

**“The Sacrificial Lamb”: Representations of Trans Feminine Bodies in
American Horror and Comedy Film of the AIDS Crisis**

By

Kennedy DeAugustine

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Department of Cinema Studies, School of Film and Media Studies in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Bachelors of Arts

at SUNY Purchase

Purchase, New York, United States 2020

Sponsor: Joel Neville Anderson

Second Reader: Rachel Fabian

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 CRITERIA AND FILMOGRAPHY.....	6
CHAPTER 3 CONTEXT OF TIME	11
CHAPTER 4 PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION.....	17
CHAPTER 5 GENRE.....	27
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION.....	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	45

When I think of the power that cinema holds within our lives, in reference to the applicable influence it has on an audiences' perception and interpretation of the contemporary outside world, I'm often drawn back to the work of early cinema. The Lumière brothers, the mediums' creators, are a perfect example with their simplistic yet enduring catalog of works such as *Workers Leaving a Factory* (1895), as well as the invaluable contributions made by one of the founders of Soviet cinema, Dziga Vertov, with his film *Kino-Eye* (1924). In acknowledging these pioneers, though their impact on cinematic history is clear, at first glance it might appear that the only correlation between these men and these films is their shared mode of execution being film, they couldn't seem more unrelated when it comes to the divide between these filmmakers both geographically and culturally. However, these pioneers both touch on a relationship that laid the foundation, that has built a formulaic film language. Yes, it is this language through moving images that has continued to stimulate and intrigue audiences, continuing to persevere through the ever-evolving dialect and landscape of cinema that allows it to resonate still today. In films we see ourselves, we are able to empathize and draw similarities to the actions on screen that we can see and attribute to our own likeness. To see a body that is like our own and be able to relate to a distinguishable emotion or a setting that mirrors our own lives, this connection is what invests us in a character and situation, no matter the complexity of the narrative. To see our likeness we orient ourselves in space and time to feel as though we're not alone in our lived experiences, it's this form of connection that gives *Workers Leaving a Factory* and *Kino-Eye* accessibility to a more diverse audience. Even though these films differ in

time and subject matter, they provide insights to audiences through a perception and interpretation of the past. While most contemporary cinema strayed from the novelty of capturing the mundane, the capacity in which these sentiments have persisted from the Lumière brothers to Vertov and beyond, represents the constant connection drawn between the lens and the human form.

Film has often been a way to say more about the time and place in which it's created than the story itself used to explore and bring new perspectives that not only intrigue the viewer but provide a message that brings some level of comfort. One of film's greatest purposes is to hold a mirror up to the societal aspirations and concerns that resonate with its audience on the basis of a collective experience that holds true to real life, be it directly or indirectly. But what happens when the audience as a majority cannot relate to the bodies on screen physically, mentally, or emotionally and what purpose would such a disconnect serve? The intrinsic need the audience has to engage with a film is predominantly dependent on being able to perceive experiences as a way to orient themselves, regardless of the setting in time and space. One of the principal ways to make this connection is through fear, one of our most basic and relied upon instincts. Regardless of class, gender, or race, we have all been afraid of something at one point in time. We understand this by the way all stories need some kind of antagonist as a truth that spans every genre and form of entertainment that has narrative structure. It is a purposeful split that allows us to identify, through the physical embodiment of often generalised interpretations of what or who we should perceive as either the antagonist and protagonist. Our ability to distinguish between the antagonist and the protagonist as an audience is malleable based on the time and space a film exists in. The context of the cultural and social landscape that coincides

with a film gives us an idea of the audience it catered to at the time, as well as allows us to better analyze the subtext of the inclusion and motivations of both the antagonist and protagonist characters' archetypes. It's how the morals of these stories and characters overcome adversity that impacts how we are meant to identify with these bodies, conditioning our interpretation to be dependent on their interactions with the people and world around them. Likewise, we can see expressly through cinema's advancement through history that the fears of the past don't always resonate with the fears of the future, in fact, the basis of these aversions may persist, but the vessels that personify fear evolves with the progression of the social climates that encompass them. The phasing in and out of these vessels is in direct relation to how the majority can devise some comfort in seeing a definitive separation between the personification of their fear and the hero that provides the solutions by overcoming or vanquishing the vessel. Subsequently the inference we make to these bodies in relation to ourselves in the real world and how we apply this knowledge to our interactions outside of a voyeuristic space is reliant on their place in the narrative in comparison to cis bodies dependent on the genre. This can be seen in the way film and narrative structure have historically been utilized to display different sides and perspectives of historical and cultural spaces that would not be readily accessible to American audiences. This is what I consider to be the cinema's greatest strength and most alluring complexity, the perception and interpretation that influences the representation of this fear creating "The Other". What can the analysis of othering tell us about what specifically sets the tone when a new iteration of this plight of being objectified lends itself to the interpretation of good and evil? To delve deeper then, how is this applicable to trans feminine bodies' representation during the peak of the AIDS epidemic of the eighties and mid-nineties in America? The genres of comedy and horror utilize

bodies as vessels to inform the audience's opinion through the uses of parody and tropes, which we can only infer to reflect the societal, cultural, and political landscape at the time. How and who decides what should be deemed as "The Other"? What is it about the sociopolitical backdrop of a particular time and place that incites a change in how character archetypes of good and evil are defined, and then in turn how it affects the audience's ability to relate to the characters they see on screen. Furthermore, what implications does the way "The Other's" motives are presented and communicated on screen have on the way the audience perceives the character of "The Other", in our case more specifically the trans feminine body? Lastly, how has this narrative of providing comfort through insight to the masses been helpful and/or harmful to the representation of the often minoritized people the vessel absorbs? Ultimately I want this paper to acknowledge the effects of one of the most marginalized groups at one of the most pivotal moments in time for the queer community; cinematic representation has impacted not only the public perception of these bodies, but how trans women interpreted the gaze upon them and how the ramifications of having viewed trans bodies in this way has progressed in contemporary cinema?

The films I chose to explore to help answer these questions are the horror film *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) and the comedy *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995). I have chosen these films as they both directly and indirectly sympathize with the plight of the trans feminine body. Despite these sympathies both were successful upon their release with audiences during the 80s and 90s as well as both have been reclaimed contemporarily by the trans community. Through the utilization of texts that explore the complexity in the way audiences connect genres and how what they take away from these films become true in their

own interpersonal creative productions in reality as well as papers and articles written by trans and queer identifying scholars that go into greater detail on how cultural and historical context impact gender identity. Often we utilize bodies we see differently from our own as vessels to process and represent the underlying discomforts and apprehensions we have associated with our lack of understanding for that person's experience. Trans women and their bodies have served as the sacrificial lamb for the cis-hetero minority's fascination and aversion to processing the AIDS epidemic of the late 80s and 90s making them the obligatory face of a disease that was as little understood as it was represented. However, it was the integration of these bodies that served as a visual touchstone, not only on the path of empathy for audiences disconnected from a queer way of life but also as the first time trans women were able to see bodies in a socially accessible space that mirrored their own without a narrative of stigma.

By referring to the trans feminine body as a "sacrificial lamb" were acknowledging a vessel that has been designated to personify elements of fear and discomfort often associated with societies internalized distrust for the other. By using the analogy of the lamb we are presenting a narrative of what we fear most is more easily accessible when analyzed through a feeble and vulnerable form. The lamb as a tool for processing the fear unassuming and vulnerable, it's easier to displace deeper emotions and conflicts when it's accessible in the form of a non-threatening and accessible vessel such is the case in the *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

The film follows Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) an FBI recruit who is given the assignment to get close to psychologist and serial killer Hannibal Lector (Anthony Hopkins) in order to gain insight on one of his former patients, who is now on a killing spree. The killer, Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine), embodies the trans feminine form in contrast to Lector's revelation

that Buffalo Bill may think he is a trans woman but he is not. Psychosomatic motivations that have caused him to hyper fixate on transitioning are rooted in his incapability to confront the legitimate reasons for his insanity. This creates a narrative of how we process fear, the film has an overarching theme of confronting fears and how the ability to overcome said fears being the difference between truly knowing ourselves and depravity on the braces of ignorance.

The lamb is not so much a metaphor for Clarice as it is for the catalyst that will allow her to confront this fear she has for the unknown and despite being physically capable she is not able to fully reach her potential until she does. The film separates the idea that we have to overcome this fear in order to succeed by suggesting that it's about finding the strength within yourself even though you are afraid of something. Having the courage to press forward and exemplify the representation of the lamb and Clarice's interactions with it. Complaisance breeds insanity As we are able to see in Buffalo Bill an act often associated with animals like lambs he removes the hide from 6 women in order to create an Idyllic feminine body for himself to inhabit when in reality His using the trans feminine body as an excuse to enact his depravity for reasons that he is no longer able to look knowledge. By not confronting what it is that makes us afraid we are denying ourselves the ability to reach our true strength and potential as the point is not necessary to understand the other but to understand your reasons for fearing them.

The questions inevitably arise, what are the films I will be analyzing that fall into the specific window of time of the eighties to nineties and what is the criteria that I will use to classify what makes a film representative of the trans feminine experience either directly or indirectly? First, the films that I believe best exemplify my theories of the utilization of these bodies during this period are the horror film *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) and the comedy *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995). I'm looking at these films because their subject matter is directly related to the predominantly cis gendered interpretation of the queer community in general, and trans women in particular during the AIDS epidemic. The way I defined what characterized these films as examples of othering trans feminine bodies is if these films meet at least one of two definite criteria: the first an indirect interpretation when there is a cis man who takes on feminine presenting “facades” to identify with the female experience (whilst their experience is more akin to being more sympathetic to the trans feminine experience). The second being the direct interpretation, where there is a trans woman and the body is used as a disguise the other characters and/or a tempestuous obstacle to the main protagonist's moral integrity. The analysis of these films will analyze how the themes and narratives play into what stereotypes can be compared and contrasted between genres. From this we will be able to take the personifications both films produce and examine the correlation of time and place when these films were viewed to foster an explorative and/or exploitive view of the trans feminine body. By understanding the implications of the popularity of these themes as they began to become more commonplace in these genre narratives of the eighties and nineties,

subsequently we can explore what the inclusion of trans feminine “vessels” express about representation and who viewership this perspective is catering to in a time when so much aversion was directed toward trans women and the queer community. In seeking to unpack bias, adversity, and fear of the AIDS crisis through cinema taking host in the trans women’s body and identity in mainstream connections the line between the creation of the common narrative of needing to “de-mask” or advocate for these bodies on behalf of the whole LGBTQ+ community. So what drew Hollywood and audiences to be so engaged with the imagery of the trans feminine vessel in these two genres and was the “palatability” that shown the spotlight on trans feminine bodies rather than other queer bodies?

I think it’s important to understand the rationale behind choosing the two films as representations of trans womens’ identity and its impact for the given time and place, along with the criteria I will be subjecting them to. First, the reason *Sleepaway Camp* is such an important film in this context is because it was the first time a trans woman was in the proverbial “righteous” role of a horror film. Justified in her rage as well as who she subjects to it, we root for her as she is constantly confronted with the sexual gaze and subsequent aggression of men. But like most films at the time, the nuanced execution of presenting a trans body to an audience was not fully realized, as she is revealed in what ultimately was a problematic and grotesque execution of “shock”. She stands mouth agape letting out a guttural tone, nude, and looking mentally unhinged, her genitalia on display for the audience as the other characters grapple with their morbid realization. As the climax of the film is meant to invoke a feelings of repulsion to the physical body of this girl, it's only in these last moments that we see she is "outed" but it's in the way she is portrayed in this film that sets up her motivations in the future installments of this

horror franchise here that is so important. Her perception by audiences was seen as a killer based on a backstory of trauma that far outweighed the shock of her gender. It's the fact that audiences were able to separate her as a killer and not just a trans killer, that allows us to get drawn into the narrative without our own reservations getting in the way of our empathy. Although there are constant hints that allude to Angela's transition, like her aunt being the one to give Angela a physical exam so she wouldn't be revealed when she got to camp, the film holds off on information until the end is what makes the film so redeemable. The fact we are not privy to this information regarding her gender identity and the film not being advertised as a "trans killer" film, means going in you view her as a cis woman and this grants her the ambiguity to drive a narrative outside of exclusively reasoning her motives to her transition. She's able to exist outside of the bias of her transition that creates her power and allure to trans women and audiences alike, is that they're being witness to a character whose gender plays such a small role in her motivations, murderous or righteous or otherwise. She is and ultimately a champion of trans representation in a way that was subject to victimization but was given the strength, wit, and ability to justly enact revenge on those who would seek to take advantage of her body.

The film *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* is extremely worthy of analysis in this conversation because of the many layers of gender and representational commentary in the subjects that aligns itself more with providing representation of trans women than it does the drag queens that it portrays. These problematic portrayals are still very relevant and justified in the criticism they receive in this film as it simplifies the divide between drag performers, who caricature and play with gender stereotypes, and trans women. Ultimately, to make the subject matter more palatable for an audience who does not have the correct spectral

vocabulary of either sexual or gender standards. Another aspect of this film that is so integral to its success at the box office was using the hyper-masculine action heartthrobs Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze, and John Leguizamo to play these highly effeminate characters. While this may seem like a strictly comedic choice to include such directly against type men in a film like this, I believe it's a little more complex than that. The complexity of this "leading man" choice plays into how the characters represent their genders and how or what we would anticipate these characters to be. The lack of ability on the part of the other characters to distinguish Vida, Noxema and Chi-Chi from cis women can refer to their ignorance from living in a small hick town, these people are too simple to realize that they are not biological women as their mannerisms and the insight we as the audience have to make that fact extremely obvious. However, this is not at all justification for the trope, rather it is a line that's blurred between the genders that adds a robust trans representational dialog to the undertones of this film. This can be seen in the way that throughout the film there is no defined choice for them to make between genders, they do not refuse or yield to their femininity nor did they completely compensate or lean on their masculinity. They find a balance and use characteristics attributed to both genders to their advantage in a way that aligns with more ambiguous motivations based on human need rather than assimilation into a stereotype. Though this film relies heavily on gender parity and stereotypes, in some very hand-to-mouth humor, once you look closer and view it through a lens of trans women's experience, these characters become more multi-dimensional. That they never even think to step out of drag and present as cis heterosexual men, call each other by their given names rather than their chosen names, and use he/him pronouns rather than she/her. Such things that would seem so obvious to the viewer as a way to help disguise or even completely reinvent

themselves in a way to escape pursuit but for some reason they never had the thought cross their mind for one reason, they cannot revert to their male identities because they are not men. This film represents these three characters who have the ability to take off the makeup, wigs, and dresses but choose not to because, at the end of the day, that is who they are, they *are* women. This is why I believe the film aligns itself more with trans women passing. This is an extremely controversial subject in the trans community, and the ability to pass often means the difference between life and death for a lot of trans women. Although they are aware of how they are perceived by the outside world they do not consider themselves cis men and even if it meant their safety they could not place themselves in that role.

From a contemporary standpoint of cinematic analysis, especially when channeling the implications of queer representation, films like *Sleepaway Camp* and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* often brings the phrase not having “aged well” to mind for their simplistic representations that seem to only propagate the stereotypes of trans bodies being dangerous or not to be taken seriously. However, there has been a push in the last 10 to 15 years to reclaim a lot of films that were perhaps deemed deming or offensive in their portrayals of the communities they utilized--specially queer communities. So the question is, what did visibility do for the groups it represented at this time and why was it so important? To unpack this question, we must examine the eighties and mid-nineties’ cultural landscape of America at this time. Often when discussing the weight a film has on its environment we see the symbiotic relationship of culture affecting media and media affecting culture.

This statement rings true when we look at the eighties at a time in historical contexts that was very much centered on culture and media. It was a new age that saw the United States not in a foreign war for the first time in so many years and with this came the financial boom. With all of this influx of financial prosperity, a push began towards more material and leisure pastimes for people. With this new lackadaisical finding itself into homes and lifestyles but with room for expression the eighties focused on assimilation. A resurgence for “family values” the prioritised conservative morals and a family and household structure that was reinforced through popular media. If you could identify with these characteristics or at least be striving towards it, is what would allow you to be seen as an equal. Primarily, this standard of living was meant to incite a

feeling of equality, when in reality it widened the gap between those who did not operate on these ideals rooted in heteronormity. This could primarily be seen in television and film in the creation of the “blockbuster” and film culture representing the contemporary space in which it is consumed, specifically with comedy and horror genres. There was a movement of immersion in film culture to be able to connect to a film and audiences being able to become in their own creative productions. Mainstream culture especially at this time borrowed a lot from minorities, specifically black and queer communities, as rap and ballroom culture were popular at the time. So it stands to reason, these often individuals were not allowed to participate in spaces in the way their culture was because they did not fit these new ideals. This is relevant in how a parallel narrative was happening at this moment in the eighties that would devastate the queer community by associating them with a disease that was brought into the public eye through a campaign of fear mongering and misinformation that ostracized them from cis heterosexual society for the decades that followed, this would be known as the AIDS epidemic.

The pinnacle use of film as a medium is to bring the under represented groups to the representative masses that otherwise would not be aware of the plight experienced by these peoples. What this visibility represents is a way for a marginalised group like the trans women to have a space to see themselves personify narratives that sympathise with their aspirations, fears, and life expenses but when these groups visibility is ignored the consequences reinforce stereotypes. This only creates a larger cultural divide between audiences by oversimplifying the trans femme experience by creating a singular character archetype tasked with representing an expansive gender spectrum. However it's often the use of stereotype, not necessarily distance us from a character or poke fun at them, but stimulate the ability of those with similar experiences

to draw connections with them. In this case it's not about grounding yourself to specific bodies but finding comradery through humor or emotion in a situation on screen that an audience can mirror in their own life. In the cultural mindfield the AIDS epidemic created left the queer community feeling vulnerable, especially trans women who not only struggled to find a place in their own community but in their day to day interactions as well. A place and time when misinformation and fear-mongering inferred the insidious *femme fatale* quality bodies of these women did not leave much room for a constructive conversation about the malleability of the gender binary. Yet these two films stray from the narrative of aversion and in a way that flies under the radar of "queer" films. Through using the trojan horse of genre and recognizable tropes and/or actors, they become vessels that have underlying messages of not denying their identity by representing themselves. Showing that they can be the heroes of their own story without repressing or shame tied to their embodiment.

Film is the medium for the unsung heroes of our past that history has left behind or more likely chosen not to remember. It is an empathic medium that can use our universal likeness, not necessarily in body, but in experience to find understanding in a character's reaction to strife and struggle even in situations that might be so foreign from our way of life. Yet, even with film's innate ability to present a narrative as an alternative to historical telling of "right and wrong", there is an aversion to these stories that do not serve a more overarching understanding of a predetermined norm. These representations fall short of films' potential by playing into specific tensions and stereotypes of certain bodies, such as trans feminine bodies, to produce an arbitrary portrayal of a group or experience. Yet, both directly and indirectly these two films challenge

that representation. How does challenging this narrative during the AIDS crisis serve the view on trans feminine bodies both internally and externally?

It can be said that the present often says more about the past than it does about the future, and when we think about the historical contexts in which bodies like the trans feminine body is utilized in both positive and negative ways, we are able to find the answers in our cinematic past. From film's creation and integration into the mainstream composition of Entertainment, people have always found reasons to connect with the images they see on screen. This goes far beyond the initial novelty of the moving image and, as mentioned before, touches on something more human within us to see ourselves in a way immortalized, frozen in a time and place that will serve as a legacy long after we are gone. Thus, it is the weight of these images that impart a sense of responsibility and power on to those who are behind the camera. The omnipotent hand that decides whose stories get to be immortalized and shared amongst the world is a power that often, even with the most innocent of intentions, finds its way into the wrong hands. The proverbial wrong hands in reference to how this God like power of cinema and its perception as an impartial medium pursuing the capturing of bodies and stories seems to overlook the eye of the filmmaker. When we see how someone is represented there is often a subtext of juxtaposition based on the opinions of who is behind the lens. This dispassion of choices by those in possession of the camera can influence our ability to relate and humanize the bodies on film. The perception of life tradition and self image can often be impacted by even the most nuanced gaze of the camera leading to a representation that might be completely different from the reality of the lives and experiences these bodies represented.

With this sentiment there is a sense that representation of marginalized bodies was doomed from the start. As all cinematic technique began and ultimately sustained, we look to the time and who had control to mold the medium's narratives and audiences' sympathies. Most likely this would be a white cis heterosexual man of upper class. The most obvious implications of these men's gaze were rooted in a superiority complex imposed on the narratives they presented. Even in the beginning outside of the realm of narrative, if you had a camera you film what you know about the world around you. This led to a weaponization of cinema in the way that these men utilized it and its accessibility to popular culture, also predominantly white, to reiterate social stigmas and disparities predicated around primarily gender and sexual relations. These are the origins of a systematic precedent of an inferred gaze cultivated by this idea of power, by holding this gaze on a group that is different from our own we hold the power over them as opposed to being held hostage by our own fear. When a society has been inundated with the trappings and aspirations of white cis heterosexual culture as the standard for what is the norm does not leave much room for acknowledging ways of life that stray from this narrative. Looking at this in relation to the AIDS epidemic, that LGBTQ+ rights activists worked so hard to bring into the public consciousness, their representation on a platform such as film was a great tool to have. The beginning of an integration to include bodies, like trans feminine bodies that were austrosided by a greater cultural narrative, as a way to get audiences to build a connection with these characters. To uses the characters to act on the part of the trans feminine community, seen in a multitude of genres, to de stigmatize trans femme bodies not only to the mainstream cis audience but to trans women as well.

In a time that saw so much death and stigma around the queer community, to see themselves brought in to an accessible space, provided vindication to women of shared experience to feel legitimized when they may not have possessed the vocabulary to express themselves. Even though these stories, at this point in time, may not be able to represent these trans femme bodies completely free of stereotypes or showcase definitive trans stories, they still found a place in mainstream culture to offer a voyeuristic experience to a majority cis audience. These films are so integral to a part of integrating queer culture and identity in to a more “palatable” way to audiences to at the very least make them feel as if they have seen a new perspective of a group that had historically been denied that sympathy. These films had to take on the worst parts of misinformation, homophobia, and fear by discrediting them in a way that hides behind their respective genre and character tropes. These films, operating in the universal language of human likeness, created a way for the greater narrative of these stories to acknowledge the fears and hopes of the collective audience, in a climate that held culture, media, and public perception as an absolute triad, and were able to solidify representations that otherwise may have been lost to spectacle. To display these trans femme bodies, with a conscious choice to do so when the societal landscape seemed most volatile, was a tool in the utilization of cinema’s insight potential to present stories and experiences that may seem so different from our own but provide a means of exploiting what makes us similar.

When we talk about something like the perception and representation of bodies in cinema and the impact of the lens this perception is viewed through, we must first understand the motivations behind what we see on screen is not always so cut and dry. We often associate our viewership with a certain aspect of finality; trusting in our eyes and our ability to understand the moving image, we develop a contentment in the language of film, especially with genre films that have an element of predictability to their narratives. “I see it, therefore it is”. While at first we may consider this belief crucial to our perception and ability to absorb the film, we lose the ability to find undertones and subtext that could completely negate our initial opinions about a film. Often you only look for messages you anticipate to find when analyzing a film in this way but may pick up other themes and elements subconsciously. Our opinions are much more malleable than we may initially think, and are often engaged through the subtext of tropes such as othering and the gaze. What we are seeing is a funneling of stylistic and technical choices that culminate into a multidimensional image that imparts a predetermined gaze into our minds. Yet, it's how we process these images on an individual level that can sway our interpretation of a body's motivations by placing them in proximity to our sense and our reality based on the world around us. The cinematic planes we see this impartial interpretation play out on trans femme bodies, both directly and indirectly, are the realms of how we equate things such as desire through visual pleasure and dynamics of antagonist and protagonist narrative constructs. It's through these channels, that feed multiple streams of information to the viewer, that we can start to piece together the building blocks that create the bigger narrative of our visual and practical

understanding of trans femme bodies in cinema and stylistic characteristics of genres impact audiences' reseption of such information in sociopolitical climate like the ones that surround films such as *Sleepaway Camp* and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*.

Unpacking the levels of a visual pleasure and how it relates to the spectator in the context of the imagery associated with trans feminine bodies is an important step in understanding how we see this body in connection to ourselves and our desire for it. Visual pleasure is characterized by feminist theorist Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, as characteristics placed on femme bodies by a gaze that's sympathetic to predominantly cis male desires that are predicated on the idea of sexual desire place on images based on the idea of the "active/male" viewer and the "passive/female" viewer. Mulvey goes on to theorize that the audience's voyeuristic lust is "The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic."¹ . By this Mulvey is saying that this "heteronormative" gaze looks for human quality and shape in spaces that traditionally wouldn't be associated with having such characteristics, vilifying feminine sexual desirers and there ability to act on them. What she is proposing throughout the writing is that this overtone of male sexual conquest affects the aspects these feminine bodies tend to inhabit, these bodies are meant to be lusted after and were not supposed to be sentient beings that pursue their own sexual liberation. This gaze is also impacting how we as the audience distinguish the body relative to the interactions and space it occupies as a means of seeing these bodies as villainous. These theories become distinguishable traits that can be seen in the way this description of vilainous, depraved bodies falls upon the classic femme fatale character. Mulvey's subject matter that lists

1

the confines of the femme fatale and understanding of the “male gaze” and the purpose it serves, can be considered to be reborn into the trans femme body. Mulvey’s writing is most critical of *Noir* film and the character trope referred to as the femme fatale. One of the calling cards of the Noir genre was in its formulaic portrayal of the motivations of characters, predominantly female characters, and how gender, morals, and social status played into the persona of the femme fatale. Classically, narrative structure often favors the archetype of female characters put into scenarios that exhibit her vulnerability in a way that makes the audience infer that her safety is compromised in need of direction from a male savior. Yet, as the narrative of noir films usually do, a twist doesn’t seem to be far behind. We begin to see that the helpless woman may not have been so helpless after all. It’s this set-up that finally “de-masks” the femme fatale when compared to the moral superiority of her male counterpart. It’s through the objectification of her form that acts as our warning, a woman embodying a hyperfeminine frame and operates on sexual prowess as a manipulator, a wolf in sheep’s clothing. These characteristics are so deeply ingrained in how we think of attractive women as red herrings for sin. The deferral of blame that falls on the female as the villain of a film primarily revolves around the consistent theme of femme fatale luring a male to carry out an act that is in conflict with his moral compass. Similarly, as trans feminine women are meant to be seen as a moral hurdle for the cis male protagonist to overcome. The trans femme body, like the femme fatale body, is to challenge the man’s will by playing on his taboo desires, desires that will be his demise if he gives in to them either morally or in the more final sense of death. They are the sacrificial lamb that is used to justify the cis man’s lust onto these bodies as a “trap” but rather than death, the penalty for his desire is the confrontation of his diversion from his heteronormative sympathies. This narrative

follows these bodies, seeing them as objects meant to process cis male lust and the problem in their lies that rather than accept these desires for these women, just as they would a cis woman, rather than just act on this reciprocated feeling, the lust manifests as shame and resentment ultimately leading him to act out in a violent manner. Themes that have persevered outside of this genre, we rationalize the displacement of frustrations on to these bodies by the aforementioned motivations the trans femme body represents, we don't feel as bad about her atonement or death at the hands of the cis male as the consequence of her attempted temptation. This only plays into more stereotypes that surround these women, as not being *real women*, whose only purpose is to use her body as a sexualized trap to “trick” cis men and no matter how similar her motivations are to the men, hers will always be justified by not being satisfied with their gender feeling the need to compensate by hyperfeminizing and sexualizing themselves to hide their “truth”.

The connections between these character archetypes as well as how this gaze affects the opinions associated with these bodies by the audience are more akin than one may expect. To further this notion, we must compare the spaces these bodies occupied, their motivations, and the narratives these characters follow in relation to the characters on screen. The meekness that is meant to be inferred about these trans feminine characteristics can be seen in *Sleepaway Camp*. Angela is often overpowered in scale when compared to her male counterparts and in moments of duress, she is seen as all the more vulnerable by these men due to the fact that she does not speak. The fact that Angela is without a voice likens her more to the representation of a physical object rather than a human person. Her lack of audible objection and frail stature coupled with her age places a veil of innocence and naivety onto her. Almost taunting the audience with any

male characters' ability to overpower and/or overtake her and we assume this to be true and even consider her to be a liability to herself inadequate of understanding the sexual implications of the situations she finds herself in.

This can also be seen in the other film when Patrick Swayze's character Vida Bohem, is sexually assaulted by the police officer. Extremely feminine and demure up to this point and even being physically lifted by the much smaller male officer, the way she clings to her self enforced rules of femininity and never seems to stray from her more caricatured definition of female sympathies. It is only in a moment of vulnerability that extreme rage prompts what can be argued as self-preservation reverting to a more masculen posture and tone, Vidas normally high, airy voice drops and she acts out violently by incapacitating the officer. Immediately following she leans into her a feminine persona, calling for her friend's help and although she has already demonstrated her strength to defend herself from the much smaller officer, she is afraid to check herself to see if he is still alive. Similarly, Chi-Chi, played by John Leguizamo, finds herself alone in a field outside of town when the men that saw her arrival begin to surround her. Chi-Chi, normally a confident, if not argumentatively outspoken woman, first feels she can handle the situation, but as more men begin to appear she realizes the increasing danger of the situation. She continues to talk and attempt to make light of the situation, increasingly for her own comfort as the men do not respond to her increasingly anxious tone. She finds herself surrounded by the men in a way that is more representative of a pack of wolves looking on a wounded lamb. The implication being that her body is about to be ravaged in a sexual way as well as the undertone of anticipation that the sexual tones will give way to violence once her trans femme body is compromised.

In both cases, it can be argued that the common theme among both films in how it relates to the male gaze is one of viewing these bodies as seemingly always vulnerable. So in both cases, the women are able to defend themselves either reluctantly or proactively, involving an inciting incident where a cis male counterpart wouldn't look at them and assume that the power is theirs alone in the situation. This idea of sexual power relating to trans feminine bodies seems to be following the narrative that the incitement of sexual lust and desire as it is meant to arise for the audience comes from the idea of cornering the trans character. The inference to be made here in the specific contexts of time and place that these films exist is one of the abilities of a group that is not understood, by the normativ cis genderd public, being able to be dominated in a way that gives the power of the decision of sexual conquest to the group it opposes, in this case, a straight cis male coming on in a sexual matter to a trans body that often does not share that desire. The ability to both sexually and visually dominate the characters insinuates the ability to expose their inferiority to justify the gaze of the cis male antagonist and subsequently the cis male viewer.

Moving forward with the notion of what a general audience as spectators that derive from the visual pleasure of bodies, how these films navigate desire for the trans feminine body? Alternatively, what do these messages say to trans women about how they are viewed by society? A great piece of writing to explore this aspect of desire is the paper *Cinematic/Trans*/Bodies Now (and Then, and to Come)* By Cáel M. Keegan, Laura Horak, and Eliza Steinbock. For understanding the desire for the trans bodies, as opposed to the cis female body, the way in which we approach desire must change. The paper uses a method called the *somatechnical approach* which they explain as the "...view both the lively and flashman of

technique and the practice of engaging via hard and soft technologies". This way of analysis through the "...interrelations around images..." seeks to understand and assess the relationship between images that comprise a scene as a lead to understand the place of the trans body in the world it occupies. By using the contexts and association of the rate that these images appear we are able to build a more inclusive understanding of trans feminine bodies.

The level the transfeminine experience is acknowledged by both films is different in how the trans femme body is composed in relation to the environment it occupies. For example, with a film like *Sleepaway Camp*, the trans feminine body is acknowledged by the ending of the film by the means of other characters onscreen making observations and verbalizing said observations that lead audience recognition of the physical trans femme body as well. Yet a film like *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*, goes about this trans femme acknowledgment differently, it's in the interpretation of the characters that leads someone to connect their experience to a trans feminine one and defer the trans femme representation onto the film. Keegan, Horak, and Steinbock refer to this latter form of deferment as exhibiting plights and characteristics that resonate with the trans community despite the film not directly presenting that narrative to an audience. Especially with marginalized groups that struggle to find a definitive narrative of authentic representation in mainstream media, they find similarity and add a subtext to the motivations of characters that would align them with their personal experiences. By way of creating their own representation from films that often seek to marginalize or invalidate them, they find their vindication in likening their experiences in the baseline emotions associated with being trans, predominantly playing with gender norms, a sense of not belonging, or an integral issue of being able to be seen as passable by either the other characters or the

audience. The reasons *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* resonates with the trans femme community as already mentioned, tie its self to the “fantasy body” occupied by the characters cohere to their fears and motivations when justified through a trans femme experience rather than a drag queen’s perspective. The authors justify trans groups’ ability to assimilate media representations that wouldn’t commonly be considered representative of the trans experiences as a means of providing themselves with a sense of validation and visibility that has been denied from them by contemporary culture. Especially in the eighties and nineties, there was not a space that was ostensibly and definitively trans representative, so, as with many marginalized groups, they found a way to connect and engage with films that met their base narrative. To elaborate on the ability to draw similarities to life that seems unlike your own on the surface level, I use the example of science fiction films that occupy worlds, situations and even bodies that seem so far removed from our own, yet we are still able to connect on a multitude of levels to the narrative and find similarities that mirror our own lives in reality. Films like the *Star Wars* (1977-2019) saga follow characters that fly spaceships, live on distant planets, and are of different species with languages that are not accessible to audiences. Despite not being able to relate to the characters on levels we may deem mandatory for our investment, these films were wildly popular, with some of their most beloved characters being non-human. Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) is a great example of our ability to connect and empathise with a body based on gesture and the space it occupies. Chewbacca, or Chewie as he is lovingly referred to by his human partner Han Solo, is a wookiee, a race of beings that are tall, covered in hair, and whose language is a mix of guttural growls and grunts. Off this description alone it's hard to find any redeeming humanistic qualities but we are still able to invest in his character by seeing how he

interacts with Han (Harrison Ford), Luke (Mark Hamill), and Leia (Carrie Fisher). His interactions when it comes to language are either met with a coherent response or repeated back to him by one of his English speaking human friends, he is always understood by the other characters even though we as the audience do not understand him. He can laugh, create battle plans with Han, and even wails in pain when he is trying to protect his friends from danger. This is proof that even though no one in the audience would be able to identify with being a Wookiee, we project human qualities like love, pain, and laughter on to characters like Chewbacca by doing this we negate the fact he is not human and non verbal, in the sense we can not understand his language, we can empathise with a body that we have no personal experience with because we can understand its interactions with the space and characters that surround it. Still, it is more common for this time and place to have the trans community to have to use this method of defining their visibility rather than being able to find media that is inclusive to trans women in both representation and narrative.

Another aspect that plays into representation and interpretation is inclusion. For the most authentic representation it's important to include members of the experience both behind and in front of the cameras. However, as progressive as these films were for the time it is a valid and justified critique that neither film uses an actor of trans experience to portray their trans femme characters. Angela is played by a cis woman and Chi-chi, Vida, and Noxiema are played by cis men. This topic is often discussed under the controversial idea that an actor is a vessel meant to become someone different from themselves, regardless of race, ethnicity, or in our case, gender. The argument being, a truly great actor can play any role and become any character that is a fictional creation. So why does it matter to have films that utilize the trans femme body include

transwomen, what does this add or take away from the narrative? What is it about these trans femme portrayals that elevated these films to be claimed by the trans femme community in cult culture despite the cis actors. Inclusion of trans femme women in forms of entertainment that utilize their bodies has many implications that serve their community. The most obvious being able to prevent the exploitation of trans feminine bodies in ways that are not true to the trans experience. Representations such as those in TWF, seem to be predicated on the assumption that drag queens want to be women and dilute the difference between drag and trans experiences and use them as interchangeable verbiage to explain anyone outside of societal gender norms. When by definition drag queens are performers who utilise gender theater to play with notions of gender and sexuality and trans women are very clearly contrasting. These kinds of lumping together that is driven by someone outside of the community using their ideas and reasoning to justify the motives of a person to fit their narrative rather than interacting with a member of that community. This is what can be seen as another level of cis exclusionary behavior meant to invalidate and profit from trans bodies without investing in the real lives they negate.

To understand why horror and comedy genres lend themselves to the perpetuation of its gaze on trans feminine bodies one must first look to the purpose they serve in the world they exist in. As viewers and voyeurs when we see a film we suspend our belief in traditional aspects of reality that ground us in our world. By this I mean, we give up our rational beliefs and laws that would otherwise allow us to separate the fictional space of film from reality. We are able to use logic to understand events taking place in a fictional environment, for example, fighting monsters or existing on a planet in outer space are things that would not be possible in reality. Even if we are able to make parallels in a film that grounds itself in a contemporary reality we still retain the ability to be cognizant of the fact that these actions did not occur in real-time. However, we still give up a portion of this belief when we see a film because we make a conscientious choice to participate in escapism. Some genres are harder to distinguish as fictional spaces than others. An example of how we are affected in how we process and apply this information is the genre of drama and the melodramatic tones often personified by the protagonist. This would be how our perception is shaped seeing someone overcoming outlandish obstacles in ways that would be impractical to most of its viewing audience. The inferences we make with genres of comedy and horror are harder to distinguish when it comes to the practicality of their narratives attributed to real-world circumstances.

All operate on the innate human desire, things we are hardwired to connect with and liken to ourselves almost always on a subconscious level. As I stated earlier the interest we have in film and the way we invest in the narrative we have to have needs met in our minds that we

may not be equipped to experience in our everyday lives. The truth is we find visual pleasure and its ability to trigger and stimulate our minds to draw similarities between genres that we may not consciously think are as fluid. It's this derivative of visual pleasure that can be seen across these three genres but I posit that the comedy genre extends this theory in ways that align itself to further the conversation of how we derive visual pleasure from genre and develop a view of how gender in relation to body are meant to be interpreted by us, the audience. As we derive this gaze through multiple genres in different ways, the impact each genre has to allow a more accessible stage for us to displace the complex fears of our society and the effect this has on how we see trans women being represented. It's how we use this visualization and innuendo that differs in presentation across genres, that ultimately entices us to invest and learn from these films. These preverbal building blocks that peek our human interest are made up of the same simplistic formula that can be reattributed to any narrative and ultimately once we are committed as a viewer how do we navigate the information as it relates to the protagonist and antagonist. Using things like opposing forces such as the conflict between protagonist and antagonist in a narrative structure is what shows off the juxtaposition between what the film considers to be the gendered motive and malleability of these forces. When it comes to films like these they often operate on our own internalised fears and nowhere is this better examined than in the use of body genre in both comedy and horror. How the audience processes these questions and derives answers from the use of the bodies such as trans femme bodies is ultimately a study on how these bodies manifest the fear and curiosity they personify.

One way this body genre works is through the premise of the Freudian pillar called the uncanny. Freud posits in his theory that the uncanny is something that is created through the use

of aesthetics to create a feeling of dread and horror to all that view it. In other words, you can almost imagine it as the “gut” feeling of unease you sometimes get for no outwardly discernible reason. This comes into play especially when examining the blurred lines of gender presentation in films like *Sleepaway Camp* and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* not only in the interpersonal relations on screen but in how we perceive the implications of body genera in our own lives. Using this way of prossesing our likness to a charictor and ultomently our disere for them, body genre can make trans femme characters seem so close to being “normal” but create a sence that something is still off. In cinema we get this differential through things such as the relationship, both composinaly and interacivly, between characters of cis and trans genders highlighting the striking opposition between them. Both films go about this in different ways, for example, in *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* the comedic view of these bodies where they are very clearly different from their cis female counterparts. On the other hand as seen in *Sleepaway Camp*, in horror the trans feminine body is seen as so close to perfect yet often there is a hurtle, of a primarily sexual nature that the body or those privy to its form are not subject to overcome. This idea of the presentation of trans femme bodies is another term often referred to as passability rather than someone of trans experience ability to pass as their preferred gender. This is the exact opposite for horror as we can see in the film it's the ability of the trans feminine body to a simile and alternately act as a red herring that most often acts as a moral hurdle for a cis male protagonist to overcome rather physically or sexually as giving in to these desires would lead to his death. When it comes to passing as it relates to the perception of these bodies the duality of representation is austerey the greater ability you have to pass as cis-gendered, which means the less ability you have to identify as trans. This inherent opposition

that this statement has is on full display in both films and examines both in ways that are reliant on their genre. To navigate the complexity of passability and representation is to acknowledge the fact that the statement negates itself when we think of broader, outsider, interpretations of what connection passing and being trans feminine holds to one another. Rather where both films would seem to impose this perspective of passing, to be perceived as cis-gendered, is the ultimate goal of transitioning would be a disservice to the trans community. Where these films truly surpass the perceived theory of the later is in how they navigate passing and accepting of trans identity by representing passing characters, like Angela who use their body as a tool to take power away from those who would harm her and although she is made to take on this trans body it is not a liability to her. Similarly, with non-passing characters such as Vida, Noxeema, and Chi-Chi the fact that they are able to be perceived by the people in this small town as cis women, despite the comedic aspect of the “man in a dress” trope, the goal is not passing as much as it is acceptance. They represent the idea that you can present your gender and the people around you, who do not represent the trans experience, will respect and acknowledge you as such without question or opposition.

Not only how the trans femme body acts as a sacrificial lamb not only as a way for people to put a face to what they fear most an ideology, disease, or sexuality things that exist outside the realm of singular identification but are expansive and complex. Giving a human body, relative in time and space to our own, to an entity as a way to understand it in ways that make it not only accessible but defeasible. This gives primarily the majority viewer a sense of comfort that allows them to walk out of a theater feeling as if they have been informed and more confident in their knowledge in a potential future interaction with a member of this group. The

other side of this coin seeks to create the sacrificial lamb narrative as it creates a personification of an all-encompassing queer body. In our case, this would refer to the trans feminine body finding its relevance in genre film as a way to exist in a sovereign medium to combat the constant shame, aversion, and mistrust of this body in the AIDS coverage of the eighties and nineties news scope. However trans women's bodies were used as ambassadors by proxy in that, their bodies were ostensibly not their own but instead was a homogeneous nameless, faceless, representation for an ambiguously sexual and genderqueer body. So how do trans women who see these trans feminine bodies, *their* bodies, being utilized, directly and indirectly, find their power and identity in these characters in the way their perspective genres represent them?

Slasher film as a subgenre of horror was introduced in the 1970s has forms that focused on body horror primarily. Characterized by exuberant amounts of violence, blood, and gore they're often go beyond the realm of terror transitioning into the almost fanatical. Campy tone as itself to the outlandish over the top nature that prompts the ability of the film to exhibit a level of horror that can be more accessible when viewed as a spectacle rather than augmented reality. It's the way or acts as a Trojan-horse as the perceived simplicity of the slasher film that we are able to develop a more complex subtext of examining what makes us let down our guard and confront the topics of a more taboo nature that have multiple demeritons and fears, such as gender and sexuality, and when it comes to topics like the stigma around the AIDS epidemic often led the heterosexual cis minority society may feel to overwhelmed by what they feel is the unknown. Giving this entity of fear a face and body to exist in allows our preconceived notions of distrust to subsidise, as we have confidence in the genre to place them in a role that coincides with our belief of these bodies as evil. Yet, along with the shift of the power narrative of these

films another shift occurred with the horror genre playing on our anticipations but automatically negates them by allowing us to interact with a body that we would often avoid in our outside lives. The slasher film was able to put the audience in a voyeuristic environment and entice them with a resolve of good vanquishing evil that they were more open to seeing these bodies if they assumed they would be killed off in the end. However, films like *Sleepaway Camp* draws the viewers in and makes them believe they are rooting for the right person when in reality they are identifying with a body they'd otherwise have avoided. This not only depicts a lens of validation for trans bodies like Angela, who was able to pass and draw empathy from the audience until she is outed at the end but also satisfies the audience over aching questions about trans femme bodies that in the mass media hysterics of the eighties were not being answered.

The seventies was a renaissance for the genre, to step into a world that was a product of violence itself, as in the Vietnam era, the inability to deny the imagery of war changed America's tolerance for seeing vulgar acts in a so matter of fact way but also agitated people's need to make sense of why these atrocities happen. Cinema no longer felt the need to dilute or restrain itself from exhibiting violence on a more intense scale. The precursor to this genre was the more Hitchcockian motivation which saw a more implied sense of violence that was driven by suspense and very rarely exhibited any act that would result in bodily harm, instead, using reactions of victims, mostly female, as their aggressor approaches out of our line of sight and the resolve being her lifeless body often posed in a compromised, yet still glamorous, position. The overhaul included a focus on special effects that would create a sense of shock but would knowledge the advancing imagery of death in people's contemporary consciousness. The slasher films were able to make the more outright connections of desire and internalize hatred of arousal

of the self or of others arousing them is commonly used to drive a killer to depravity. Often this attribute falls on the belief that trans females presented in horror films are considered to be manifestations of trauma enacted on them by someone else, using their trans-ness as a defense mechanism or a disguise a, wolf in sheep's clothes, to lure people to their death. Through the use of a perceived disguise the inability to access or distinguish human qualities versus the uncanny creates a sense of distrust of your own abilities to know friend from foe, such is the case in Sleepaway Camp. Of course Angela is recognizable as human with gesture, motion, and a face we recognize visual similarities but her ability to pass, preceding the final reveal of her nude body, represents her marginal visibility. The marginal viability we are privy to lies within her lack of speech and frail stature almost as a red herring to her humanness. This exists to impart on her victims, as well as the audience, her virtual indestructibility as she was able to act out these murders without attracting our suspicion and we are subject to the horror as a consequence of underestimating her power. However the gender politics that rose in the slasher films had its roots in the Hitchcockian archetype but it brought women, including trans women, into two new roles, killer and the "final girl".

The use of disguise has been a tool of the horror genre as a means to Represent the ability to act out a level of commonly sexual depravity that seems on humans or unable to be acted out as one's authentic self. To hide one's true face is to become unbounded by the laws of societal expectations, it represents a repressed desire to obtain a freedom that has been stifled by consequences of shame and ostracization. This is commonly where this theory of desires finds its place among trans feminine bodies, ultimately their goal to obtain the obtainable, to be seen as something their "not" and to be around women is to be reminded of their lacking and to be

around men is a reminder of their vulnerability. Trans women as a threat to male sexuality is more often the inciting drive that prompts the theory that trans feminine bodies are tools of evil and deception. Trans women, through the male gaze, are not seen as "women " but men that challenge the assured convictions of the sexual preference of straight men and must be eradicated to deny the desires for their bodies by these men. However, slasher films in horror provided a new narrative that allowed for the bodies that were often made for eradication were now given the power of the killer and the males must now atone for their sins. This new adoration of horror brought with it a new narrative that saw women as the killers or as the "final girl", the heroes by being the most perceptive and aware of their surroundings. These films victimised men by representing their carnal desire for sex as a distraction, they are not able to use self control to save themselves, their one track mind incapable of realizing the magnitude of danger their in and as a result do not outlive their female counterparts. In other words, boys are killed not on the premises of their gender, but because they've made the wrong choices.

The thing that allows the horror genre to be such a gender and sexually ambiguous space is It uses the fears of an audience to allow it to present what we are most afraid of in a way that is accessible. In these films sexual transgressors are both male and female, which is in sharp contrast to the hitchcockian era of then is the more aggressive participants and women as the more passive. There is an old saying about sex that is extremely perdenate to this theory and that is "Everything is about sex, except for sex. Sex, is about power." For example most often in films that utilises a camp setting like Sleepaway Camp is ultimately to achieve the goal of creating a place beyond the watchful eye of parents and adult gardeins in order to have sex. This act is most commonly associated with teens, as they are often thought of as on the cusp of

childhood and adulthood acting almost exclusively on impulse. This act of sexual conquest is an act that results in a loss of innocents, crossing the threshold to adult desire and consequence that they are not yet mature enough to consider. This rejection of purity to achieve the selfish act of ogasum, is often the innocent that invites their death either during or after losing their virginity. It's the act of death through violence that often mirrors this act of ogasum, a fixation on the females face, the penetration of a blade, with the climax being her final breaths and queens of pain akin to female ejaculation before finally expiring. This act stemming from the chasity and/or impatience of the killer, though they may use their weapon to touch the victim in a sexual manner or lure them in with the assumption of intercourse they are disgusted and disinterested in the act of penetrating the sexual organs of their victims. Rather the erotic tones use the weapon as an extension of the phallus and the act of penetration or satisfaction can only be met by the act of killing. Using violence as a way of detouring sexual urges is not necessarily a new issue in horror films. often times, this trope was used to incentivise audiences to abstain from premarital sex but also to help the audience navigate who were to be considered the right sexual partners for them and by default, who the "wrong" partner's were. By killing those who cross gender lines in order to fulfill their sexual appetite, regardless the character being male or female, this sends a message of once you diverge from the heterosexual norms you must be punished with an act of their visceral killing to equal the depravity of their sexual desires.

The trans feminine body is often it's own worst enemy in this way especially when it comes to arousal. The trans femme body often betrays itself when it comes to genital exposure, this can be in *Sleepaway Camp* as Angela's genitals are exposed in a manner that would provoke discussed by the audience as she stands nude, unhinged, and bloodied. Her eyes wide and

unblinking as her mouth is agape producing a guttural croaking drone this combination of shock and disgust gives her an almost subhuman quality as opposed to the meek traumatized girl we assumed her to be at the beginning of the film. However, it is the genre in which this representation exists that makes such a stark and depraved image mean something greater in the bigger picture of trans representation. The pull of a horror film, almost exclusively, is that you are meant to rewatch a horror film in the way that the second viewing of the film and the initial viewing that preceded it are perceived as two different narratives. The first of which being, *Sleepaway Camp*'s uses Angela to represent the trans feminine body as a vessel for desire be placed on it, often by imposing cis heterosexual men, with out its consent. While appon the second viewing Angela being trans is a way to explain her aversion to sex, she dosen't have male sexual labeto because she is not a male. This knowledge of Angela being trans going into the second viewing can also be viewed as her body evolving in a way to exist above sexual compulsion. She has grown beyond such trivial human desires and seems indifferent to her own sexual desires, if any, makes her even more dangerous as she can not exist in the binary of having the urge of lust for a partner thus making her vulnerable or being seduced thus rendering her submissive.

Comedy relies as much on the body as drama and horror do, thus making it a body genre. Through the use of silhouette, stature, and contrasting characterizations of femininity and masculinity the comedic tones to the body are present. All of these tones operate on the same principle of an initial assumption made by the audience and possibly the characters on screen as well that is followed by a realization of that assumption being incorrect or a half truth at the very least. This exemplifies the use of ambiguity throughout the genre and it uses the ambiguousness

of their gender identity in this case to incite situational humor based around their interactions in reference to their gender. The anticipation of the will they won't is complex is what drives the narrative forward and is what leads the characters to situations where they have to confront their gender. This can be seen in the way that these situations revolve around the town finding out that they are not Sis women, will they make it to the contest on time, or will the cop finally catch up to them? At first glance one may not see the exemplary stage the genre of comedy represents as a medium. Audiences tend to place trust in more grounded genres that have no room for interpretation when it comes to more complex tones and pertinent subject matter to the real world. This idea that intense subject matter can only be explored through genres that use more understated methods as means to comment on social issues. Dignity and a serious nature being perceived as necessary to genres that reflect our most taboo and disparaged aspects of culture back onto itself, when this is not the case and in fact comedy has been prolific in its ability to continue breaking this sense of genre superiority sense cinemas creation. Whilst not as nuanced in its delivery or examination of more complex topics as drama or horror, comedy still explores fundamental issues that resonate with the audience through narrative and depictions of character archetypes. Humor is an avenue to not only laugh at what it is we are afraid of but to also welfare ourselves for being so afraid of it. Humor may make the audience feel empowered with a sense that they are holding a gaze that is the initiation for the humor when in reality the power belongs to the comedian on screen. This is often exhibited in the way we view things that seem so detached and outlandish as funny but in actuality they are often routines, patterns, and ideologies that we often follow in our own life. The trivialness is able to be put on display in a way that breaks it down to being so ityotic and nonsensical.

Satirizing the often dehumanizing and dangerous aspects of life that are associated with the experience of trans women such as out a resulting in bodily harm or even possibly death is what make comedy as a genre different as it can make the most intense subject matter seems more approachable and accessible when able to be viewed through a more relaxed medium. Comedy showed it was possible to laugh at situations while an undertone of more serious topics existed throughout the film or throughout its many subplots. Multiple narratives existed within comedy films these narratives can be summed up as subplots stemming from the main plot of the film examples of this from the film would include the overarching plot of these women on the run, the cop hunting them down, and the abuse of Vida's new friend, Carol Ann (played by Stockard Channing) experiences from her husband. The genre lets multiple plot points catch as an element to understand time and space in the film while also creating a sense of suspense as we anticipate all of the plots running congruity, to eventually meet for the climax of the film. The ability to use comedy as a cultural touchstone is based on the fact that comedy at the time of the eighties and nineties was primarily a satire genre that functioned best when reflecting the time and space it existed in. Comedy exists to make commentary and harder topics take away the comedic aspects of the film, the star studded cast and the silly situations the trio find themselves in. What we're left with Is a film about 3 gender queer people on the run Having escaped an attempted sexual assault by a police officer they are forced to hide out in a small town as the cop is hot on their trail out for blood as retribution for being "tricked".

Similarly, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* characters utilize a dry, deadpan brand of humor that is meant exclusively for the entertainment of us as the audience, as the jokes revolve around primarily innuendo or are an illusion to their "trans-ness", go over the

heads of their rural cis counterparts. Trans women use humor as a way to shift power dynamics in situations and experiences that would otherwise make them feel valuable or invalidated. The use of a comedic retort in response to a hostile situation or persons is a way of placing emphasis on the absurdity of the situation by not dignifying the provocation with an emotional response. Like in the film the seemingly overly gestured response of the characters in response to situations that would normally be a source of discomfort to an audience becomes a punchline. This can be seen in situations like where Noxema talks to the gaggle of boys telling them, it's only appropriate to say good morning to the ladies and not whistle making rude remarks. When they inevitably laugh her off, she grabs the scrotum of one of the boys and squeezes it tight in her hand, dragging him to each lady and asking him to wish her a good morning. Where the real world application facing a catcall head on, especially as a trans woman, can be seen as a real danger. However in this space Noxema is the one with the power, the visual absurdity of grabbing a man by the scrotum in order to elicit a more appropriate response without any reciprocation from him or the other men around him, is so unattainable that it's hilarious. This is done as a way for what may be a really intense situation that would result in a confrontation being redirected to make a joke. This is an example of using comedy as a means of self defense is nothing new, especially in film. This is a deliberate indication to the audience to laugh at the aggressive behavior of the antagonist thus diminishing the tension of a situation as well as removing the ability of the antagonist to control the interaction. It is a way of refusing to be dominated and objecting to the perceived power held over them by cis straight men as superior.

It is also the jobs of these women to exist as an audience surrogate or to allow the audience member to transition from a viewer to a voyeur. This is often used as a spectacle but

can also be used as a tool to build empathy. The proverbial difference between laughing at someone and laughing with someone both have very different implications for the bodies that they affect. By letting these bodies control the comedic narrative of the film we are engaging directly with their gaze. Often as a viewership it is harder to watch something that requires a visceral response from us emotionally and/or making us question our morals when we have to imagine how we would react in that situation. It's at this point many audiences choose to look away or not invest in the narrative as it confronts topics in an accusatory way. Yet what comedy does with this brand of just roll humor and its reliance on the reaction of the body to indicate the Absurdity of a situation also indicates the appropriateness of it. We as the audience are allowed to laugh because we are in on the joke but we will often don't realize that we're laughing at the expense of someone else. Whether it be the aloof hicks or the deranged buffoonery of the cop, we are being conditioned to understand behaviors that are seen as reasonable and unreasonable. The film helps develop a sense of what is justifiable to correction by clearly distinguishing how and who the main characters choose to comedically reprimand. Though the three characters are constantly making jokes and poking fun the jokes are often not focused on other people but at themselves. When they do target another person it is for the specific reasons that revolve around A character being homophobic, sexist, or violent to someone weaker. This gives the audience a sense of right and wrong without any serious alterations that may make them turn away. The genre's ability to define and redefine what is culturally acceptable and what isn't and how we cultivate information and start a conversation to atone for our cultures misgivings. The power of comedy as a genre is not necessarily through the perpetual repetition of using humor as a deterrent for transphobia or homophobia. Rather, it exists as an open ended question for the

audience to ration why these disparities exist and what they as viewers and ultimately participants have done to propagate such adversity. The ability of comedy to break cinematic conventions and poke fun at the serious nature we view cinema in as well as the absurdity in our day to day interaction and conversation in the real world. The points of commentary on our reality extends from the most mundane idiosyncrasies to the most complex social constructs in an effort to analyze what makes us place so much trust in the sanctity of such ridiculous acts.

Ultimately what the *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* and *Sleepaway Camp*, as well as what their perspective genres, represent for trans bodies in the time of the eighties and nineties AIDS epidemic, is it offered a place for an audience to feel comfortable with the manifestation of their fears while also starting a narrative for trans bodies in cinema. By allowing cis audiences to feel both removed as viewers but invested in as voyeurs allowed them to interact in a controlled space and let trans women as well as the queer community have representation in a different spotlight that did not revolve around death and disease. The purpose of a film such as *Sleepaway Camp* is to confront us with horror in that, things that we're afraid of, the things we don't understand, become physical and bound to comparison with our own bodies and morals. However the body also serves to represent largely marginalized communities such as trans women in roles that make them powerful and unable to be harmed by the aggressor that invalidated them in real life.

Of course, these representations are riddled with problematic tones and imagery and are imperfect but I challenge anyone to show me the first display of a marginalized group that is. The fact that these films even made their debut in time and space such as this was a monumental step forward for visibility and would act as catalysts to prompt multiple reiterations of these character archetypes holding a plethora of voices and experiences until a more comprehensive and a frantic character was formed. In the end, it's the legacy that these films leave behind them that blazed the trail for representation in the future.

Although these films were important mile markers in the trans community it is important not to settle for These instances and caricatures of representation. At the time these were characters that were seen as trans icons as well as queer champions however when we talk about current cinema we still haven't grown from these archetypes as much as we would like to think. Though the advancement of cinema has led to many blossoming and Expanding Interests and research in representation of many marginalized groups trans women are still widely disparaged against. While still a part of the film archetype vernacular they have been subjugated to existing solely within dramatic films like *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) and *The Danish Girl* (2015). They now seem to be relegated to the narrative that they only exist to die and/or further the plot of another character. Yet where cinema has stayed stagnant, other mediums like television have embraced and innovated this characteristic of gender and sexual representation both in front of and behind the camera with shows such as *The Fosters* (2013-2018) and *POSE* (2018-) that represent a wide spectrum of gender and sexuality.

It is not enough to simply acknowledge what films like *Sleepaway Camp* and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newma* has done for the trans community as well as their prospective genres. It is our duty as film scholars to not only Analyze the past but subsequently question Where we will be in the future? The future of trans inclusive film has the world at its feet, with the decades belonging to the AIDS epidemic riddled with misinformation and distrust for the queer community in the past, the more expensive gender and sexual vocabulary has found commonplace in many aspects of contemporary cis heterosexual life.

Finding comfort in the archetypes and themes of the past only serves a purpose for those who seek nostalgia or are afraid of change. Is from scholars and members of the film industry

change is no stranger to us and although technological and other advancements may begin to have never and will never cease in the medium what is holding us back is our lack to congruently advance our narratives of trans women. Now is the time to foster a community that employs trans women and trans men as well as non-binary peoples in the writing room, in the editing bay, and behind the camera to aid in our advancement forward. By taking the past successes, not as the narrative standard for trans feminine bodies but the initiative to propel beyond ourselves we can face the fears and anxieties of a diverse gender society and work them out as only film can.

Bibliography

1. **Keegan, Cáell, Horak, Laura, and Steinbock, Eliza** (2018) *Cinematic/Trans*/Bodies Now (and Then, and to Come)*, DOI: 10.3366/soma.2018.0233 # Edinburgh University Press, 1-13.
2. **Raun, Tobias and Keegan, Cáell** (2018) *Nothing to Hide: Selfies, Sex, and the Visibility Dilemma in Trans Male Online Cultures, Sex in the Digital Age*. New York : Routledge, 89-91.
3. **Mulvey, Laura** (1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen XVI.3* : Federation Internationale des Archives (FIAF), 6-18.
4. **Williams, Linda.** (1991) "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Summer, 1991). 2-13.
5. **Freud, Sigmund** (1919), "The 'Uncanny'." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217-256.
6. **Clover, Carol J.** *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film.*, 1992, 21-51.
7. **Halberstam, Judith (Jack)** (2005), *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: Media Studies, 22-213.
8. **Morse, Nicole Erin.** "Trans Media: Seeing Double: Visibility, Temporality, and Transfeminine History in Transparent." *Jump Cut (Online)* (2016): np.

9. **Morse, Nicole** (2017) “*A double-take on reality television: Laverne Cox’s political and pedagogical gestural humor,*” *Feminist Media Studies*, 17:2, 168-180, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2016.1171792.
10. **Janisse, James, Rebecca, Chelsea and Ford, Joan** “54: *Transgender Representation in Horror,*” Audio Blog Post, *DEAD MEAT PODCAST*.
<http://deadmeatpod.libsyn.com/website>, Apr 17, 2019.