked torso) is completely removed. The cut away is *cut away* which suggests that Owen is shocked at his glimpse of Abby's *female* genitalia. The refusal to cut away (in all senses) masks a rejection of cutting/castration from the narrative. But again the question remains whether Reeves' refusal to visually elaborate works to render the scene more normative, or more subversive (or queer) in its greater elusiveness?

It is through the reinsertion of *castration* into Alfredson's film that homosexuality can be brought back into the equation. Subjecting the film to an extra-textual queer reading arguably makes the text richer, revealing layers of subtext that could be otherwise overlooked or misread.

In refusing to confirm Elias' previous gender as male, Alfredson's film omits the shame suffered by Oskar in Lindqvist's novel as a result of his homosexual feelings for his friend. Across the three adaptation of the narrative there are explicit references to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet's* balcony scene. The morning after Eli/Abby, having crept through Oskar's/Owen's bedroom window, spends the evening with him, Oskar/Owen wakes at sunrise to find that Eli/Abby has left with the impending dawn leaving him a note which is a direct quotation from the play: 'I must be gone and live, or stay and die'. The reference here works as a queer inversion of the gendered relationship from Shakespeare, clearly feminising Oskar/Owen in the role of a romanticised and abandoned female partner, in taking Eli's/Abby's male gender origins into consideration, the intimacy shared between the two becomes something that must be kept secret for fear of social reprisals.

Foregrounding castration allows for a queer reading of the combined text of the novel and Alfredson's film which discerns a conflation of gay male subjectivity with a shameful feminine passivity via both symbolic and literal castration. If Eli *is* a young gay male vampire, his frustration and shame with the femininity imposed upon him via castration becomes clear in his repeated protestations, 'I'm not a girl'. Lindqvist's text could suggest that he has taken on a masquerade of femininity in order to survive and avoid reprisals should he be revealed not as a vampire, but as a *gay male*. Eli effectively teaches Oskar to

accept and transcend the stigma of homosexual passivity, symbolised by castration, achieving self-mastery in his passivity. Oskar's baptism-like rebirth in the swimming pool, having been saved by Eli, can be read as the conclusive point in his negotiation of the culturally imposed feminine passivity. Oskar moves from isolated young boy to playing the Juliet to Eli's Romeo and finally is cast as passive victim in his symbolic drowning. I would argue that Oskar's coming of age is, in fact, a coming out story, whereby he experiences a traumatic 'shattering of the self' (Bersani, [1987], 2010: 24-5) by negotiating with phallic power (his 'hitting back' at his tormentors in the frozen lake sequence) and in his empowerment through a non-phallic passivity. Alfredson's film contains many motifs of reflection, subjective fragility and shattering. The shots of Oskar that bookend the film's main narrative visualise him mirrored in his bedroom window (see Fig. 67), 'ghosted' by a secondary reflection. The shots suggest Oskar as a pure reflection foreshadowing the appearance of Eli as his alter ego through the 'other' side of the window.



Fig 67.

The very fact that his image is cast in multiple reflections on the double layered window pane suggests both the potential fragility and compound nature of his subjectivity (and sexuality). This symbolic vulnerability is literalised in Oskar's near drowning in the swimming pool scene.

Alfredson's film and Reeves' film take a similar approach to their visualisation of the sequence. Both amplify the novel's partial description of Eli's rescue of Oskar as told from his semi-conscious perspective. In true art film form, the first film's concluding scenes are typically suggestive and, as Bordwell argues, are 'left dangling'.

To return to Hutchings' discussion of the slippage between literal and symbolic castration, the dénouement of *Let the Right One In* also offers both literal and metaphorical readings. Cornered and alone in the pool, Oskar is ordered to hold his breath under water for three minutes or have one of his eyes stabbed out. He is held under water by Conny's abusive brother as he struggles to break free, in medium close up the static camera lingers on Oskar's struggle beneath the surface, interspersed with several cuts to the younger members of the gang looking nervous at the seemingly inevitable outcome of this ordeal. A cut back to Oskar shows him appearing to lose consciousness. The shot stays with the submerged boy, while Eli's arrival, slaughter of the bullies and eventual rescue of Oskar take place out of frame. A muffled shattering of glass is heard and shards of glass can be seen behind the passive victim falling down from the surface of the water, accompanied by screams, distorted

by the water from this submerged position. The actions of Eli's horrific attack are then implied by the images of various kicking legs, disembodied arms and a decapitated head all of which float into the static medium shot at its edges, while Oskar remains unaware (Fig. 68). Eventually Eli's pale arm reaches down into the frame pulling Oskar out of the water as he comes round.



Fig 68.

Emerging from the pool, seemingly reborn, Oskar briefly sees Eli's eyes in an out-of-focus subjective close-up. The film then intercuts between Eli's and Oskar's eyes in tight close ups, suggesting a reconnection between the two. A high angle wide shot from the ceiling of the swimming pool briefly reveals the bloody massacre that Eli has left behind, and a cut to a mid shot shows the gang's sole remaining member traumatised at what has just occurred. Both Eli and Oskar are nowhere to be seen.

There is no doubting the effectiveness of this tension between showing and not showing (and knowing and not knowing) so beloved of horror fans. Using amplified sound, fragmented objects and movements in a static shot that teases its audience by refuses to explain all, Alfredson is

able to foreground some explicit gore and yet mask the full extent of the horror that Eli inflicts. So doing Alfredson continues the device of framing off reactions and events from Oskar's view. This creates both dramatic irony and a split identification between the two protagonists. Yet the visual effect also works to suggest that Eli's rescue of Oskar is but another fantasy, an extension of his vengeful tree-stabbing. Oskar's lapse into unconsciousness further supports the idea of Eli as a symbol of his repressed desires unleashed to wreak revenge as a psychic projection, a suggestion which perhaps encourages the viewer to question Eli's existence entirely.

The final sequence delivers a further ambiguity. A medium tracking shot reveals the interior of a train carriage in motion. As it pulls back through a corridor, the lighting is overexposed, a bright daylight almost blinding in comparison with the preceding nocturnal shots. The open window's billowing curtains sway in the wind, clearly indicative of a dream-like fantasy. The drifting camera pulls back through this bleached out palette and reveals Oskar seemingly alone in the carriage (Fig. 69). A conductor appears and stamps his ticket as the camera pulls out to a mid shot showing his few belongings and a wooden chest against which he tenderly rubs his finger in communication with Eli whom the audience presume is contained within.



Fig 69.

The film's ambiguity could actually lead the viewer to question Eli's existence at all throughout the film's event. Could Eli have existed as a symbolic projection of Oskar's repressed violent and sexual desire? If we regard Eli's existence as actual, then he can be argued to allow Oskar a channelling of the repressed anger originally visited on the tree. With the help of his friend, Oskar learns to stand up to his bullies and, more importantly, by coming to terms with the feminine masculine (which Eli represents), he accepts his own desire. However, although Oskar accepts Eli regardless of gender, he does so only in via an acceptable form of femininity, as Eli continues to look like a young girl, enabling them both to 'pass' and, in effect, Håkan's aging lies before him.

If we instead regard Eli as a fantastical projection of Oskar's repressed sexual and aggressive desires, the events in the pool and afterwards can be seen to represent Oskar's symbolic death. If Oskar drowns, then the otherworldly elements of his final train journey become emblematic of a journey beyond death. Eli's confined existence is symbolic of the

repression of Oskar's latent homosexuality which is projected onto a monstrous (yet sympathetic) 'Other', but nevertheless needs to remain hidden.

6.6 Daddy's Home: *Letting the Right One Slip (Back) In*

In 'Repression' (1915) Freud states that 'the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at distance, from the conscious' ([1915], 1953-66: 147). Robin Wood (1985) argues that the monstrous 'Other' figures from the genre operate as the 'return of the repressed' elements of society that are inimical to the dominant heteronormative culture. Such instances of repression clearly pertain to an analysis of *Let the Right One In*, in that Eli's 'Otherness' combines fear of castration, monstrous femininity, infantile sexuality, bisexuality/homosexuality and racial difference (in his dark haired Eastern European difference to blonde Oskar) collected in the figure of the vampire 'child'. But while I have argued that the repression of these transgressive elements (presented in an unequivocal form in Lindqvist's novel) is still present across the subsequent film versions' masking of homosexuality, I want to suggest that this masking inevitably fails, allowing homosexuality to slip back through.

Wood argues that the disreputability of the horror genre, as a lower form of entertainment, often results in a more effective way of lulling the censors to sleep, to allow challenging critiques of mainstream ideologies

to slip through almost unnoticed. Thus the genre's use of metaphor to confront issues of contention was indeed 'taken seriously' by Surrealist, art-film directors such as Luis Buñuel and Georges Franju (1985: 202-203). It seems fitting then that Alfredson's suggestive art-horror version of Lindqvist's tale follows this same knowingly surrealist bent. But whereas the power of surrealism lies in the foregrounding of 'the unconscious, dreams and the overthrow of repression' (Wood, 1985: 203), I would argue that a more subtle representation of homosexuality occurs in Alfredson's film, particularly in the ambiguous depiction of Oskar's father Erik's (Henrik Dahl) sexuality.

Both the novel and Alfredson's film suggest that Oskar's father's alcoholism and depression is a trigger for the breakdown of his marriage. Lindqvist's novel also mentions his lack of paternal drive. In one passage Oskar describes his father's posture in an old photo taken just after he was born, 'Next to his mum was his dad, looking uncomfortable in his suit. He looked like he didn't know what to do with his hand and had let them fall stiffly by his side... A man who was happy to be a father but who didn't know how to act.' However the fact that both parents never remarried is treated with enough uncertainty to suggest other underlying and unspoken issues, as demonstrated when Oskar's mother brushes off his questions almost ashamedly: 'It just didn't work out'... They had both used the same words' (2004: 68). The vagueness surrounding the

reasons for this split allows for a number of readings, including the possibility of his father's repressed homosexuality.

In Alfredson's film, before visiting his father, Oskar is shown in the back seat of a travelling car, playing with a small red figure of an American Indian, a symbol of marginalised masculinity that may anticipate his father. In one sequence in his father's kitchen, Oskar is shown trying on his father's red fleece jacket, which he continues to wear upon each visit. He rises from his seat and grabs it off a chair, looking back at his father sheepishly as if to check that this is okay. His father notices and nods at him in response, while music swells lyrically on the soundtrack; the very same 'Love Theme' (composed by Johan Söderqvist) that is a recognisable romantic leitmotif, now recurs in this private moment of pleasure for both Oskar and his father and thus eroticises it. Oskar smiles and pulls on his father's fleece, pulling it up to his face he takes a deep breath and inhales his father's scent. This moment of erotically imbued paternal worship occurs out of sight of Oskar's object of affection – his father has turned away. This suggests that there is something to hide in this feeling. Wearing his father's clothes suggests Oskar's desire to be with and be like his father, which further indicates a collapse of masculine identification and desire. The same eroticising of paternal masculinity is evident in the original passage from Lindqvist's novel in which Oskar's romantic abandon is clearly felt:

His dad was the very image of an adult as he now stretched out his broad arms and Oskar fell into them. His dad smelled different

from all of the people in the city. In his torn Helly Hansen vest fixed with Velcro there was always the same mixture of wood, paint, metal and, above all, oil. These were the smells, but Oskar didn't think of them in that way. It was all simply 'Dad's smell'. He loved it and drew in a deep breath through his nose as he pressed his face against his dad's chest. (2004: 250)

In an interview the director remarks on American audience's readings of a scene in which the relationship between Oskar's father and his male neighbour, is understood as homosexual¹⁴. Disregarded by the director as erroneous readings of the character's deep depression, represented by his alcoholism, the scene in question can be paralleled with Eli's genital reveal shots in its elusive queerness, in that it avoids any definite answers as to the lingering glances that occur between the neighbour, Janne (Sören Källstigen), and Oskar's father. Anthony Quinn also argues: 'when his father introduces his live-in (male) friend to him [Oskar], he is unable to ask – because he doesn't really understand what's going on. The boy may be wise beyond his years, but he's not yet ready to have a conversation about his father being gay.' (2008).

The scene in question begins one evening when Oskar and his father's fire-lit game of Tic Tac Toe is interrupted by Janne. In close up, his two feet are shown pausing at the threshold of the doorway spilling a little of their dusting of snow onto the wooden floor (Fig. 70). This halt configures Janne as a vampire-like intruder who must be invited in by the father before he can enter. If this figure does indeed symbolise male

homosexuality, then it is one that is again paralleled with vampirism in terms of these cinematic conventions.



Fig. 70

After being invited in Janne replies, 'Good evening to you all' and the camera pans with him as he walks tentatively into the space shared between a disappointed Oskar and his father. The guest stands awkwardly over the pair, in a low angle shot, commenting: 'You look like you're having a grand old time.' Faking his pleasure in Oskar's presence, he sits down slowly and politely smiles before awkwardly breaking eye contact with the boy. Janne then slowly looks towards Oskar's father and says nothing but simply smiles. Looking crestfallen Oskar quietly pleads, 'Dad...it's your turn' as he watches his father retrieve a vodka bottle and two shot glasses from the nearby kitchen cupboard. His father replies with his back to his son, 'We have guests...'. The intruding neighbour comments suggestively, 'It's nice and cosy in here.' The pair drink in silence, their awkwardness increasing at the presence of the boy. A cut to a close up frames Oskar later in his bedroom, as he opens the note that Eli left by his bedside table the previous evening: 'I must go and live, or stay and die – Yours Eli'. It is at this painful moment, when Oskar realises

that he cannot be his father's erotic object that he decides to leave. His separation is self-imposed, sudden and final; we do not see his father again.

Interestingly, Lindqvist's novel includes a passage in which Oskar reminisces over evenings of his father's indulgent drinking, many of which led to him paying Oskar a drunken visit in bed. During these moments Oskar refers to his father as the 'werewolf', in terms of the changes brought on by his drunken self-loathing.

Oskar lay in bed waiting for the Werewolf. He knew exactly how it was going to go. He would come into Oskar's room and he would no longer be Dad. Just an alcohol-stinking, clumsy mess, all sentimental and needy. He never got violent or anything.

But what Oskar saw in his eyes at those times was absolutely the scariest thing he had ever seen. Then there was no trace of Dad left. Just a monster who had somehow crawled into Dad's body and taken control of it. The person his dad became when he drank had no connection to the person he was when he was sober. And so it was comforting to think about Dad being a werewolf. (2004: 282-3)

The novel represents Oskar caught in a choice between monstrous icons: the wolfman and the vampire. His description of his father as 'werewolf' is reminiscent of Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man, in which repressed desire for his father is argued to re-emerge in the form of frightening dreams of fierce wolves. The threatening father/wolf figure is created by the father's alcoholism in Lindqvist's novel – but his simultaneously threatening yet 'sentimental and needy' visitation also has sexual undercurrents of nightly visits that, in the novel, Oskar abhors countering

the film's suggestion of repressed desires for the father. It resonates further with Bersani's reconfiguration of Freud's reading of the Wolf Man's relationship with his father as a 'genealogy of gay love' discussed earlier in which 'the appeal of the muscular, mature male figure, the Gay Daddy is complexly tied up with the frisson of masochistic desire for the [...] castrating male father figure.' (1996: 112).

With Oskar's father's visitation as 'werewolf' omitted from Alfredson's film, the potential for homoerotic readings are increased by the visible warmth between the two. But in Reeves' remake, the divorcee father never appears on screen and is only heard in one short telephone conversation with his son. Any implication of his homosexuality is obliterated in this scene by the suggestion that he has moved in with a new girlfriend, 'Cindy', who is heard answering Owen's phone call. Reeves' presentation of absent, but caring, paternity is more positive than his demonizing of single motherhood and, more importantly, his refusal to ambiguously depict Abby's gender, clearly encourages a re-inscription of heteronormative values.

Conclusion

Alfredson's art-house influenced treatment masks the novel's explicit transgressive elements and its elliptical conventions operate as a form of *textual repression*. Conversely, the excess of obliqueness throughout the film also provides opportunities for the very same repressed energies to

bleed back through when competently read by those with extraneous knowledge of its textual origins or by affecting a queer interpretation of its many subtexts. Further still, the film's masking of castration, homosexuality and paedophilia reveals just enough to warrant investigation or reinterpretation. While both films' presentation of the climactic pool rescue suggest a bloody massacre without showing it, it is Alfredson's version that, via its subliminal shot of Eli's castrated genitals, piques enough interest to reassess the film's subtleties. While the refusal to show can encourage alternative interpretations, showing *too little* can also work to reinstate repression. Reeves' film's refusal to reveal Eli's scar as a signifier of queerness works not only to mask any transgression; but cuts it completely from the text.

Fittingly, both Alfredson's and Reeves' films end with the train journey scene in which Eli/Abby is presumed to be secreted away in Oskar's/Owen's luggage. Whether we accept either reading, of Eli's/Abby's existence or non-existence, Oskar's/Owen's final journey may not actually appear to be as promising as the journey away from the constraints of civilisation seems to suggest. Though they escape together, this coda is far from jouissance-filled: Oskar/Owen has merely replaced Håkan/'The Father' and is still marginalised and Eli/Abby, as a symbol of femininity, continues to be associated with shame and boxed in. Repression remains intact.

¹ Oskar's incontinent leakiness can be paralleled with Carrie's menstrual seepage; both adolescents have divorced parents and are often verbally insulted and both Carrie and Oskar are compared to the 'filthiness' of pigs with Oskar's bullies who perpetually refer to him as 'Piggy'.

² Differences from novel to both film adaptations are outlined in the table in the Appendix.

³ The vampire metaphor has represented the parasitic aristocracy and capitalism, the ancient past reaching into the present, exotic Europeanism and the threat it poses towards Western (particularly American) culture. (Dyer, 1988: 54)

⁴ *Absolutely Positive* (Peter Adair, US 1991) and in *And the Band Played On* (William Friedkin, US 1992) and *And the Band Played on: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic* (1987) contain 'spectacular images of the abject, the dead who dare to speak and sin and walk abroad, the undead with AIDS' (Hanson 1991: 324).

⁵ The **British Board of Film Classification** outlines 15-rated content including: 'Strong threat and menace...unless sadistic or sexualised.' and nudity 'may be allowed in a sexual context but without strong detail...in a non-sexual or educational context.' In terms of violence, scene 'The strongest gory images are unlikely to be acceptable. Strong sadistic or sexualised violence is also unlikely to be acceptable.'

⁶ The Swedish equivalent certificate 11 set by the **Statens mediaråd (Swedish Media Council)** is set aside for films that, due to their graphic content are 'not rated' and as such immediately obtain a 15. The guidelines recommend that 'films or scenes must not be approved if they are liable to have a brutalizing effect on audiences over the age of 15 or to cause children under the age of 15 mental harm.'

⁷ **MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America)** determines R rated pictures as containing, 'some adult material...adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually-oriented nudity, drug abuse or other elements, so that parents are counseled to take this rating very seriously.'

⁸ Taken from ESplatter's review of the film by Lucius Gore, <http://www.esplatter.com/reviews.php?id=860> (accessed 13/08/2010)

⁹ See Matt Bochenski's review of Alfredson's film in *Little White Lies*, 22.

¹⁰ Siegfried Kracauer asserts often, 'staged anxieties about male self images and male sexuality [...] male identity crises [...] toy[ing] with bisexuality by featuring love triangle in which the two males are usually

'best friends' or business associates who show an obvious...attraction to each other' (1947, 86-87) and as such, queer interpretations of *Nosferatu* can be encouraged.

¹¹ Dyer refers to the colloquial German terms Tante (meaning Auntie) and Bube which he describes as 'the large handsome, open-faced working class lad...the heterosexual type', (1990: 35)

¹² Hutchings includes: *The Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, US 1972), *I Spit on Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, US 1978), *Cannibal Ferox* (Lucio Fulci, IT 1981), *Santa Sangre* (Alejandro Jodorowsky, IT 1989) as horrors featuring literal castration.

¹³ This invites interesting readings of both the assimilative threat that Oskar's mother evokes in Alfredson's film and the more demonized punitive, but drunken mother in Reeves' *Let Me In*.

¹⁴ Alfredson bewilderedly comments, 'At several screenings in the US, I've heard people say that the father's a homosexual! This for me came as a total surprise, but of course I found it interesting.' (Twitchfilm.com, July 2008).

Conclusion:

This thesis began with an intention to investigate the queer uses of horror in recent film and television. Accepting that horror film's allegorical and metaphorical values have long been utilised to symbolise heterosexual fears of homosexual 'Others', I set out on a quest to understand the employment of the monstrous metaphor in an era in which homosexuality, at least in Western culture, has become increasingly acceptable but only according to heteronormative standards. In the modern queer horror text, homosexuality does not lurk in the 'shadowy realm' (Doty, 1993: 15) of inference; instead it presents itself in varying degrees of visibility, often breaking free from the limiting associations with monstrosity that heteronormativity imposes upon it. Yet as Leo Bersani puts it, the very same prospect of increased visibility runs the risk of assimilating difference, whereby gays 'de-gay [...] themselves in the very process of making themselves visible' (1993: 32). A closer look at the representation of homosexuality in queer horror reveals a gay masculinity which finds itself troubled by associations with shameful femininity. As this thesis has shown, the assimilation of threatening sexual difference into a safe homonormativity has resulted mainly in the adoption of hypermasculine performance and the apeing of heteronormative values.

My analysis of those queer horror films that emphasise a monstrous homosexuality reconnects with Benshoff's concluding warning that while

‘the monster queer may be a sexually, alluring, politically progressive figure [...] s/he is still a social threat that must be eradicated.’ (256). This thesis reveals the celebratory pleasures offered to queer, gay and lesbian viewers in identifying oppositionally with monstrous characters (often coded as sexually ambiguous) who threaten the norm (examples include Carrie, Eli and Otto). It has also demonstrated that the queer utilization of horror at times flips the monstrous metaphor to make it represent right-wing homophobia. While heteronormativity still prevails in queer horror, it often develops into a bourgeois homonormativity.

Although this thesis’s central focus has been on horror (and its varied sub-genres: the slasher, the body horror, the zombie film and the splatter film), the genre’s influence on other generic forms is extensive.

Accordingly, this study’s consideration is much wider in scope, moving from classical horror cinema to theatrical appropriation and more esoteric forms like the experimental short. It also takes in niche and cult genres such as exploitation cinema and camp television serials, as well as more complex hybrids that fuse pornography with political satire the more oblique and suggestive representation of horror in the art film. This study’s close readings of queer horror texts from cinema, theatre and television contribute valuable new insights into the nature of contemporary gay male identity. What comes to light, initially, is that the appeal of the horror genre for the gay male spectator offers similar ‘remasculinising’ pleasures to those that Peter Hutchings concludes are

available to the (assumed straight) male spectator after a temporary feminisation. Yet, for the gay man, homosexuality's associations with femininity extend beyond those very *temporary* unpleasures experienced by the straight male spectator. As such, the oscillating processes of identification offered by queer horror texts provide a method of working through the cultural stigma of feminised gay masculinity, whereby the gay subject becomes more of a man at having endured and suffered through the masochistic spectacle of horror.

Chapter one considers Brian De Palma's *Carrie* as a key text in this investigation into queer uses of horror. Analysis of Stephen King's 1974 original novel and the original 1976 film adaptation reveals that their narratives, themes and visual forms are particularly appealing for gay male spectators. The consumption of the classic horror film and gay men's strong identification with Carrie as a marginalised sexual Other, 'outing' her sexuality to her oppressive mother, proves a powerful starting point for an analysis of the transformative pleasures that the horror genre holds for the gay spectator. This is demonstrated in the queer theatrical and cinematic appropriations of De Palma's work. In queer horror gay men utilise the masquerade, as analysed by Joan Riviere and Mary Ann Doane, to perform exaggerated gender traits (both feminine and masculine). This suggests an oscillation between a rejection of any association with shameful femininity and a powerful identification with the female subject and her repressed place within patriarchal,

heteronormative structures. At once, the gay male spectator of horror film experiences an empathetic connection with the feminine, whilst also desperately wanting to be recognised as 'not woman'. Queer appropriations of *Carrie* foreground femininity's masquerade and then exaggerate it to the point of the grotesque as a means of fending off gay effeminacy via excessive cross-gender performance. The gay man's desire for remasculinisation can be seen in an ironic performance of failed femininity which masks his failed masculinity. This is often done at the expense of the female identities being parodied. Yet *Carrie's* pointed narrative, which deals with burgeoning sexual difference and of coping with the powers embodied in that difference, clearly resonates with the gay male spectator as a celebration of Otherness.

The wealth of *Carrie* adaptations and cinematic references throughout queer horror extends to Chapter two's exploration of Charles Lum's experimental video *Indelible*. The work provides evidence of a complex negotiation by the gay male subject of a masochistic jouissance, at once feminising *and* re-masculinising by its dis-identification with abject femininity. Reviewing *Carrie* and the other film texts cited in *Indelible* from a contemporary perspective summons up a nostalgic contemplation of a pre-AIDS period in gay male culture. The horror and pornographic film sources reveal a simultaneous un/pleasure in remembering a gay male hedonism that is now, indelibly, scarred by AIDS. As such, the fusion of genres sets the template for the formal and aesthetic elements of queer

horror. The consequent attraction and repulsion in regard to the gay male body connects it with that of the eviscerated body of the horror film. Lum's contemplation of *Carrie's* chief symbol of the feminine abject (menstrual blood) is conflated with an understanding of the gay masculine abject (semen). It both celebrates it and warns of its potential to pollute, literally in the spread of sexually transmitted disease and also as a cultural symbol of sexual Otherness. Once again, *Indelible* also reveals a desperate wish for a distancing from shameful femininity in its presentation of the hypermasculine Gage Men and in the remasculinising trauma of indulging in the horrifically alluring pleasures of unprotected gay sex.

Indelible represents gay male anxieties around alienation within the community, specifically via Lum as an HIV positive gay man who does not practice anal sex. In this sense, queer horror provides a vehicle through which to enunciate gay men's personal and cultural anxieties around isolation and shame. The experimental form of the film allows for a genre-led contemplation of the elements of horror that appeal to gay men. The appropriation and parody of its tropes can be seen in *Indelible's* textual 'dress up', worn in the composite layers seen in the drag theatrical variations *Carrie* inspires.

Chapter three's analysis of the emerging Gaysploitation horror sub-genre points to its origins in exploitation cinema but suggests that the gay male directors whose works are discussed not only exploit gay

masculinity but also adopt and rework the metaphorical conventions of the horror film for their own ends. The films discussed in this chapter clearly share the low-budget, aesthetically minimal qualities of the factory-produced sub-genre. The parodic appropriation of slasher conventions is perhaps their most obvious trope, foregrounding the sub-genre's soft-core eroticism to change the gender of the typically objectified female and fetishise the male body. The framed out murders of female victims are supplanted by the eroticised deaths of almost exclusively male victims, further conflating sex with death. The sub-genre's comic sexualising of this violence suggests that the chief appeal of the horror genre for the gay spectator may lie in its eroticising of trauma.

The absence of women across Gaysploitation reveals more about its representation of masculinity. While the films and television series discussed deal in cultural stereotypes that exploit their attractive young male leads, this also extends to a sub-cultural critique of gay masculinities. Gaysploitation horror reveals fears of an ageing, clonish homogeneity. Its portrayal of gay masculinity moves from the homoerotic to implicit homosexuality to explicit portrayals of gay men; its narratives idealise a macho, straight-acting masculinity in which gayness becomes incidental. At times, as in *October Moon* (Collum, 2007), Gaysploitation overtly deals with the gender anxieties of gay men within hetero- and homonormative ideologies that impose femininity upon them.

Gaysploitation horror such as David DeCoteau's *The Brotherhood* (2000) and Here! TV Gothic horror soaps *Dante's Cove* (US 2005-2008) and *The Lair* (US 2007-ongoing) point to a homoerotic aesthetic that privileges straight-acting masculinity and often reveals a desire to bed straight men. This dissertation's consideration of gay directors working in the seemingly reactionary confines of exploitation cinema, concludes that the reception of Gaysploitation often encounters comparable problems to the woman-directed sexploitation films that Pam Cook discusses. Working within exploitation conventions that trade in stereotypical and often oppressive images of gender and sexuality, queer horror's excessively obvious presentation of stereotyped homosexuality, consciously or unconsciously, draws attention to this unrealistic and unnatural construction. More recent Gaysploitation horror films, such as *A Far Cry From Home* (Rowe Kelly, US 2008), *Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror* (Thompson, 2007) and *Socket* (Abley, US 2007), depart from this gender conformity to focus on oppressive heterosexist structures of contemporary Western culture that still demonise homosexuality. The increasing numbers of queer horror film releases in recent years and their unapologetic (if not unproblematic) portrayal of gay male characters in lead roles clearly point to a more progressive representation of homosexuality in the genre.

Chapter four extends this consideration of Gaysploitation horror's potential to reveal, and therefore challenge, naturalistic stereotypes of gay masculinity often represented in more mainstream cinema. It

discusses *Hellbent's* (Etheredge-Outzs, 2005) appropriation of the slasher horror formula and its character types, including the Final Boy. Etheredge-Outzs's film demonstrates queer horror's almost complete removal of women, with its satirical take on Clover's female survivor allowing the chaste and conservative Eddie (Dylan Fergus) to come to terms with his homosexuality and effectively re-masculinise himself via symbolic phallic empowerment. The film also offers the potential for a critique of imposed heteronormative gender forms with its satirical exaggeration of the Tom of Finland-inspired stereotypes. Yet, while queer horror can take a parodic distance from its portrayal of performative masculinity even this joke machismo raises further questions about gay men's 'worshipful tribute' to straight masculinity.

Chapter five explores gay filmmakers' satirical utilisation of the zombie as an icon ripe for queer identification. Historically, the zombie has functioned as a metaphor for de-individualisation, a symbol of the 'return of the repressed' and a rapacious consumerism before becoming an exile from heteronormativity. In *The Nature Of Nicolas* (2002) and Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991), repressed homosexual desires infect the flesh, turning its gays into the undead. However, it is in Bruce LaBruce's appropriation of the gay zombie figure in *Otto or Up With Dead People*, utilised as a means of exploring sub-cultural anxieties within a white, bourgeois, homonormative community, that reveals the zombie as another adoption of masquerade. LaBruce's film clearly demonstrates

queer horror film's potential to attack both oppressive homophobia (in the film's poignant portrayal of zombie/queer bashing), and to critique the bourgeois homonormativity of its middle class Berlin clubbing milieu. His comic contemplation of the deadening gay scene and of hypocritical 'reactionary revolutionaries' reveals the isolation and disillusionment within the gay community. The film's depiction of the young gay zombie Otto as both 'consumed' and a reluctant 'consumer' (a riff on gay male top/bottom sexual positioning) locked within an inescapable capitalist ideology, points the finger at urban gay culture's role in the privileging of property. The messy physicality of the zombie also reconnects with queer horror's utilisation of pornographic tropes. The hardcore elements in *Otto's* 'gut-fucking' imagery magnify the gay man's oral eroticism in a cannibalistic orgy that again supplants anality with orality. The gay consumer desires masculinity as meat, craving the zombie skinhead's hypermasculinity.

While queer horror provides an opportunity for gay filmmakers to tackle both the problem of representation and of gay sub-cultural anxieties, they often remain low-budget niche productions. Chapter six's consideration of *Let the Right One In* (Alfredson, SE 2009) as an art-house horror provides the obverse image of a more transgressive homosexuality making a transition from novel to screenplay to screen, removing any explicit reference to queerness en route and thus returning homosexuality to the shadowy realms of symbolism. Taking a paratextual approach to

Alfredson's film and applying a psychoanalytic reading of castration, I argue that the homosexual content of the novel, although repressed in the Swedish film adaptation, eventually bleeds back into it. It does this via the ambiguous relationship of its two leads, Eli and Oskar, in its suggestive presentation of Eli's scarred genitals and, finally, in Oskar's relationship with his father. Arguably Alfredson's film of *Let the Right One In* provides an example of the failure of repression in the modern horror text to mask homosexuality in an era in which explicit representations of queerness have become more commonplace. Nevertheless, the attempt at repression suggests that, despite the emergence of a more liberal queer horror aesthetic, there still remains sufficient stigma surrounding homosexuality to warrant its excision. Yet the relevance of art horror's subtleties cannot be overlooked. Where mainstream horror's approach to transgression is explicit, art horror is more opaque.

While this thesis argues that queer horror, in its increasingly explicit representations of homosexuality, allows for a more open portrayal of contemporary gay life, the horror genre also works to channel its repressions. The multi-layered excesses of the horror form mask gay shame, 'covering up' gay men's anxieties about their own problematic masculinities. The performative, self-referential, and seemingly celebratory, pleasures of the genre resound throughout this thesis: in the trans-sex identification of drag-*Carrie* performance in chapter one; via the digital layering and superimpositions of *Carrie*, *LA Tool and Die* (Joe

Gage, US 1979) and the other moving image texts within *Indelible* that are discussed in chapter two; in the adoption of straight-acting machismo in Gaysploitation horror or the fancy dress parody of machismo in *Hellbent*; in the faux-zombies of *Otto*, and, finally, in the masked adaptations of *Let the Right One In*. The horror genre's penchant for remakes, sequels, adaptations and intertextual reference clearly provides pleasures for the gay male subject. Yet while the 'performative' appropriation of gender and genre allows for a self-assertion that draws attention to the constructedness of mainstream generic and heteronormative gender forms, it can also operate as a form of 'self-divestiture'. Here the jouissance implied in this 'self loss' is not only afforded to the subject via masochistic identification but also via an immersion in the active pursuit of appropriation, performance, adaptation and generic layering.

Writing about the 'vampiric' or parasitic nature of adaptation and appropriation, Linda Hutcheon (2006) suggests that the pleasures of narrative repetition and re-presentation lie in the fact that, 'we retell and show again and interact anew with stories over and over [and] in the process they change with each repetition and yet they are recognizably the same' (177). This recognisable different-but-sameness is resonant with what Leo Bersani calls the homogeneity of homo-ness in same sex desire, understood by him as, 'a desire for the same, from a perspective of a self already identified as different from itself' (Bersani, 1984: 59).

Bersani's description also applies to the repetitiousness of many of the horror films discussed in this thesis, from DeCoteau's formulaic homoerotic horrors, to the many visual and narrative references to *Carrie* that run throughout the films analysed. Queer horror's compulsion to repeat Gothic aesthetics and excessive gender performances, reveals a desire to play 'dress up'. Indeed, there is much 'covering up' here, not only in the sense of the sub-genre's presentation of coy partial nudity (particularly in the case of David DeCoteau's works), but in the masking of the shame associated with homosexuality. The vampiric or parasitic metaphor of the adaptation echoes Richard Dyer's consideration of the self-loathing bloodsucker as a metaphor for homosexual guilt. The vampiric 'borrowing' of other texts, of other genres and styles and of gender are imbued with this sense of shame and an emphasis on an attraction-repulsion binary that is at the heart of queer horror; as Dyer suggests, the gay subject exclaims: 'I don't know why I want to do these disgusting things, but I do and I can't help myself...' (Dyer, 1988: 63).

This overview of the continuing emergence of a queer horror aesthetic has revealed a trend in gay men's use of the horror genre's tropes and conventions between 2000-2010. I recognise that this study of a single decade's films (concluding with *Let Me In* (Reeves, 2010)) is bound by time constraints and offers only a snapshot of gay male anxiety in the West at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Its sample is limited to a consideration of Western horror cinema and might well encourage future

investigation into other cinema's representations of homosexuality in horror and increasing developments in television horror¹. Where homosexuality in horror may once have been portrayed allusively, recent representations have moved towards more explicit depictions of sexuality. Queer horror has turned the focus of fear upon itself, on its own communities and subcultures. If the horror genre's function is to represent 'the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses' (Wood, [1979] 1985: 201), then this thesis concludes similarly that the queer horror sub-genre works to configure the struggle for recognition of all that *gay culture* represses or oppresses. Queer horror depictions of the monster have become more complex and monstrous tropes no longer assume a heterosexual norm. Instead, they now represent aspects of masculinity that perturb gay men. Once homosexuality is rendered explicit, the horror genre demands a new outlet for its contemplation of repressed anxieties and fears.

Although the monstrous metaphor still exists in queer horror, it is now configured to represent gay men's fears. Firstly, it suggests their fear of association with shameful femininity that is based on heterosexist assumptions of their failed masculinity (something which the eroticising of hypermasculinity further underlines). It also symbolises gay men's anxieties about fitting into a 'deadening' gay subculture that privileges bourgeois homogeneity, conformist gym-body ideals and a valorisation of youth. It highlights a post-AIDS guilt that continues to impose itself upon a

gay culture still haunted by the epidemic. Most importantly, queer horror's most recent reworking of the monster figure to symbolise homophobic Others points towards the fragility of the conditional acceptance of homosexuality as defined by heteronormative standards. While this inversion may suggest a celebratory ownership of the horror genre's conventions, the aforementioned instances of homophobic right-wing 'monsters' in queer horror worryingly reflect a swelling of the same intolerance in real life. Queer horror's swing away from its classic predecessors may well only indicate a temporary shift in the demonising of homosexuality.

¹ Nobuhiko Obayashi's *Hausu* (JP, 1977), a camp fusion of 'schoolgirl bubblegum pop and phantasmagoria', can be paralleled with *Carrie* (US, 1976) in an exploration of Asian queer horror. Recent examples such as *The Wig* (South Korea, Won Shin-Yeon, 2005), involving a haunted hair piece made from the scalp of a dead gay lover, offers interesting insights into the contemporary global representation of homosexuality in horror film. Television horror series *American Horror Story* (FX, US 2011-ongoing) produced and written by Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy (both 'out' gay men), appropriates plentiful horror texts from both television and cinema. A haunted house conceit allows for a compound narrative involving its ghost inhabitants. Appropriations of horror films are rife throughout the series; its titles borrow from *Seven* (David Fincher, US 1995) and recurring sound motifs including scores from *Psycho* (Hitchcock, US 1960), *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, US 1958) *Twisted Nerve* (Roy Boulting, US 1968) and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Ford Coppola, US 1993) add to its 'performative' layering.

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Appendix 8.1

Film Synopses

***Carrie* (Brian De Palma, US 1976)**

A high school netball pitch is filled with girl team players competing in a game. The girls call for the ball to be passed to Carrie White, as she will miss it; the ball is passed to Carrie and she misses it, receiving torment and verbal abuse from her teammates. They go to the showers where Carrie, who is indulging in a slow, cleansing shower, has her first period. The girls continue to mock her, whipping up into a frenzy where they throw tampons and sanitary towels at her calling for her to 'plug it up'. Ms. Collins disperses the manic girls and slaps Carrie to calm her down; at the same time a light bulb explodes above them in the shower cubicle. Carrie is sent to the principal's office where she is excused from school by an embarrassed principal, 'Morty', who continually gets her name wrong. Infuriated by this, Carrie makes an ashtray fly from its position on the principal's desk.

While walking home from school, Carrie is tormented by a boy riding by on a bicycle and she makes him fall off by simply looking at him. Margaret White, a religious fanatic and Carrie's mother, calls on Mrs. Snell to offer religious advice. Mrs. Snell pays her \$10 and she leaves offended. She later returns home and receives a phone call from Carrie's school letting her know she has been sent home from school and why. She hits Carrie in disgust, calls her 'a woman' and drags her to a closet in the kitchen where she forces her to pray to an icon of St. Sebastian. Carrie goes to bed and while looking at herself in the mirror she tests out her burgeoning telekinetic powers and breaks it. At school, in a poetry class, the teacher reads out Tommy Ross' poem on pollution. Carrie declares it beautiful as the others and the teacher mock her.

After roll call in gym class, Ms. Collins admonishes the girls for their actions towards Carrie and treats them to punishing workouts in her detentions, during one of which Chris Hargensen, one of the lead girls who incited the attack on Carrie, rebels against Ms. Collins. As a result, Ms. Collins slaps her and bans her from the prom. Carrie, meanwhile, continues to investigate psychic phenomena in the library. Sue Snell, who was also involved in the attack on Carrie, feels guilty and asks her boyfriend, Tommy Ross, to take Carrie to the prom to alleviate her guilt. Chris and Billy Nolan drive to a party. Billy hits Chris when she continues to call him a stupid shit, but she performs oral sex on Billy in return for his favour to enact revenge on Carrie. Billy concedes and asks Carrie out to the prom; after running away, he eventually goes to her home and gets her to accept. Ms. Collins finds Carrie upset about her self-image and offers her advice on make-up and hair, while forcing her to look in a mirror. Ms. Collins, concerned, meets with Sue and Tommy to air her worries about their intentions towards Carrie at the prom.

Billy, Chris and two of his friends break into a piggery, slaughter a pig and fill a fuel can up with its blood. Carrie reveals to her mother that she has been asked out to the prom and has accepted. Much to Mrs. White's chagrin, Carrie forces her mother to listen to her and not to run away by using her powers to close the doors and windows of their home. Billy and Chris fill a bucket with pig's blood and suspend it on a beam over the stage the night before the school prom. Carrie prepares for the prom by making her dress and visiting beauty parlours. Chris sets up the ballot by encouraging her friends to volunteer their services to run the ballot papers at the prom. Tommy and his friends visit tailors to prepare for the prom by renting tuxedos.

On prom night, Carrie dresses for the prom but her mother mistakes her pink dress for a red one and she becomes hysterical, physically abusing herself. Carrie restrains her with her powers and goes to meet Tommy. At the prom they are greeted by gangs of gawping schoolmates. They sit and chat and are interrupted by Ms. Collins who sits with Carrie in Tommy's absence and they talk about her own prom. Sue Snell leaves a family dinner to visit the prom in secret. Carrie and Tommy enjoy a dizzying dance together and return to their table to cast their vote. Mrs. White paces her kitchen frantically at home and begins cutting vegetables manically. Billy and Chris prepare themselves for the humiliating act underneath the stage, Chris readying herself to pull the cord that will bring the bucket of blood down on Carrie. Tommy and Carrie are announced as King and Queen and take the stage to accept their crowns. Sue realises what is going on with the bucket set-up and moves to stop it but Ms. Collins stops her and throws her out of the auditorium. The bucket is released and Carrie is showered with blood; the bucket falls on Tommy's head, knocking him unconscious.

Horrified and humiliated, Carrie traps the remaining students (save Billy, Chris and Sue) in the school gym, where she uses her powers to enact revenge on them. Turning on the sprinklers and hoses, she electrocutes the teachers and principal and she kills Ms. Collins by moving a basketball backboard down on her severing her in half. She starts a fire and walks out of the gym to leave the remaining students to burn. On her way home, Billy and Chris try to run her over but Carrie uses her telekinesis to overturn their car and set it on fire. She returns home to a wrecked house, with ceremonial candles lit in each room. She takes a bath upstairs, unaware that her mother is waiting her return. Mrs. White and Carrie pray and her mother confesses about Carrie's traumatic conception in that her father forced himself upon her. She stabs Carrie in the back mid-prayer and Carrie tumbles down the stairs to the kitchen. Stopping her mother's advance with her knife, she makes kitchen implements fly at Mrs. White impaling her to the door frame. She dies in loud, satisfied groans in a pose similar to St. Sebastian. Carrie drags her mother to their closet where they hide as the house implodes and catches fire, sinking into the ground.

Sue Snell's mother attends her daughter while she sleeps. She answers the phone and airs her concern over her daughter's traumatic sleep patterns. Sue walks down Carrie's street carrying flowers. She lays them at the burnt foundations of her house, on which a cross reads 'Carrie White burns in hell'; a bloodied hand then reaches out from the soil and grasps her. She awakens and Mrs. Snell is restraining her daughter as she has risen from a nightmare.

LA Tool and Die (Joe Gage, 1974)

A closed down warehouse houses anonymous groups of burly, faceless men all indulging in sex, of various sorts, with each other. Jim, who is busy giving oral sex to another man, stops to address Hank. Hank watches the events from off-frame, as Jim goes on to give oral sex to the many men standing around masturbating over him, as he kneels in the centre. We finally see Hank as he takes off his glasses smirking at Jim.

We see Wily driving his van, down long, dark open roads listening to a radio preacher spouting, at times obscene, religious philosophy; he travels with his Alsatian dog.

Vic is being spoken to by a Mafia-style anonymous man in profile, in a shadowed office, asking him to go to a 'fag bar' a few times a week to pick up some money from there; he appears unwilling to do so.

At the bar Vic looks uncomfortable with the gay male clientele as he walks through the throngs of men. At the bar, the customers play pool, pinball, drink bottled beers; the walls are lined with cowboy posters and Tom of Finland drawings. Vic passes by Hank

who is in the process of cruising Wily. Wily leaves and Hank follows him to his van, where he declines his cruising offer, and he leaves without giving Hank his name. Passing Vic once more in the toilet, Hank retaliates to Vic homophobic and aggressive comments and the two fight. Being successful, Hank then talks to his friends, who reveals Wily's name and that he is headed to LA Tool and Die; Hank decides to follow him.

Wily travels in his truck listening to the radio and brief, subliminal flashbacks occur whenever he hears about 'Vietnam' or South East Asia. We see a brief flashback to jungle in Vietnam where Wily is looking for a wounded soldier. Wily stops to offer a lady a lift, concerned for her being alone on the roads. She is a prostitute who, after declining Wily's offer, accepts a lift from another gentlemen. She pulls out a gun, handcuffs the man to a tree in the nearby bushes and steals his car. A male stranger stumbles across the man's cries for help and proceeds to have sex with the man, while he is still handcuffed to the tree.

We see a young rambler diving into a rock pool. Wily is nearby in the bushes with his dog. The man emerges and climbs up across rocky paths to an outside lavatory, where he watches a man masturbate on the wall which has been graffitied upon. The man leaves, another car pulls up and a man and woman get out and have sex in the toilet, watched by the rambler. They leave and catch sight of the young voyeur; they throw their used condom at the rambler, who later masturbates with it.

Wily later stops for gas, pulling into a garage. He uses the toilet, which is lined with posters of naked women, and masturbates. The pump attendant watches Wily masturbating through a glory hole in the toilet wall. They mutually masturbate and the pump attendant fellates Wily.

We see another brief Vietnam flashback while Wily drives. He passes a school football pitch and we see a Coach and Mr. Dawson discussing his son's achievement at sports and the father airs his concerns as a single parent. The two discuss loneliness and sex over a whisky and soon they also have sex.

Hank drives to LA Tool and Die following Wily. Wily stops at a beach to wander across the rocky coast. Upset and tearful, he remembers at length his Vietnam experience in flashback. He tends to his injured and dying friend (perhaps his lover too), who urges Wily to save himself and carry on without him.

Hank pulls over, heeding a radio warning about dangerous high speed winds, and sleeps in his car in a lay-by. He is awoken late at night, and ventures out to find a parked van which he enters, finding an all male orgy inside which he joins in on.

Wily eventually arrives at LA Tool and Die, where he meets a representative from the Employment Office. A young man, Dave, leaving in his car, has an accident and his car is overturned. Wily and the employment rep help him out of the car. The rep takes Dave home where they have sex with each other. Wily meets Hank at the Employment Office. Montage of scenes show the work at the LA Tool and Die, including men working, moulding and cutting metal. Wily and Hank work together and become closer. Hank tells Wily one lunchtime that he is saving all his money to buy a plot of land so that he can retire there and lead a life of luxury. He invites Wily to the Land Office to pick up his papers that afternoon as the land is now his. Wily refuses.

Hank checks his deeds at the Land Office still impatiently waiting to see if Wily changes his mind. He notices a cleaner, a construction worker and an office worker go into the toilets; he waits for a while then follows them joining them in their sexual orgy. Wily turns up in Hank's absence. He stumbles across them all in the toilets and Hank and Wily catch each other's eye. Wily eventually joins in. They leave together and return to Hank's where they have sex with each other, masturbating onto a saddle.

Wily and Hank venture to Hank's piece of land which appears to be arid, where Hank is hammering in a For Sale sign into the ground, he is resigned to selling it on. Wily hears, in flashback, his ex-lover urging him to find someone else and carry one with his life. Hank accidentally hammers into an underground spring of water; the two rejoice and throw away the For Sale sign.

***Indelible* (Lum, US 2004)**

A brightly glowing moon shines out behind drifting clouds as the title 'What can't you forget?' appears typed upon the screen. A naked man dives into a pool of water and the foam and spray rise to the surface. A rock song is heard, images of a prom night fade up simultaneously and a dance hall is filled with students and teachers dancing to the music. The title INDELIBLE dissolves in red on the frame. A prom voting card is held up, featuring, among other names, Carrie White and Tommy Ross; a pen hovers over it. Returning to the dancing students, a title fades up - in white this time - reading INDELIBLE.

The voice of a radio evangelist preacher named 'Spoonball' is heard as the shot transfers to the interior of a moving car, looking up and out of the window. Overhead, trees and branches whizz by the car as it moves at speed. The disembodied voice of the preacher continues on a religious rant, about the lord's 'strange ways of doing things...'. The title INDELIBLE dissolves into the frame, but remains somewhat transparent.

Over a black frame, the title INDELIBLE, now in solid white, flashes intermittently.

A car/scrap yard is seen with cars and motor parts piled on top on one another. A title appears in white: LA TOOL & DIE; moving towards the warehouse door, silhouettes of men are cast on the wooden walls.

A tapestry of the Last Supper looms over a family meal in the foreground, involving Mrs. White and her daughter Carrie. They discuss the prom night at her school and Carrie boldly confesses that she has been asked by a boy named Tommy Ross and intends to go. Mrs. White responds negatively, admonishing Carrie with a religious rant and throwing her drink over her. Throughout their dialogue, naked men, erections and oral sex is superimposed over and under the familial scene. Mrs. White demands that her daughter repent and go to her closet to pray. Carrie continues to tell her mother rebelliously about Tommy. Tommy and Carrie waltz and spin on the prom dance floor, superimposed over the mother-daughter argument. Mrs. White denigrates 'boys' and likens them to 'sniffing dogs' trying to figure out where 'that smell comes from'.

Anonymous men, masturbating and indulging in oral sex, are superimposed over Mrs. White and Carrie.

Jim, a naked man in the warehouse, performs oral sex on an anonymous man who lies beneath him. Jim addresses the camera directly and a man behind the camera responds - 'Don't let me stop you Jim!'; Jim goes on to fellate the penis.

A bucket of blood is seen positioned precariously on a girder hovering over the thrones reserved for the King and Queen of the Prom. A loud tannoy announces the winners of the King and Queen titles, Carrie White and Tommy Ross. While everyone cheers, the recipients look uncomfortable.

Jim continues to perform oral sex on the penis, exclaiming: 'This guy's real hot'.

Carrie and Tommy walk in slow motion to the stage, while Chris and boyfriend Billy watch events secretly from beneath the stage. Chris clutches at the rope attached to the bucket. Carrie and Tommy reach the stage, cheered on by their peers.

Jim masturbates the erect penis claiming: 'It's just about ready to pop!'

Chris, teasingly, pulls at the rope. Jim fellates and masturbates the penis. Carrie and Tommy take their places on the stage, as Chris grips the cord tightly and Jim continues to orally pleasure his partner. Chris pulls the cord, licking her lips, the bucket begins to fall in slow motion and male groans of ecstasy are heard. Just as the blood falls from the bucket onto Carrie, the image freezes. Jim masturbates the penis until it ejaculates semen repeatedly onto his face and into his mouth.

The audience at the prom react disgustedly at first, then they laugh uncontrollably. Tommy shouts his disgust and anger but there are no voices heard but the falling of blood.

Jim addresses the camera and asks the man behind it to masturbate. Jim sits in the middle of several men, who all masturbate onto him.

Carrie uses her telekinetic powers to trap everyone in the school hall. She hoses them down by controlling the fire hose with her mind and turning on the sprinklers. The men all ejaculate onto Jim, who writhes with his mouth open. A man wearing sunglasses is ejaculated onto and his face and sunglasses are covered in semen.

Miss Collins, Carrie's gym teacher, is shown laughing in a kaleidoscopic image as the line 'Trust me Carrie' echoes repeatedly. Mrs. White maniacally paces about in her kitchen. She stops to pick up a knife to cut frantically at a carrot on a chopping board but she continues to chop at nothing. Several leather-clad men all fellate and masturbate each other in a highly stylised, sadomasochistic dungeon setting. More students become trapped and hosed down in the prom hall. Tommy is hit on the head by the falling bucket and is knocked unconscious.

A man laps up ejaculate from the face of another man. The fire hose continues to spray students and Norma is knocked unconscious by the spray. The men in the S&M dungeon continue their orgy, indulging in oral sex.

In split screen, students are thrown about by the powerful water jet, and a man is ejaculated upon by several men.

A man in a white tuxedo, the principal, is electrocuted by holding onto the microphone stand in the wet prom hall. A woman returns to standing position from where she has fallen, as if moved by an external force. The orgy in the S&M dungeon now features one man surrounded by others, and he masturbates in the centre. A woman spins around with some force and is centrifuged so that the blood is spun out of her. 'Faster, Faster' is repeated by a man's voice. A man tries to hold onto the fire hose and loses control and is sent flying onto the floor.

In split screen, a man in the S&M dungeon powerfully ejaculates, the same action being played in four separate screens on a white background.

Blood sprays onto a lamp shade and a mirror. Carrie showers in the girls' locker room and blood pours down from between her legs. Carrie walks down from the stage, silhouetted against the backdrop, which is in flames. A man (Childress) and a woman (Gillian) linger romantically near each other, ready to kiss; Gillian moves towards his eyes. Childress's eyes appear red; they then begin to weep blood.

Two men indulge in oral sex. One is on all fours whilst the other ejaculates into the other's open mouth. Carrie is showered with blood on stage at the prom. Gillian, in her pyjamas, backs into the corner of her bedroom with her hands outstretched. She pleads for help as a man (Childress) moves ominously towards her. A man laps semen from the face of another man. 'You can go to hell' resonates as Carrie takes a bath to wash the red blood from her. Chris dangles a tampon in front of Carrie, smiling and mocking her. Carrie continues to bathe. Carrie looks devastatingly out at her audience while covered in blood on stage.

Two men kiss and swap semen between each others' mouths. Gillian moves back and crouches into the corner of her bedroom. Carrie lurches back into the corner of the shower cubicle as the girls surround and torment her, throwing tampons at her. Carrie continues to bathe.

Childress convulses and shakes uncontrollably. Carrie uses her powers to avoid a car, controlled by Chris and Billy intent on killing her; she sends it spinning off the road and it explodes. Miss Collins (Carrie's gym teacher) is severed in two by a falling basketball backboard at the prom. The principal, being electrocuted, bursts into flames. Gillian's eyes glow a bright blue. Childress explodes from within in slow motion. Carrie, covered in blood on the prom stage, lets out an anguished cry that we do not hear.

David De Coteau's selected titles:

Voodoo Academy (US 2000)

A prologue reveals a voodoo ritual being carried out on a semi-naked young man (Blake Godfrey) who is tied to an altar by a priest (Rev. Carmichael). Ritualistic oil is poured onto the body of the victim and erotically massaged into his muscled body. Hooded figures in robes enter the room with candles; glowing lights emerge from the candles but the ritual turns sour and he is killed. The hooded figure is revealed to be Ms. Bouvier, the school's attractive administrator. She and Rev. Carmichael reveal that the ritual failed because the sacrifice was not 'innocent and pure of mind and of body'. They vow to continue in their sacrifices using virginal young men to fulfil a 'prophecy'.

Christopher Sawyer, a young college student, enters religious studies, along with five other students at Carmichael Bible College run by the enigmatic financier Ms. Bouvier. Christopher shares a room with the other students at the college. At the first religious studies session, it is revealed that Christopher has replaced Mr. Godfrey, who has left the college in the previous weeks. Rev. Carmichael's church has been criticised by other denominations. The Rev. touches his charges in intimate ways during their sessions, massaging their shoulders as they are on their knees. Rev. Carmichael introduces the religion's version of the confessional booth, which is a technologically-enhanced booth in which the students 'cleanse themselves' of sin by taking confession with the Reverend. Each day the students must confess their sins to the Reverend. One of the students (Rusty Sancowicz) is singled out for his display of the sin of narcissism, in the pursuit of bodily perfection via body-building, and is asked to be the first to test out the booth. Sancowicz emerges from the booth, his tie now loosened and his shirt slightly unbuttoned. The students quiz him on what happened and he admits, on confessing his sins, to seeing a light and feeling 'pure'.

Christopher (dressed only in a towel) sits with Billy while he takes a bath. They discuss their attraction towards Ms. Bouvier, but also how enigmatic she is, and they discuss the odd occurrences at the college. Billy reveals that an ex-student, Blake Godfrey, was last seen taking a nightly trip to Ms. Bouvier's room. Rusty begins acting strangely; he is late to dinner and eventually turns up wearing shorts and a vest, but is not chastised by Ms. Bouvier.

During the evening, Chris wakes to see the other students writhing in their beds, caressing themselves while in deep and erotic trances. He watches them transfixed as they pull back their sheets revealing their white underwear. Ms. Bouvier also watches them from the other side of the wall through a hole in a cross. Rusty gets out of bed and sleepwalks in a trance to Ms. Bouvier's room. There he is met by Bouvier and Rev. Carmichael and he is tied down in preparation to become the victim for the second sacrifice. He is eventually sacrificed and is turned into a still-living, small voodoo doll complete with his own head. Christopher, who has followed Rusty up to Ms. Bouvier's room, discovers a collection of voodoo dolls, all now with their heads removed.

The following day, there are fewer places set at the breakfast table and it is revealed that Rusty has been asked to leave the college after being found taking drugs. Billy and the other students now display the same traits as Rusty: indifference, rudeness and wearing casual clothes at dinner. Christopher tries to appeal to them, concerned at their behaviour.

Each of the other students begin taking confession in the technologically-enhanced booth which purifies them. While in the booth, they are put into a trance and begin caressing themselves erotically, stripping themselves semi-naked. Ms. Bouvier appears to them in a vision asking them to come to her room. Becoming impatient, the Reverend begins using the communion wine, the same wine used during their sacrifices, to transform the boys without the ritual. Pouring it into one student's bath water and massaging him with it, he turns immediately into a voodoo doll.

Chris begins to display some of the traits of the other students. He eventually finds the room in which Ms. Bouvier watches the other students during their evening trances, and he watches the other boys caressing themselves. He sees another student, Michael, sacrificed by Ms. Bouvier and the Reverend and transformed into another doll. Ms. Bouvier is transformed into a horned devil with claw-like hands, feeding from the pure energy of her victims during the transformation. The Reverend catches Chris looking and ties him to the altar becoming the next victim. Chris reveals that he is not a virgin, unties himself from the altar and jumps away from his captors. Ms. Bouvier unleashes a force beam from her hands, it misses Chris and smashes the altar wine over themselves, turning them into a two-headed voodoo doll. The remaining boys are saved.

The Brotherhood (a.k.a I've Been Watching You) (US 2001)

A prologue sequence reveals a young student being pursued at night around campus by four young male figures (vampires) dressed in black leather and wearing sunglasses. The student, Nathan, is caught by his pursuers and, after threatening to reveal their 'secret', he is eventually attacked and killed by them.

A TV news report reveals a killing on campus at Drake University and the fraternity, Doma Tau Omega, are accused of being involved. A young student, Chris, watches the report on television and he is interrupted, unexpectedly, by his new roommate Dan. The two are mismatched; Dan is a stereotypical nerd and Chris is a sports major. During a lengthy running session, shown in slow motion, Chris, wearing a pair of red shorts, takes a moment to stretch on a park bench. He is watched by the four pledges from Doma Tau Omega, who all wear sunglasses. Their leader, Devon, comments on Chris 'looking perfect' and declares that he 'wants this one'. Later that day, Chris cycles around campus and, while checking out a young female student, falls off his bike. He is confronted by Doma Tau Omega and Chris notices their fraternity pin, an expensive red jewel housed in a gold setting. Dan and Chris step in when another gang of offensive fraternity brothers try to pick up the young female student (Megan) whom he checked out earlier. Devon watches as Chris, Dan and Megan all make friends and she later invites them both to a party that night. Dan, Chris and Megan attend the party which is

held at the house of Doma Tau Omega, a reconstructed church. Devon takes Chris to one side and introduces him to the fraternity, while Dan looks around the building trying to read some ancient books. Devon and the fraternity brothers give Chris a special drink to try and Devon takes him outside into the garden. They sit on a park bench while Chris becomes increasingly intoxicated. Devon questions why Chris is obeying his actions and following him. Devon confesses that, in his boredom, Chris is his new project to 'remake in his own image...out of all the men on campus – I chose you.' Megan and Dan wait for Chris outside the party as Dan grows concerned that he will lose his new friend. Devon offers Chris the chance to become a fraternity brother and enjoy their 'very special lifestyle'. Devon makes Chris a blood brother and, pricking him with his fraternity pin, he drinks Chris' blood and forces Chris to drink his. Chris then passes out.

Chris wakes up, hung-over on the same park bench. He returns home to Dan and begins having stomach cramps. Becoming sensitive to light, he begins wearing sunglasses. A delivery of clothes arrives for Chris from Doma Tau Omega along with a fraternity pin. Dan confronts Chris on his sudden change of personality. Chris aggressively throws Dan out of his way as he tries to prevent him from attending another night at Doma Tau Omega. Dan breaks into the Doma Tau Omega's fraternity house and discovers books and photographs in which Devon and his brothers are revealed to be centuries-old vampires. On his way to the fraternity, Chris is challenged by the rival fraternity he confronted earlier and, suffering from stomach cramps, he is unable to stop them attacking him. The Doma Tau Omega brothers appear and help Chris by brutally attacking them.

Later, at another fraternity party, Devon, Chris and a girl (Sandy) disappear into a bedroom. Devon initiates Chris into the fraternity by drinking Sandy's blood. The two men undress (leaving on their underwear) and they caress each other while erotically draining Sandy of her blood. Chris wakes the following day after a nightmare to find his shirt stained with Sandy's blood. Chris becomes disgusted with himself and decides to leave Doma Tau Omega. He is confronted by Devon, who reveals that Chris is the 'perfect body' for Devon to transfer his soul into. They kidnap Chris.

Dan asks Megan to speak with Chris, concerned for his friend's well-being. Their search for Chris leads them to the Doma Tau Omega house. Chris is stripped to his underwear, along with the other brothers and led to an altar. The brothers hold him as Devon performs the ritual intending to 'fill you [Chris] with myself'. Megan and Dan fight their way into the house, killing one of the fraternity brothers. Just as Dan and Megan enter to prevent the ritual, Megan reveals that she is part of Devon's plan, holding Chris captive with an axe. During the ritual, Dan seizes his chance and attacks Devon with the axe, killing all the members of the fraternity. A dying Devon asks, 'Didn't you love me just a little?'; Chris responds, 'I loved you like a brother!'.

The Brotherhood II: Young Warlocks (US 2001)

At Chandler Academy, students John Van Owen, Marcus and Matt are the outcasts of their class. Despite being A-grade students, they are all in trouble at school for smoking, but they are still bullied by other students and have very little luck with girls. They still long to be part of the 'in-crowd', sports' students, Harlan Radcliffe ('prettier than most of the girls I've gone out with'), Randall and Alex. The bullying sports' students see John looking longingly at one of their girlfriends (Mary Stuart) and ridicule him.

New student, Luc, starts at the Academy and befriends the 'outcasts'. In class, Luc is revealed to be another trouble-maker as he plays cards and disagrees with a lecture on witchcraft. John is confronted by Mary, who asks John out on a date, while Luc watches them, smiling to himself.

While out taking a run, Marcus is accosted by Harlan who runs semi-naked, and who is then joined by fellow jocks Alex and Randall. They ask Marcus to join them as they 'hit the lockers'. In slow motion, the four students undress for the showers. During his shower, Marcus is pinned face first against the shower wall by the jock students. They comment on his naked behind: 'nice view Marcus'. Harlan leans in and comments 'Hmmm, what shall we do here?'. He decides to write 'my pussy' on his bottom in permanent marker. They are interrupted by Luc, who overpowers Harlan and threatens to write the same thing on his face.

Marcus, John and Matt break into the academy after hours and meet Luc in the swimming pool where they take a swim and drink alcohol. They bond with each other over what makes them outcasts, coming from poor families, having psychological problems or suffering abusive parents. Luc promises to help the three friends by offering them power, popularity, girls, respect and good academic grades in return for their loyalty. As part of the ritual, Luc begins to cry. Wiping his tears with his fingers, he touches each of the boys' mouths and they are entranced. He makes John lick the tear from Luc's face.

The following day, the boys all begin wearing sunglasses and they appear to be empowered by Luc. They begin playing football shirtless, like Harlan, Randall and Alex. The boys begin breaking the Ten Commandments; for example, thou shalt honour thy father and mother, which Marcus breaks by dropping a photograph of his parents from the school roof. The boys hide a voodoo doll of Randall in his car, causing him to die in a car crash.

John goes on date with Mary, who comments on how much he has changed, which sours their date. Luc confronts John and tells him that he has controlled Mary's mind. In turn, he demands more of John, asking him to lure in Mary's friend (Trini). The four friends enter Trini's room where Luc initiates sex with an entranced Trini; John joins in while the other boys watch.

The following evening the boys sit around a pentacle. Luc reveals that he has stolen a witches' knife from his history lesson, and reveals that he is a warlock and wishes to recruit the other boys to his coven. He asks each of them to sacrifice someone to commit to the coven to 'kill the one you hate the most'. Marcus stabs Alex with the witches' knife. John confronts Harlan with the knife while he dresses in the locker room. The blade erotically lingers between the boys but Harlan walks away unharmed. Matt attacks the headmistress and stabs her.

John confesses to his history teacher about the witchcraft at the school, and fears for his girlfriend Mary. Luc and his coven kidnap Mary for a sacrifice and use her to lure John to the pool house. Ms. Stevens, the history teacher, confronts Luc at the pool; she is his 'opposite', a religiously devout teacher. The coven transforms into semi-demons with altered faces and voices as John appears. They approach John with the intention of killing him but John knocks them out.

Luc holds a knife to Mary's throat and forces John to drop his own knife; he kills Luc with the spirit's tooth knife. Luc falls onto the pentacle, Ms. Stevens embraces Luc's fallen body and they both disappear in a flash of light. The other boys regain consciousness and return to normal.

Final Stab (US 2001)

A young man (Charlie) sits at home watching a horror movie, 'Green Zombie', and receives a phone call from his girlfriend Angela. He undresses to take a shower. His apartment door is opened to reveal a masked figure carrying a knife. During the shower, the lights cut out and the young man emerges from the shower, only to find his girlfriend

Angela in his apartment. Returning to the shower, Angela is killed by a masked pursuer. Charlie pulls back the shower curtain to reveal a male killer who stabs him.

Charlie awakens abruptly to reveal that the prologue was simply a nightmare, one of many that he has been suffering with. In concern, Angela asks him to visit a psychiatrist.

Christine and Doug drive up to the Palermo estate where she is to host a party for her sister, Angela. The estate was the site of a previous family massacre. Christine appeals to Doug to ask Angela to the party. A wealthy group of college students are all invited to the remote Palermo estate to participate in the night's events. Christine plans on double-crossing her sister and her boyfriend by involving them in a murder mystery game that they are unaware of. It is revealed that Doug is her closeted gay friend: 'I've got the right equipment, but – wrong game.' Christine blackmails Doug by threatening to reveal his sexuality to his family and the country club.

Three young students (Earl, Budd and Tom) pull up next to the Palermo estate and discuss an advert for actors for the evening's murder mystery. It is revealed that Budd intends to make Christine suffer for a previous wrong she has done to his family.

Partners Julie and Patrick discuss Christine's problems with Angela and Charlie (who has suffered a mental breakdown after the massacre of his family); they reveal that they are part of a bigger plot to make Angela and Charlie suffer. A masked killer slits the throat of Earl, one of the anonymous students who were plotting in the woods to ruin Christine's party. Two more actors/friends, Brett and Steve, turn up and discuss horror movie rules.

Another of the students is murdered in the woods of the Palermo estate. Doug, Charlie and Angela turn up to the estate that evening and enter the house as a threesome, watched by the vengeful Budd.

Angela is surprised to find that Christine is holding a surprise party for her sister. Steve returns from the kitchen; he has a knife in his back and dies in front of the partygoers. Charlie panics and runs out of the house. After Angela races to find Charlie, Christine asks Steve to get up and the death is proved to be fake. Christine reveals her desire to make Charlie have a breakdown. She allocates roles to all the remaining partygoers and everyone plays along with the scenario except for Angela and Charlie. The masked killer arrives and is unmasked and revealed to be Simon, a hired actor. The actor/killer is murdered by an identically-dressed real murderer figure.

Angela discovers that Steve is playing dead when he answers his phone; the others explain to her that the evening is a joke. Budd is killed by the (now authentic) masked killer. Angela and Doug have a discussion about Charlie and Christine and it is revealed that Doug once dated Angela before coming to terms with his homosexuality. Steve is actually killed by the real masked killer.

Julie and Patrick have sex in one of the building's bedrooms, but are disturbed by the masked killer, who they think is an actor. Both Julie and Patrick are killed. Doug reveals to Charlie that the evening is a hoax and they get in the car to leave. Doug talks to Charlie about an affair they had in freshmen year at college, and Doug reveals that he is being blackmailed about his sexuality by Christine. While Charlie tries to find Angela, Doug is strangled by the masked killer in back of the car, while making a phone call to Angela. Hearing him die, Angela panics and realises that the fake deaths around her are all now real. She is pursued by the masked killer. Seeking safety with Charlie, Christine appears and reveals her plot – to make Charlie have a breakdown and kill someone. Charlie accidentally stabs Angela while lurching to hit Christine. After Christine reveals her plan, Charlie double bluffs her by framing Christine in return, revealing that he used a fake knife to stab Angela who reappears, alive and stabs her sister Christine who is revealed to have killed everyone at the party.

The Frightening (US 2002)

A prologue reveals that a student (Paul) has attempted to break into Hallows End School to retrieve some files. He enters the school pursued by three men dressed in black, wearing sunglasses and with black woollen hats. After phoning a friend he is attacked and killed by his pursuers.

Corey wakes from a terrifying dream. At breakfast, he talks with his mother about his 'first day' at his new school. His mother voices her concern for her son, making sure that he is remaining on his medication. Corey exclaims that he feels like an outsider, a 'freak'. After the previous night's murder, the school stays open, much to the chagrin of Ms. Birch, one of the school's teachers. It is revealed that there has been a series of disappearances and murders. Curious, Ms. Birch investigates some noises down in the school's basement and is confronted by the same murderers from the previous night.

Corey begins school and befriends some fellow outsiders and freaks, who dress in outlandish and 'punk' clothes. A conservatively dressed group of young men notice Corey as a new addition to the school; they appear as preppie-types. The outsiders notice Bridget, a 'square-peg', bookish student and comment that she will not last long. They inform Corey about the previous night's murder and state the victim was a friend of theirs.

Bridget confronts the headmaster (Mr Isczek) about the murder, who appears indifferent to it. Upon leaving, she is promptly killed by the anonymous gang. Corey watches his college's wrestling team and has flashbacks about a previous wrestling match in which he accidentally killed his opponent, breaking his neck. He is interrupted by cheerleader Beth and they are joined by the wrestling team led by Perry. They attempt to recruit Corey into their sports' team, but Corey declines. Corey is warned off the 'Stepford Kids' by fellow outsider Mason. The 'Stepford Kids' and Beth comment on Corey as being 'perfect'.

Corey discusses with a fellow outsider that, based on appearances, he feels that he would fit in better with the wrestlers. Corey becomes aware that the new kids at the school stand out as they do not appear to be 'robots'. Corey is later electrocuted in the shower by an anonymous black-gloved killer.

Perry and the 'Stepford Kids' talk to Corey about his past and his psychological problems, attempting to recruit him into their fold. One by one, the gang of outsiders are killed off by the 'Stepford Kids'. Corey continues to have dreams in which he walks around the school in his underwear, witnessing erotic scenes of other male students in various states of undress. In the basement he comes across a ritualistic scene in which the 'Stepford Kids' stand in a circle semi naked while Beth the cheerleader beckons him to join the 'team' in order to 'take all the misery away'.

In a meeting with the headmaster, Corey makes a complaint about his friends dying or going missing. Corey is encouraged to 'fit in' with the 'Stepford Kids' and not to report the problem to the police. The headmaster blackmails Corey about the unfortunate accident he was part of at his last school.

Mr Isczek is eventually killed by the 'Stepford Kids' after he objects to them taking over the school. It is revealed that the school reports of murders and disappearances go back to 1925. Mason and Corey break into the school to read the files which, they hope, will reveal the truth about an accident in the 1920's, in which the school was blown up by a faulty boiler. Mason reveals that there has been no record of the school being rebuilt. The 'Stepford Kids' hold Beth captive. Mason and Corey confront the 'Stepford Kids', as it is revealed that both the school and its pupils are in limbo, with the Stepford Kids as

killers being charged to carry the students to the other side. Perry reveals to Corey that he and the others are all ghosts. Corey is then faced with a choice to cross over or stay on their team to stay with his mother. Corey turns on Perry and kills him.

He wakes up and, as a ghostly apparition, he sees his mother at the breakfast table talking to his photograph. In flashback, it is revealed that Corey died in the wrestling accident at his previous school.

The Wolves of Wall Street (US 2002)

A prologue sequence reveals a young businessman (Tyler) being chased through the streets of New York at night by what appears to be a ravenous animal. In shadow, he is attacked and killed.

Geoff, a young man who is new in town and direct from college, takes a grubby apartment. After several unsuccessful interviews to be a stockbroker, he befriends a female bartender (Annabel). He sees a wealthy and attractive group of successful brokers enter the bar, Wolf Bros Brokerage led by Dyson Keller. Annabel puts a good word in with the group whom she knows and she gets Geoff an interview.

Geoff is taken on by Keller, given the chance to become a broker with the firm as well as the chance to 'wear the ring' that symbolises that he belongs to the firm as a trainee. Geoff begins his tough training with five others who all vie for one position. Geoff is introduced to Dyson's right hand man, Vince De Gray, who takes him under his wing. Geoff later begins dating Annabel, and discovers that she dated the victim (Tyler) from the prologue.

The clan of brokers begins to kill female sacrificial victims during the full moon while stripped to their underwear. The sacrifices begin as orgiastic sexual foreplay but end in the women being killed by the brokers' animalistic teeth. Geoff is successful at his training tasks, while Annabel grows concerned that the job will overwhelm him as it did her previous partner. After drinking heavily with the broker partners one night, Geoff wakes the next morning with blood on his neck and no memory of the previous night. Returning to work, he finds that he has been chosen to wear the broker's ring and has secured a job with them. He begins to dress differently, wearing expensive clothes and sunglasses to fit in with the other brokers. Geoff begins having flashbacks of the evening he has no memory of. Vince reassures him that he is 'going through changes'. Dyson begins treating Geoff aggressively on finding out that he is dating Annabel. Geoff begins to grow suspicious of Annabel's relationship with Dyson.

Dyson demands that he stops dating Annabel and reveals to Geoff that he is turning into a werewolf like the other brokers. Giving into his hunger, Geoff begins killing young socialite women, guided by Vince who suggests, due to his recent 'changes', that he give up monogamy. Geoff also kills a gay man cruising him on the subway. During a full moon, Geoff turns aggressive and chases Annabel home – biting her. She realises that the Wolf Bros. killed her previous fiancé. Due to Geoff's guilt, together they conspire to bring down the company by killing the Alpha Wolf, Dyson. The brokers kidnap Annabel, becoming aware of their plan. Geoff rescues Annabel by stabbing Dyson with a silver fountain pen and, upon his death, realises that Vince is the Alpha Wolf. Annabel and Geoff struggle to overpower Vince, eventually killing him with the pen.

Leeches! (US 2003)

In a nightmare sequence, a young male swimmer (Jason) gets out of a swimming pool to see sticky residue on the ladder, and is then dragged back into the pool by unseen monsters. Waking at night, his girlfriend, Casey, warns him against his taking steroids to win the next swim-meet. Jason talks to his friend, Steve, about his concerns over taking steroids. At a deck party, by the side of a river near Lakecrest College, students discuss the forthcoming swim-meet. Laboratory geek, Spence, takes samples from the water at the river, and discovers a large leech attached to the back of a friend, also one of the swim team members. The remaining swim team assemble for practice, as requested by their coach. Steve and Jason take a shower together before the meet and pull leeches from each other's backs; the leeches disappear down the shower drains.

The team all begin taking steroids, urged on by Steve. This is discovered by Spence, also a weaker member of the swim-team, who disapproves. In the late hours of training, one of the swim team members slips while taking a shower and, whilst unconscious, a large leech emerges from the drain and crawls into his mouth. Later the swimmer vomits blood followed by a large leech, before collapsing. His roommate, unaware of his fate, takes a nap in his underwear. The leech slowly crawls up his sleeping body and kills him.

Jason vows not to take any more pills, complaining that they 'make him feel strange – different', Steve accuses his girlfriend of pressuring him and taking him away from the team. In the girls' dormitory, a fellow biology student takes a sample of a strange animal mucus that is found slicked on a fish tank.

After hours, a drunk swim team member takes a swim in the river and is killed by large leeches. His body is found on campus and it is assumed that he has drowned while drinking. The college principal is later killed by giant leeches while driving home. Spence and Sarah perform tests on the animal mucus. The swim team hold a memorial party at the pool and Steve urges his teammates to flush the steroids down the toilet to avoid discovery. In the sewers underneath the pool locker rooms, a large cocoon bursts open. One of the swim team members is attacked and killed by leeches when pouring his steroids down the drain. The students are all killed and drained one by one by leeches. Casey and Jason attempt to spice up their sex life, with Casey blindfolding and tying Jason semi-naked to the bed. Casey leaves the room, and giant leeches then crawl up Jason's thighs and body, eventually biting and killing him and later Casey too. It is revealed that the coach is dealing steroids to his team.

Spence and Sarah find many of the college students dead, and the bodies of sated giant leeches around the campus. Spence suggests the leeches are a result of the steroid abuse. The coach conspires to hide the bodies of the students for fear of them finding out about the team's drug abuse. Spence, Sarah and Steve overpower and tie up the coach in the shower, where he is attacked by leeches but frees himself by biting and eating them. Empowered by steroid rage from the leeches, he attacks the three students while they attempt to electrocute a pool full of leeches. The coach and Steve both die of electrocution in the swimming pool along with the leeches. It is later revealed that Spence has been creating the giant leeches.

Speed Demon (US 2003)

A young man walks down a deserted roadside, back to his hometown from college. He is stopped by two young men driving erratically in a sports car, who threaten to knock him over. The two mock Jesse as a 'college boy'. In voice over, Jesse comments on the group of speed racers, which is made up of many members and called the Chain Gang. The gang includes the leader, Auto Ridley, Jesse's younger brother, Mikey, Clutch, a female member called Chopper, with Axel, Wiper and Road Rage making up the rest of

the group. Auto invites Jesse to a barbecue at the garage to welcome him back. He later joins them and they mock Jesse for being educated and no longer 'one of them'.

This is Jesse's first return home after the death of his father and he eventually returns to the family business, Hamstead Garage. Natalie, an ex-girlfriend of Jesse's, also joins them and Jesse discovers that she is now dating Auto. Feeling threatened by Jesse, Auto challenges him to a race; declining, Jesse's brother, Mikey, takes up the challenge. Auto takes a speed demon talisman into the car with him and the gang members mention that the talisman allows him to access the power of speed demons (such as speed, elements and rage). Jesse recalls his father telling him stories about such talismans and speed demons. Using nitro-glycerine spiked fuel, Mikey loses control and dies in a crash. Jesse's brother is buried and, in voice over, Jesse explains that his father also had died in a car crash.

Jesse has recurring nightmares, in which he sees images of the speed demon talisman and experiences a flashback in which he sees his father worshipping speed demons by drinking blood at an altar. At his family home, he finds a box containing medals, a sacrificial chalice and a speed demon talisman concealed in the hearth.

Auto visits Road Rage as he fixes a car. Auto suggests that Rage steal some car parts from Hamstead Garage. Auto informs Road Rage that he intends to use Jesse to get vital information from his father's home on the location of a hidden speed demon. While Jesse is in a trance and wearing the talisman, an ominous looking black car speeds out of a nearby garage. Elsewhere, the group members, stripped to their underwear, all gather around an altar and are led in a ritual by Auto. Caressing both themselves and a chained-up car engine, they seemingly control the black car. Invoking 'Mikaleth', the speed demon, they command the 'purification' of Road Rage into their fold. They pour blood onto his chest and massage it in. Later, while under a jacked-up car, Road Rage is killed by an anonymous driver dressed in black racing clothes and boots by releasing the jack and collapsing the car onto him. The gang discover Road Rage dead.

Natalie discovers Jesse asleep on the floor of his room with an empty bottle of whiskey nearby. Jesse had apparently blacked out. Auto asks Chain Gang and Wiper to search for the talisman at the Hamstead Garage while the others attend a stock car race. While searching at the garage, Chain Gang is strangled by bike chains that supernaturally come to life. On his way to the Hamstead house, Wiper is run down and killed by the mysterious black sports car that, it is revealed, used to be owned by Jesse's father.

Natalie and Jesse go out on a date. The remaining gang members perform another purification ritual on, Clutch, while Jesse and Natalie sleep together, at the same time the black sports car drives at speed around the town. Jesse stops short of making love to Natalie and leaves her in order to 'clear his head'. Clutch is killed by the black car driver. Natalie meets the remaining gang members and wishes to leave their number, refusing to submit to the power of their god. She returns to Jesse to warn him about the demons and pleads with him to leave town.

After another purification ritual, this time with Axel, Jesse witnesses the group's performance at their hideout. Axel later confronts the phantom rider in the black sports car on nearby train tracks and attempts to shoot the driver with a shotgun. He is pursued and run down. With only Auto and Chopper left, Natalie approaches them concerned about the phantom rider. Auto asks Natalie to kill Jesse whom he thinks is possessed by the speed demon. She concedes and Chopper accompanies her. Auto calls Jesse provoking him to meet him upon threatening to kill Natalie. Chopper turns on Natalie and pulls a knife on her. Natalie escapes but Jesse has been drawn into a trap by Auto. Natalie and Chopper and Auto and Jesse all confront each other. Auto confronts Jesse in his true form, possessed by the speed demon desperate to claim Jesse's talisman. Auto uses supernatural powers to create explosions around Jesse. Natalie uses her supernatural powers to make Chopper kill herself. Having cornered Jesse, Auto is run

down by the phantom rider who reveals herself as Natalie, having harnessed the power of the speed demons herself.

Beastly Boyz (US/CA 2006)

In flashback, the murder of a young woman (Rachel) is seen, her body now lying on a small jetty by a lake. Her twin brother, Travis, stands over her in mourning; he comments on how close he was to his sister. In voice over, while visiting her grave, Travis vows revenge for the murder of his sister, threatening to kill the men that committed the crime.

In a nearby wood, Travis prepares himself, sharpening knives and exercising shirtless in lengthy slow-motion sequences. While having a nightmare, Travis dreams of Rachel beckoning to him. Sleeping, he caresses his sleeping body with a knife, licking it and teasing at his underwear. At a makeshift altar, Travis, while in a trance, contacts the spirit of his sister and writes down the name of the first killer, Max. He then stalks Max who is out jogging in the woods. Travis follows Max home, then, while Max has a shower, Travis undresses and enters the shower too, with Max unaware of any invasion. Travis stabs Max from behind and blood showers down between their bare legs. Pushing him against the wall, he shows Max the knife and repeatedly stabs him from behind in a symbolic rape. They collapse together in a post-coital-like exhaustion and Max dies.

Travis writes down the next name, Emery, while in a psychic trance. Emery takes a shirtless cycle ride in the wilderness, followed by a nap at his log-cabin. Travis enters and caresses a sleeping Emery's back and bottom with his knife. Upon waking, Travis stabs him.

Travis writes down Jennings as his next victim. While out driving near a lake, Jennings stops to take photographs but is chased by Travis, and eventually run over and killed.

Travis writes down Alan as his next victim. Alan throws stones by the lake, and is startled to hear Travis calling his name. He is captured, gagged, stripped to his underwear and tied to the rafters of a large log-cabin. Travis, also stripped to his underwear and also wearing a gag and leather gloves, runs his knife over the body of the incapacitated Alan. He is seen killing Alan by another of the gang of men he has vowed to kill, who then runs for his life but is eventually stopped and killed by Travis.

Channelling Rachel's spirit, Travis writes down Simon as his next victim. While Simon is laying flowers at Rachel's grave, Travis appears and chases him with a knife into the woods where he eventually hunts down and stabs him.

Travis writes down Mario as the next victim; Travis confesses that 'revenge was incomplete' in voice over. While caressing his knife, Travis watches as Mario exercises shirtless in the woods. He chases Mario down and kills the final victim.

Returning to Rachel's graveside, he rejoices that they can be together as brother and sister in heaven. Lying down by her graveside on an adjacent plot, in flashback it is revealed that Travis too was killed by the same gang of men. His body disappears and the voice over reveals that as 'brother and sister, we shared everything...even death.'

Ring of Darkness (US, 2004)

In a prologue, a young man (Gordo) is seen packing his bag to secretly escape an isolated house by the sea. He takes a cross pendant with him which he wears around his neck. Running along the beach, he is confronted by a gang of young men in silhouette, who threaten him for leaving the 'group'. They attack him and eat him.

A music video pastiche reveals a new boy-band, Take Ten, with five male members. In a news report, the remaining members are thought to have performed an intervention on the missing band member, Gordo, whom they believe to be addicted to drugs. The band hold open auditions to replace him. Band manager, Alex (Adrienne Barbeau), prowls the gathered crowd. During auditions, musician Shawn impresses Alex but provokes a negative response from the band members, but he is reluctant to join a manufactured band.

That night, one of the male auditionees is killed by an anonymous gang. Shawn and his girlfriend Stacy are invited to manager Alex's estate in the hope of persuading him to become a band member with two other short-listed competitors (Max and Jonah). Take Ten, led by lead singer Xavier, put the competitors to the test with continued tasks and performances. Shawn befriends fellow competitor Jonah, who is revealed to be an investigative journalist working undercover to reveal the truth about the band. Jonah overhears the band members discussing their choice to pick Max as the next member. Following them to a beachside cave, he discovers black magic books and a ritualistic altar. He calls Shawn and warns him, but is interrupted and killed by the band members and their manager. The following day, Take Ten reveal that Jonah has left the competition.

During further auditions, Shawn falls out with leader Xavier and threatens to leave the competition. Max is later tied to the altar by the band members in the cave and, led by manager Alex, they begin to transform him into one of them. Shawn suffers nightmares about Alex as a zombie, and of Take Ten performing sacrificial rituals while semi-naked. Stacy has a phone conversation with someone who she appears to be seeing alongside Shawn, and who appears to be using her to convince Shawn to compete.

The Take Ten band members convince Max to kill and devour a teenage girl fan during orgiastic sex, which is witnessed by Shawn. Upon discovering their cave, Shawn discovers that the band have been together for decades and are undead cannibalistic zombies. Alex and the band members confront Shawn and reveal that Max has also left the competition. Shawn grows concerned for Stacy's safety upon her disappearance. At home, a fan awaits Shawn for sacrifice. The band members appear and, upon removal of their make-up, reveal their true ancient faces. Manager Alex had used black magic to revive the dead band members after a plane crash, but now Alex is being used by the band members. Upon killing the girl, the band overpower Shawn and take him to the altar to perform a sacrifice, feeding on Shawn's youth and talent by making him one of them. The band members strip themselves and Shawn down to their underwear and perform the ritual. Stacy attempts to rescue Shawn and reveals that she is the sister of Gordo. Stacy is overpowered by Xavier, who kills her. Shawn frees himself, throwing the voodoo dolls of the band members on the fire, resulting in their deaths. Shawn takes Alex hostage and gets her to bring back Stacy as a zombie.

Other Gaysploitation horror films:

***October Moon* (Jason Paul Collum, US 2007)**

Jake showers alone and the water around his feet is tinged with blood that has been running down his legs. He later walks around the flat cleaning up, stalked by an unseen voyeur. The voyeur reveals himself to be Corin, Jake's older boyfriend. They go to bed, and Jake turns to see Corin with a knife in his chest. Jake wakes screaming from another nightmare and Corin reassures him.

The next morning at breakfast, Corin and Jake argue about the state of their relationship. Corin is jealous of Jake and his younger friends; Corin is 30 and Jake is 23. Corin grows frustrated with Jake's unemployed status. Nancy, Corin's friend at work, reveals that Corin has a new assistant, Eliot.

Eliot reveals to Marti, his fiancé, that he has secured a new job. In the car park on the way back from the general store, Eliot is cruised by a man. Marti remarks upon it and embarrasses Eliot. Later that night, Jake returns home late once more and Corin confronts him again, trying to ascertain what is wrong. They discuss open relationships, and it is clear that it is something Corin and Jake do not want.

Eliot is dressed for work by his overbearing mother and during their conversation it becomes clear that Eliot's father was a closeted homosexual who ran away with a male lover. Eliot attends his first day at work and begins to form a crush upon Corin. At lunch, Nancy, Corin and Eliot discuss their relationships, and Eliot becomes aware of Corin's sexuality – he becomes curious asking many questions. After work, Corin and Nancy agree that Eliot may be a closeted homosexual. Eliot talks about Corin at dinner that evening. Upon hearing of Corin's sexuality, his mother warns her son about 'his type'. Jake returns home late another evening and Corin grows increasingly jealous.

Marti and Eliot socialise with Corin and Jake, each taking it in turns going to one another's regular pub. First, Corin and Jake are guests at a straight Irish bar. Second, Marti and Eliot visit a gay club where Eliot runs into the man who cruised him at the car park, only this time dressed in full drag as 'Chantal'. Chantal embarrasses Eliot and accuses him of being gay. Eliot begins looking at gay websites, some of which are sadomasochistic in content, and is almost caught by his mother. Eliot continues to socialise without Marti but with Jake and Corin instead, staying over at their apartment. He begins to fantasise about Corin, while looking at photographs and smelling stolen underwear.

Eliot begins to distance himself from Marti and they temporarily separate, as Marti becomes concerned with Eliot's obsession with Corin. While out driving, Eliot discovers a disused house and barn with a cellar which he breaks into. Eliot comes out to Corin and asks for advice. Eliot invites himself along on a weekend trip to a caravan site with Corin and Jake (who originally intended to rekindle their relationship). Jake grows frustrated with Eliot's presence during the weekend. After Corin and Jake argue, Eliot follows Corin to his 'alone place' in the woods and, later that evening, Eliot attempts to kiss Corin who reacts with disgust. The weekend is brought short as the three drive home in silence.

Becoming increasingly withdrawn and aggressive, Eliot begins fashioning a shrine/prison in the cellar of the old farmhouse. Nancy, discovering Eliot's photographs of Corin, asks him to leave work. Debbie discovers Eliot's photographs and splits with him, threatening to expose him to his mother. Becoming desperate, Eliot eventually kidnaps Corin concealing him in the trunk of his car and driving him to the farmhouse. Chasing Corin through a cornfield, Eliot catches him and, to prevent him from running away, Eliot slashes Corin's feet and heels.

On discovering Corin's disappearance, Jake visits Marti and pleads with her to reveal Eliot's location. Marti goes to the farmhouse, unaware she is being followed by Jake who knocks her unconscious. Jake discovers Corin, stripped semi-naked and bound up in a crucifix-like pose in Eliot's shrine. Eliot appears, slashes Jake's back and, in the ensuing struggle, he stabs Corin in the heart before fleeing. Jake, having taken the knife, hunts down Eliot and strangles him in revenge. Marti suddenly appears and attacks Jake with the dropped knife, but is knocked unconscious once more by an embittered Jake. Jake rearranges the two bodies to make it appear as though Marti has killed her fiancé. A montage of news reports reveal that Eliot was a gay man who 'killed for love' and had slaughtered both Marti and Corin.

***Socket* (Sean Abley, US 2008)**

As Dr Bill Matthews (Derek Long) recovers in hospital from a near-fatal lightning strike, his colleagues sign him off from surgery work for the foreseeable future and he is nursed back to health by a younger intern Craig Murphy (Matthew Montgomery), whom he also begins dating. Aided by Craig and his two female friends, who are also partners Olivia and Carol, Dr Matthews returns home yet is isolated from work due to ill health. Craig introduces Bill to a secret 'self-help' group for 'people like us' (that is, survivors of lightning strikes who feel that their lives have changed after the event). Bill attends the group with Craig, now his partner, and is introduced to a collective of people (both men and women) who have all, like himself, began shocking themselves via appliances and mains' electricity to gain ever increasing highs, even implementing the use of electricity into their sexual behaviour. The group use an electric conductor in their sessions and, while holding hands in a circle, pass the current between them. Becoming dissatisfied with using kitchen utensils and forks to stick in mains' plugs to obtain electric shocks, Dr Matthews surgically enhances his own and Craig's bodies, inserting implants into the flesh of each of their wrists – one wrist fitted with plug pins and the other fitted with plug socket slots. Dr Matthews, along with Craig, tests out the new implants with Bill plugging himself into Craig to form a connected chain of electricity.

Taking the idea to the group, Bill soon enhances its members' bodies also. Over time, and as the increasing desire to experience greater and more powerful shocks perturbs some members who recognise its addictive qualities, Bill becomes uncontrollably obsessed, often sneaking off in private from Craig and his friends to secretly shock himself. Bill seeks his electric thrills often after their lovemaking, increasingly venturing out during the night while Craig sleeps. One night while being mugged Bill defends himself by stabbing his would-be attacker in the back of his neck with the prongs in his wrist, only to experience the pleasure of bio-electrical energy and, consequently, the immediate memories of his victim (visualised by a collage of images and sounds). Bill becomes addicted to murdering people via this method, seeing the bio-electrical energy as a purer source of pleasure, indiscriminately killing female prostitutes, drug addicts and homeless people. But with each kill, Bill's guilt and shame for his actions also increases. Becoming concerned for his partner, Craig investigates, only for Bill to throw him out of their home. His obsession reaches its peak when he begins using dying patients at the hospital to feed from, until Olivia is seriously injured in a car accident and, under his care at the hospital, Bill shamefully finishes her off by stabbing her in the neck with his prongs to feed from her bio-electrical energy. Upon realising his actions, Bill runs away with the intention of killing himself, unable to live with his shame. After Bill's final phone call with his partner, Craig rushes to prevent Bill's suicide attempt – an electrical overload at the local power station. His attempt to stop Bill ends with the two lovers electrocuted and placed in a coma at the hospital.

***Hellbent* (Paul Etheridge-Outzs, US 2006)**

A prologue reveals it is the night before Hallowe'en, as a gay couple kiss in their parked car by an isolated woodland. They are interrupted by an anonymous assailant wearing a devil's mask. One of them is decapitated by the masked killer as his lover fellates him, and the other is later stabbed to death. The next day, Eddie, an administrator at the local police station in West Hollywood, is caught by his police officer sister, printing out mugshots of attractive male criminals. Having lost an eye in an accident, Eddie has become a desk-bound administrator in a police station.

The station inspector asks Eddie to perform some community work in the local gay scene, to raise awareness of the previous evening's killings. He does so, while dressed in his dead father's police old uniform. Eddie cruises an anonymous biker figure, he cruises Jake while he is being tattooed, and later embarrasses himself when he attempts to pick him up in the nearby car park. Later Eddie meets with his friend, Chaz, a bisexual dressed as a cowboy, for the evening's Hallowe'en fancy dress celebrations. He find Chaz sleeping with a couple (a man and a woman) in his camper van. Eddie warns him about the previous night's killings. Together they meet Tobey, a gay male model friend, who is dressed in full drag and they wait in a restaurant for their fourth friend, Joey, to finish work and dress-up as a leather-daddy.

The four friends, Eddie, Joey, Chaz and Tobey, all dress-up in various fancy dress costumes to attend a Hallowe'en Carnival in West Hollywood, a very gay neighbourhood in Los Angeles. They drive to the same spot at which the two men were slaughtered. Eddie tells his friends about a murder of two gay men, who were beheaded by a masked figure, the night before, in the very same spot that the men park in before walking to the carnival. En route, they encounter a shadowy figure stalking them, dressed as a devil, whom they take for another carnival-goer.

After watching a musical performance on stage at a nightclub in which Joey appears to be killed with a chainsaw, the four friends separate to cruise for sex, and they are picked off and killed one at a time by the pursuing Devil Daddy figure (a term which the characters use to describe their pursuer). Eddie pursues the enigmatic Biker figure, Jake.

Joey attempts to proposition Jared, a local jock, whose sexuality he is unsure of. Discovering his bisexuality, Jared arranges to meet Joey in the toilets. Joey is intercepted by Devil Daddy, who beheads him in the toilet cubicle. Meanwhile, Chaz takes some pills and, under narcotic influence, begins wildly dancing on the floor of the Meat Locker nightclub. He is watched from the crowd by Devil Daddy, who proceeds to slash at him, the audience remaining unaware due to the flashing strobe lighting. Chaz is eventually beheaded in plain view of others, who mistake it for another performance. Tobey, after failing continually to find a partner, drinks heavily and, after taking a photograph of himself in front of a billboard advertisement in which he features, he follows Devil Daddy into an alley. He attempts to call to the murderer, who ignores him, mistaking him for a woman. After he removes his wig and dress, the Devil Daddy turns and promptly decapitates Tobey.

Unaware of his friends' deaths, Eddie returns home with Jake after narrowly escaping an attack by Devil Daddy himself in another nightclub. Alone in the flat, Eddie and Jake indulge in teasing foreplay, in which Eddie is handcuffed to his bed. Teasing Eddie, Jake refuses to kiss and retires to the bathroom leaving Eddie tied up. Eddie becomes anxious that Jake, being a stranger, may in fact not be who he appears to be. Jake is attacked by the Devil Daddy, who is concealed behind the shower curtain. Devil Daddy then moves towards Eddie, who manages to free himself from the handcuffs and is stalked throughout the flat.

Eddie battles with the attacker, taking an injured Jake to safety out on the fire escape. He finds his father's gun in his closet, but loses his glass eye in a struggle with the masked killer. Eddie handcuffs himself to the railings and is thrown from the fire escape; hanging by one arm he attempts to shoot at Devil Daddy to stop him from decapitating Jake. Due to his visual impairment, he continually misses and, after Jake pleads with him to aim at him, Eddie eventually shoots Devil Daddy in the head. Eddie rescues an injured Jake and they embrace on the fire escape. The apparently masked killer is taken away in an ambulance but, as it drives away, Devil Daddy's eyes flick open and Eddie's glass eye is shown between his teeth.

***Otto; or, Up With Dead People* (Bruce LaBruce, US 2008)**

Opening on a montage of nuclear explosions, bomb blasts, the disposal of corpses of the war dead, juxtaposed with extreme close-ups of butchers' knives being sharpened and the cutting of raw chicken carcasses, *Otto*, a young gay zombie, walks towards the camera, in what appears to be a film within a film – a documentary entitled *Otto*. Its director, Medea Yarns, provides a voice over which describes the fictional reality to which these images and the existence of gay zombies belong. A cut shows *Otto*, wandering by a rural roadside, stopping to eat a dead rabbit that has been run over. He attempts in vain to hitch a ride to Berlin. Eventually a car stops and picks up the somnambulant *Otto*.

A cut to a black and white film moves the narrative into a secondary film within a film; the titles, *Up With Dead People*, fade up on the image of Fritz staggering home to his apartment, looking ill. He stops to enter his front door, and sticks out his tongue onto which he retrieves his front door key. In a reference to *Meshes of the Afternoon*, a woman in a burka walks past. He finds his lover, Maximillion, dead on the kitchen floor having shot himself in the head. Max eventually reanimates as a zombie; the two lovers kiss. Max eventually bites Fritz, turns him into a zombie and penetrates a hole in Fritz's abdomen with his penis and the pair have sex.

Meanwhile, *Otto* is shown trying to connect with people around Berlin. He suffers discrimination by people on the U-Bahn and he is chased by infantile gangs of youth who throw stones at him. One evening, he comes across a pair of zombie males who flirt with *Otto* and kiss in front of him in a disused fairground. Film director Medea and her brother *Otto* are later seen walking through a graveyard; she picks out a headstone for her lover, Hella Bent's, birthday. In many juxtaposing cuts, *Otto*, Medea and Fritz speak directly to camera about *Otto*. *Otto* wanders around Berlin during the day, ruminating on his 'identity crisis', born out of the fact that he has no memory of how he came to be this way. Hella Bent and Medea have lunch and discuss *Otto* as the new muse for Medea's other documentary film, '*Otto*'. Whenever Hella Bent is shown on screen, she is framed in 16mm style black and white, with film grain, scratches, hairs on the lens and an accompanying silent film piano score complete with intertitles.

Cut to *Up With Dead People*; the zombie lovers Fritz and Max sit at the table going through the motions of breakfast with one another, but both groan and grunt in zombie-style.

Otto wanders through town and comes across a butcher's shop, staring into the window. The proprietor recognises him as his son and it is inferred that he has not seen *Otto* for a long time. As he runs out to speak with him, *Otto* runs away confused. Later that night, *Otto* comes across what he believes to be two zombies outside the club 'Flesh'. They are revealed to be dressing up as zombies in a performance, along with the other members of the club. He runs into a man, dressed as a zombie, who mistakes *Otto* for a

fellow 'performer'. They return to his apartment where Otto eats him alive. Later the man awakens to ask Otto out on another date.

In *Up With Dead People*, Medea explains that the, now revolutionary, lovers Max and Fritz have been beaten up by a zombie-phobic gang of youths; Max is killed and burned. In revenge, Fritz decides to recruit other gay zombies by cruising them in parks and back streets, taking them into his fold of revolutionary gay zombies.

Otto narrowly escapes a beating at the hands of zombie-phobes on the streets of Berlin. Hiding, he notices an advert for Medea's gay zombie film. After an interview with her, she is inspired to make a film solely about Otto, much to Fritz's (the actor's) chagrin. Medea films several scenes including Otto shoplifting raw chicken from a supermarket, rising out of a grave with his headstone on it, and climbing to the top of a pile of waste in the city dump in which she crowns him 'Prince of the Zombies'. During filming, Otto stays with Fritz at his apartment; after an initial awkwardness, they grow close. Otto finds a library ticket in his wallet which eventually reminds him of Rudolf, his ex-boyfriend, who continuously appears in flashback memories. He arranges to see Rudolf, who explains that he did not want to be with Otto after he found out about his sickness. Through deliberate audio interference, we discover that Otto was perhaps suffering from a mental illness, which led to his alienation. Rudolf confirms his split with Otto, they separate and Otto is later beaten by zombie-phobes.

Medea shoots the final orgy scenes from *Up With Dead People*, after which Otto returns to Fritz, who cares for his wounds and the pair make love. The following morning, Fritz finds a note from Otto on his pillow stating 'Otto RIP'. Cut to Otto in a city wasteland, where he pours petrol onto himself and apparently sets himself alight. A later cut reveals the burning body to be a dummy and, in fact, the scene is the closing one from Medea's film about Otto. Otto leaves Medea and Fritz to hitchhike north in the hope of finding others like him, after stating that he had contemplated suicide (though it would be in vain, being already dead). He walks off into the distance framed by a rainbow in the sky.

8.2 Table of Differences in *Let the Right One In* adaptations.

	Lat den ratte komme in (2006)	Let the Right One In (2008)	Let Me In (2010)
Characters	Oskar, Eli/Elias, Hakan, Steffan, Tommy, Oskar's mother, Oskar's father, Virginia, Jocke, Gosta, Lacke, Mr Avila.	Removes Steffan (police investigator) and his son Tommy.	Names changed: Abby, Owen, 'The Father', Owen's mother, 'The Policeman', Virginia, Larry, Zack, Mr Zoric, Kenny.
Narrators	Omniscient third person narrative Oskar as the central focalizer, moving between perspective of various other characters.	Largely from Oskar's perspective, sequences/shots from other's POV: Gosta, Eli, Jocke, Virginia.	Largely from Owen's perspective, with sections shot from Police Officer's Abby's and Abby's victim's perspective.
	Oskar is incontinent.	Removed.	Owen wets himself during bullying.
	Oskar retaliates by hitting back at Jonny with a boat pole, during a skating trip.	Oskar retaliates by hitting back at Conny with a boat pole, during a skating trip.	Owen retaliates by hitting back at Kenny with a boat pole, during a skating trip.
	Flashbacks describe in detail Eli's graphic castration at hands of a vampire lord.	Shared memories are alluded too via a suggested joining of minds.	Removed.
	Eli is revealed as Elias a young male castrated vampire with homosexual feelings.	Eli's gender remains apparently 'female' but contains multiple protestations, 'I'm not a girl', 'Would you still like me if I wasn't a girl?'.	Abby's gender remains female, despite protestations, 'I'm not a girl', 'Would you still like me if I wasn't a girl?'.
	Contains detailed description of Eli's castrated genitals as seen by Oskar including a scar as she/he changes in to one of Oskar's mother's dresses.	Contains a brief shot of Eli's genitals, from the POV of Oskar as he/she undresses, which are seen to display a scar of sort which is not explained.	Contains a shot in which Owen is shown spying on Abby as she undresses, with no reverse shot.
	Character of Hakan is explicitly revealed to be a paedophile who meets Eli as a young boy/girl and remains a companion.	Character of Hakan is presented as a father-figure, his past is not revealed.	Character of Hakan is referred to as 'The Father'. It is suggested via a photobooth strip that he met the young Abby as a young boy.

	Contains flashbacks in which Hakan abuses young boys.	Removed.	Removed.
	Contains scene in which Hakan masturbates while spying on boys in gym before attempting to drain one's blood.	Hakan drains the blood of one of the boys from the gym.	'The Father' hides in the back of a car attempting to drain the blood from a young man but is thwarted and is injured in a car crash.
	Hakan survives the acid disfigurement, and a fall from his hospital window after Eli feeds from him only to return as a disfigured, zombie bent on raping Eli.	Hakan survives the acid disfigurement, but after Eli feeds from him at his hospital window, dies in a fall.	'The Father' survives the acid disfigurement, but falls from the hospital window and dies after Abby feeds from him.
	Oskar's father is a withdrawn alcoholic, who is divorced from his mother and lives alone in the countryside.	Oskar's father is depicted as a withdrawn, tweedy figure who lives alone in the countryside - divorced from Oskar's mother.	Owen's father (John) is depicted as divorced from his mother, but does not appear in the film. It is implied that Owen's father has a new girlfriend, Cindy.
	Oskar's father is described as being uncomfortable with fatherhood.	Oskar's father is involved with his childhood via telephone.	Owen talks to father over the telephone, but he is not seen and only heard once.
	Oskar's father is described as the 'werewolf'.	Removed.	Removed.
	Contains a scene with Janne and Oskar's father drinking, and there is a clear reference to his alcoholism.	Contains a scene with Janne and Oskar's father drinking, with implication of homoeroticism.	Removed. It is implied that John has a new girlfriend.
	Implies Oskar's father's alcoholism leads to his potential abuse of son.	Removed.	Removed.

8.3. Table of Interviews Conducted

Filmmaker	Horror Film Involvement	Position/Company
Bruce LaBruce (Director, Producer, Writer)	<i>Otto, or Up With Dead People</i> (2010) <i>LA Zombie</i> (2011)	Independent Writer, Director, Actor
David De Coteau (Director, Producer, Writer)	Significant titles for this thesis: <i>The Killer Eye</i> (1999), <i>Voodoo Academy</i> (2000) <i>The Brotherhood (aka. I'll Be Watching You)</i> (2001), <i>Final Stab</i> (2001) <i>The Brotherhood II: Young Warlocks</i> (2001) <i>Speed Demon</i> (2003), <i>Leeches!</i> (2003) <i>Beastly Boyz</i> (2006)	Director, Rapid Heart Pictures Production Asst., New World Pictures Director, Here!TV
Paul Etheredge-Outzs (Writer/Director)	<i>Hellbent</i> (2004)	Writer/Director, Sneak Preview Entertainment
Jason Paul Collum (Writer/Producer/Director)	<i>October Moon</i> (2005) <i>November Son</i> (2008)	Publicity Director, Tempe Entertainment
Erik Jackson (Theatre Director/Stage Writer)	<i>Carrie</i> (with Theatre Couture, December 2006, New York, PS 122 Theatre)	Independent.
Sean Abley (Writer, Producer, Director)	<i>Socket</i> (2007)	Independent.
Alan Rowe Kelley (Writer, Director, Producer, Actor)	<i>Gallery of Fear (featuring short 'A Far Cry From Home')</i> (2010)	Independent, Director South Paw Pictures
Charles Lum (Director, Video Artist)	<i>Indelible</i> (2003)	Independent.

Appendix 8.4

Indelible (Lum, US 2004) in pictures



0.03 mins

The moon and lunar cycle with its Menstrual connotations are taken Not from Carrie but from LA Tool And Die.



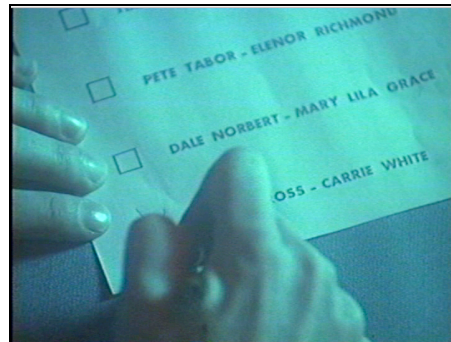
0.12 mins

Water splashes after a diver washes himself clean of 'pollution' after masturbating in LA Tool & Die.



0.22 sec

Red titles rise above the prom, Our first formal introduction in text To *Indelible*.



0.26 sec

Formal introduction to Carrie in text.



0.29 secs

Faint reminder of what is *INDELIBLE*



0.36 secs

Driving by trees while listening to Spoonball in *LA Tool & Die*.



0.48 secs

Formal introduction to the masculine mise en scene of *LA Tool & Die*.



0.56 secs

The Last Supper? at the Whites.



1.16 mins

'Prom?' accompanied by the first almost visible erect penis from LA Tool and Die in superimposition.



1.37 mins

Carrie's first milky /seminal shower.



1.44 mins

Flash Forwards to a the fantastical imagery of the prom date.



2.07 mins

'The boys!' – masturbation and Penile imagery infiltrates the familial scene from *Carrie*.



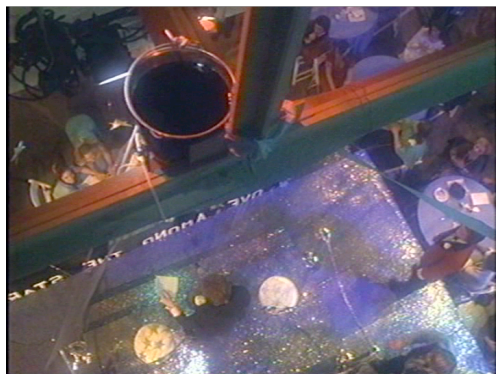
2.20 mins

Coy imagery of anal penetration, by superimposition has Carrie (as penetrator) 'penetrating' her mother (as penetrated), which prefigures her death by penetration in the denouement of *Carrie*



2.26 mins

'Don't let me stop you..' – our first introduction to Jim.



2.32 mins

The separated stage of the spectacular.



2.49 mins

'This guy's real hot, he's just about ready To pop !' later paralleled with 'That Carrie White – she sure is cute' further suggests the gender reversal of the love object.



3.08 mins

Carrie's procession to the stage to Be crowned Prom Queen.



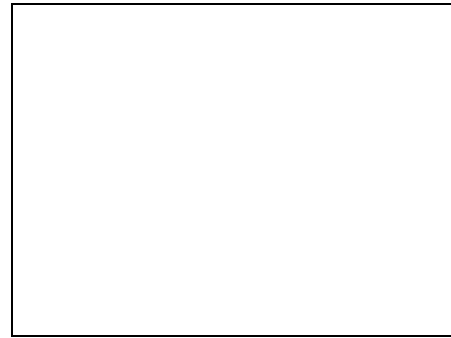
3.23 mins

Chris's excitement.



3.24 mins

A masturbatory tug of the rope from *Carrie*.



3.40 mins

The bucket topples.



3.43 mins

Chris's mouth nears the phallic rope
Mirroring Jim's fellatio in *LA Tool & Die*



3.51 mins

XCU of Chris's almost vaginal mouth,
in sensual anticipation.



3.52 mins

XCU of Chris's eye awaiting pleasure.



3.54 mins

The first subliminal upward spurts of
masculine 'flow'.



3.59 mins

'I'm gonna cum!' Chris's orgasmic/masturbatory yank of the bucket.



4.04 mins

Freezing or stemming the flow of blood.



4.05 mins

Replayed spurts/flow of semen.



4.07 mins

Replayed spurts of masculine flow.



4.10 mins

Semen is devoured orally by Jim.



4.26 mins

'They're all gonna laugh at you!'. Juxtaposition causes Norma and friends to laugh at *LA Tool's* male orgy in place of Carrie's humiliation.



4.31 mins

Miss Collin's looks concerned at the sight
Of male masturbation/fellatio she sees
From *LA Tool* by juxtaposition.



4.49 mins

Jim sits (and is almost unable to move)
while others shoot their semen at him.
An eroticised set of images that
reference imagery of St. Sebastian.



4.53 mins

Jim writhes in frenetic ecstasy.



4.58 mins

Jim writhing in pleasure/pain.



5.02 mins

Bulging pipes and tumescent fire hoses
are filled with fluid and flow also – as
symbolic phalluses.



5.11 mins

Jim is shot at.



5.15 mins

'They're all gonna laugh at you!' Jim's cum shower is visually paralleled in superimposition with Carrie's blood shower.



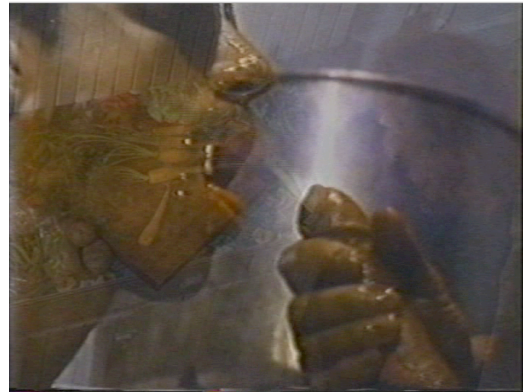
5.33 mins

'Trust me Carrie' – tension between women and their many faces as rendered by De Palma.



5.38 mins

Mrs. White's castrating kitchen, complete with phallic vegetables.



5.40 mins

While Mrs. White tries to castrate symbolically – the penile and phallic images continue.



5.41 mins

The flow continues.



5.56 mins

Male vulnerability is captured in De Palma's *Carrie*.



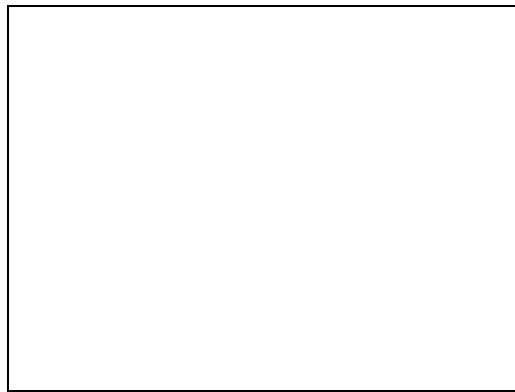
6.00 mins

The spraying (phallic) hose is paralleled via superimposition with spurting penises.



6.08 mins

Ingestion of semen is a repeated image in Lum's *Indelible*.



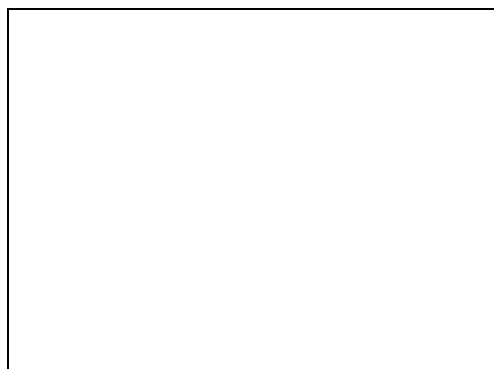
6.09 mins

Norma is showered and sprayed also by the suggestively phallic hose.



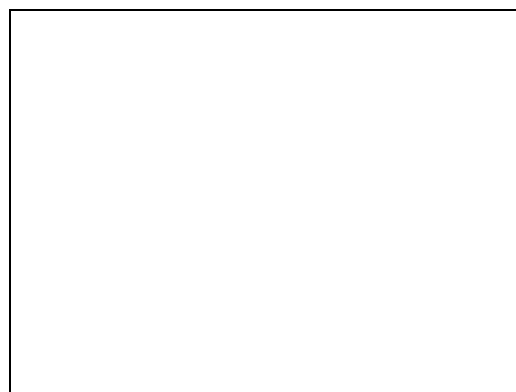
6.13 mins

The clichéd s & m dungeon of Chi Chi La Rue's *The Final Link*.



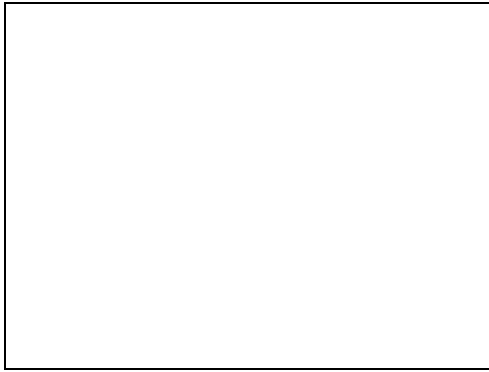
6.20 mins

Split screen carnage: De Palma's split screen montage of Carrie's revenge via a powerful spraying hose, is paralleled with spraying penises in *The Final Link*.



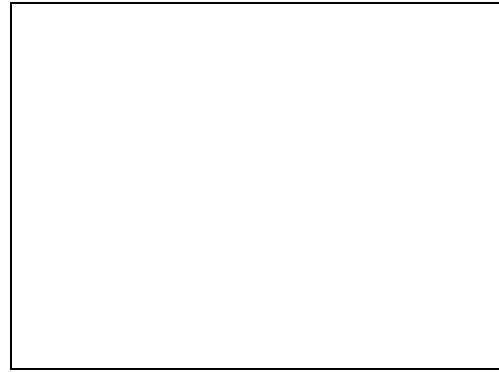
6.31 mins

Male vulnerability: Mr Fromm up in flames.



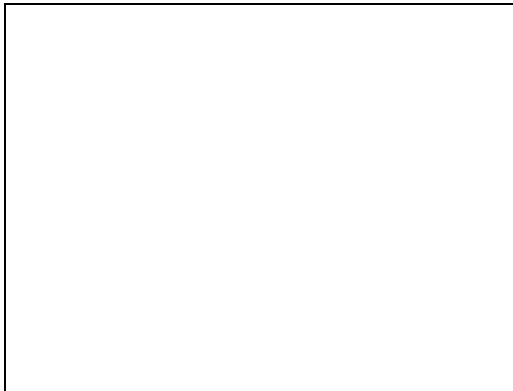
6.32 mins

A woman about to be centrifuged of her blood, her flow from *The Fury*.



6.34 mins

She is spun around and her blood flies powerfully out of her – paralleled with other powerful bodily emissions from men from *The Final Link*.



6.38 mins

The flow from the phallus (hose) is more powerful than the seeping, gradual downward flow of genital bodily fluids from the woman, but it is still flow none the less.



6.39 mins

A powerful spurt is ejaculated spectacularly from Spike in *The Final Link*.



6.45 mins

..and via juxtaposition Spike's white ejaculate spatters the domestic setting from *The Fury*.



6.43 mins

Split-screen frenzy of Spike's spectacular ejaculate.



6.47 mins

Spike sprays the mirror with cum/blood.



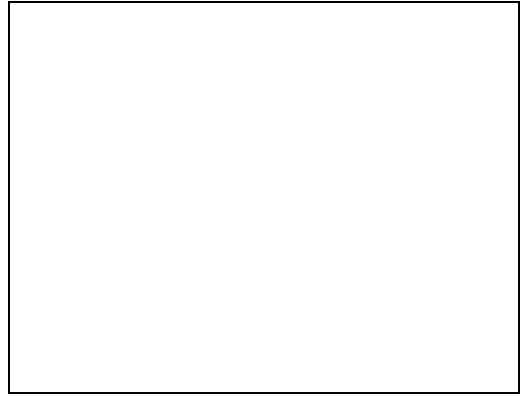
6.52 mins

The frenzy increases as the flow and repetition is multiplied.



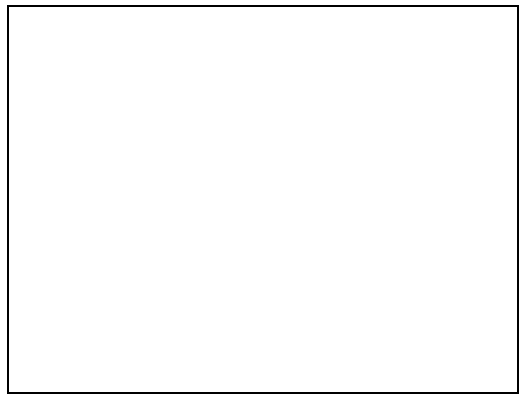
6.55 mins

Carrie's own genital bodily fluid flows after sensual self-touching and masturbatory references from De Palma.



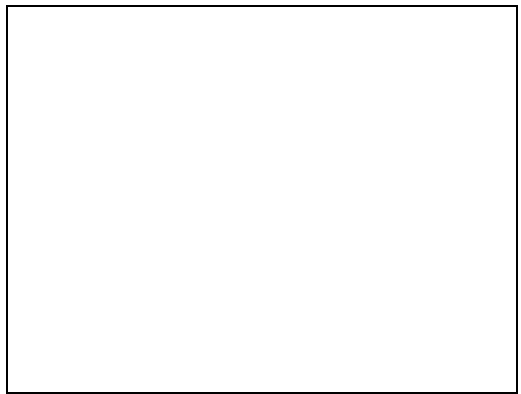
7.05 mins

Childress cries blood as he is kissed by Gillian in *The Fury* – blood and fluid flows from men also.



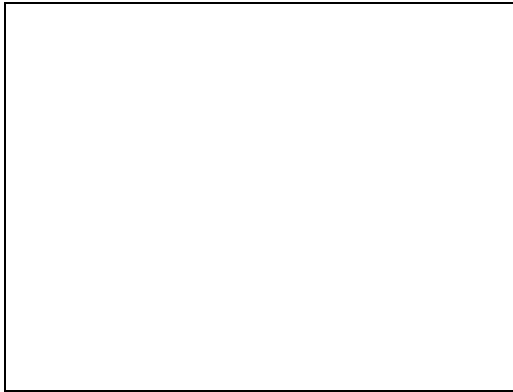
7.06 mins

Mrs. White's cries of ecstasy/death is heard but not seen under the semen ingestion clips.



7.07 mins

The blood is finally allowed to spectacularly flow by Lum.



7.09 mins

More Paul Morris pornography figuring semen ingestion.



7.13 mins

'You go to hell' from *The Fury* is echoed over an attempt to cleanse of polluting pig's blood/masturbation.



7.16 mins

Ridicule at the hands of other women. parallels Lum's ridicule and shame felt at the hands of his own gay sub-culture.



7.22 mins

Gillian as wanton woman.



7.23 mins

Carrie's cry for help is visually paralleled but is more a cry for help in her shame.



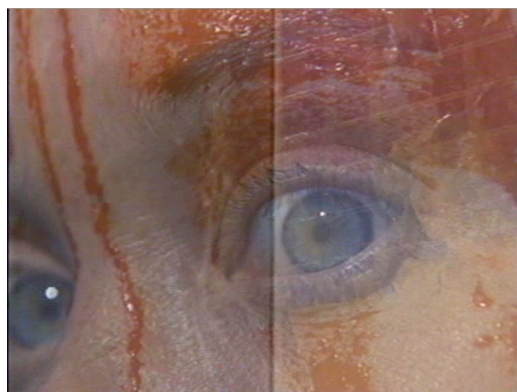
7.25 mins

Cleansing of the pollutant.



7.30 mins

Childress convulses – almost erotically as he spontaneously combusts or ejaculates himself



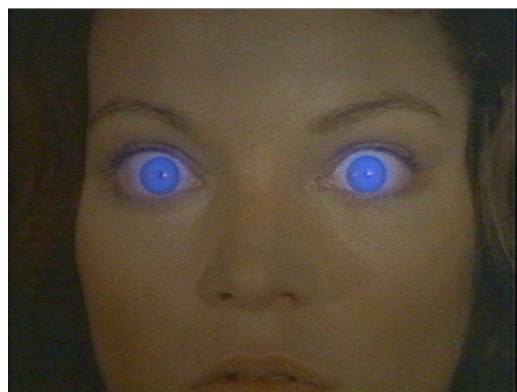
7.31 mins

Carrie returns the gaze...



7.34 mins

..and makes Chris's car explode.



7.36 mins

Gillian returns the gaze also...



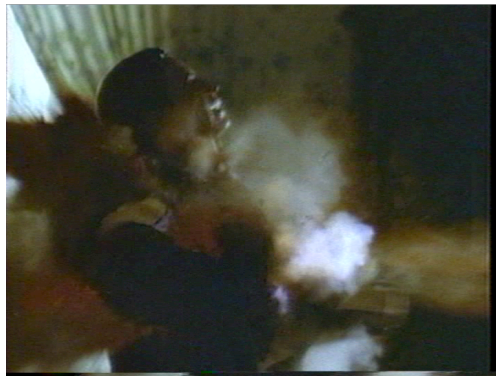
7.36 mins

...and makes Childress erupt from within in a spectacular replay...



7.37 mins

...and repetition of images from eight different cameras, of the explosion.



7.40 mins

Ejaculation/explosion from *The Fury*, formally parallels a gay porn trope...



7.45 mins

...of replaying cum shots ad infinitum.



7.56 mins

The final image of horror/guilt/shame from *Indelible*.
'They're all gonna laugh at you'