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From Monsters to *Monsters:* Perverted Predators and Diseased Deviants – Queer Representations in American Slasher Film of the 1980s

David Klein Martins

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Resumo

Com as famosas palavras "I'm just a sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania," Dr. Frank-N-Furter apresenta-se com orgulho à audiência do musical de terror pós-moderno *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), enquanto simultaneamente revela uma tendência subliminal enraizada no género de terror desde os seus primórdios: a associação entre o monstro *queer* e o terror cinematográfico. O presente estudo, intitulado "From Monsters to *Monsters*: Perverted Predators and Diseased Deviants – Queer Representations in American Slasher Film of the 1980s", tem como objectivo desenvolver esta ideia, explorando representações *queer* num subgénero do terror que ganhou popularidade nos filmes dos anos 80, o *slasher*. Neste sentido, serão descritas e analisadas as imagens negativas apresentadas por Hollywood, que tiveram um impacto tremendo na comunidade LGBT (lésbico, gay, bissexual, transgénero/ transsexual). Ao mesmo tempo, tendo em conta a vantajosa posição de poder aceder à teoria *queer* contemporânea, este estudo também desenvolve a ideia de que as várias imagens monstruosas não representam necessariamente um mal que vitimiza indivíduos LGBT. Pelo contrário, quando analisadas retrospectivamente, tais falsas representações podem de facto servir como um modo de subverter um heteronormativo conceito de individuo.

O enfoque particular na década de 1980 surge não só por causa do aparecimento do subgénero *slasher*, mas também porque este período representou um enorme retrocesso em relação aos direitos LGBT. O regresso a ideologias ultraconservadoras sob a presidência de Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), e o surgimento e a expansão rápida do vírus HIV/SIDA, bem como a associação imediata da doença com a comunidade homossexual masculina, geraram uma atmosfera geral de homofobia que assolou os Estados Unidos – um medo que foi rapidamente adoptado e explorado pelo género de terror de forma a aterrorizar, de modo particular, a classe média americana.

De forma a contextualizar este tema em particular, será desenvolvido primeiro um enquadramento em relação ao Terror enquanto género, mostrando em que medida os conceitos de monstruosidade e *queerness* podem ser associados. Neste contexto, serão também consideradas as origens históricas desta associação pejorativa encontradas já no século XIX (por exemplo, no Gótico ou o no caso do julgamento de Oscar Wilde). Deste modo, será demonstrado como a ideia

de uma "identidade homossexual" entrou na consciência pública, revertendo certos significados e estereótipos que doravante seriam associados a indivíduos *queer*.

A nível cinematográfico, será explorado o modo como as concepções erradas criadas no *fin-de-siècle* foram rapidamente adoptadas ao longo do século XX, começando com filmes de terror americanos de certo modo pioneiros, como *Frankenstein* (1931) e *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), em direção ao verdadeiro cerne desta dissertação, o filme de terror pós-moderno que eclodiu sobretudo a partir dos anos 60. Através do filme *Psycho* (1960) de Alfred Hitchcock, será exemplificada a diferença entre os paradigmas do filme de terror clássico e o filme de terror pós-moderno. *Psycho* é essencial para este estudo, visto que o filme pode não só ser considerado um ponto fulcral em relação a uma certa ruptura com as formas clássicas de produção cinematográfica de terror, mas também por ser considerado por vários estudiosos como a origem do *slasher*. Além disso, é um dos primeiros filmes que apresentou abertamente uma personagem homossexual. Durante esta análise fílmica, prestar-se-á especial atenção à influência da psicanálise nos Estados Unidos em meados do século, ou melhor, ao modo como as ideias freudianas foram falsamente interpretadas para retratar os "sexualmente desviantes", enquanto seres estranhos ou doentes. Para destacar ainda mais o subtexto *queer* do filme, será feita uma breve comparação entre o original de Hitchock e o *remake* (plano por plano) de Gus Van Sant, de 1998, no sentido de mostrar como a simples mudança de pequenos pormenores pode alterar radicalmente a visão que um filme apresenta do homossexual e da homossexualidade.

Antes de iniciar o estudo aprofundado sobre o *slasher*, será tida em consideração a grande transformação de conteúdos cinematográficos *queer* depois dos anos 60 por via de eventos históricos e fílmicos fundamentais, tal como a abolição do Código de Produção Fílmica ou o nascimento do movimento de direitos LGBT, que permitiram que personagens *queer* pudessem, de repente, ser representadas abertamente, sem que no entanto tais representações deixassem de ser pejorativas.

De forma a ilustrar os altos níveis de discriminação que a comunidade LGBT sofreu nos anos 80, serão abordados em seguida tópicos como: as ideias desinformadas em relação à SIDA que infiltraram a consciência Norte-Americana, ou a tendência para regressar a configurações físicas e a comportamentos hiper-masculinos, enquanto forma de emular os "heterossexuais", mas também enquanto afirmação de distanciamento em relação ao *queer* infectado, *fraco* e *efeminado*.

Para além disso, o *slasher* como subgénero do terror, com as suas características distintivas vai ser introduzido no contexto de teoria *queer*, incluindo uma abordagem histórica do *slasher*, nomeadamente com referência a filmes e géneros fílmicos que influenciaram o seu desenvolvimento, bem como uma breve análise das circunstâncias sociopolíticas em que o subgénero prosperou.

As análises fílmicas deste estudo têm em mente os debates iniciados nos capítulos anteriores, e explicitam a teoria aplicada a quatro filmes de terror dos anos 80 (analisados dois a dois): *Dressed to Kill* (Brian de Palma, 1980), *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980), *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, 1983), e *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Jack Sholder, 1985). Devido ao estado ainda em desenvolvimento evolutivo do subgénero *slasher* no ano do seu lançamento, os dois primeiros filmes podem ser considerados como protótipos do género. Já os dois últimos incluem todas as componentes de um filme *slasher*, motivo pelo qual foi necessário organizá-los em dois grupos (e capítulos) separados.

Tendo estabelecido a base para a demonização de personagens *queer* nos anos 80 antes do advento da crise da SIDA, *Dressed to Kill* e *Cruising* serão analisados comparativamente: começando com o impacto que os dois filmes tiveram, passando pela reutilização de material hitchcockiano, à presença do olhar voyeurístico ou à crítica de figuras de autoridade corruptas.

Ademais, tendo em conta as características definidoras do *slasher*, determina-se quanto estes filmes podem ser considerados protótipos do subgénero. Ao mesmo tempo as influências de outras formas fílmicas, como o género Italiano *giallo*, precisam de ser avaliadas, transformando tanto *Cruising* como *Dressed to Kill* em dois filmes que traçam os limites de género, sendo fundamentais na evolução do terror pós-moderno.

Por fim, ao contrário dos filmes anteriormente discutidos, *Sleepaway Camp* e *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* foram já produzidos nos primeiros anos da crise da SIDA, numa fase em que a doença ainda era entendida como uma forma de "cancro gay". Estes filmes revelarão, portanto, múltiplas alusões à epidemia, enquanto também se focam nas dificuldades que os adolescentes *queer* enfrentaram no dia a dia, reconhecendo identidades, ainda que simplificando reações.

Enquanto *Sleepaway Camp* chama a sua atenção prioritariamente para a monstruosidade de uma identidade sexual, ultrapassando normas de género tradicionais, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* empreende um diferente caminho jogando com alusões homossexuais

a um nível mais metafórico. No entanto, ambos utilizam o poder do *camp* como força transformadora.

Tendo em conta que estes filmes são *slashers* assumidos, é importante demarcar as diferenças entre eles e os protótipos anteriormente estudados. Por isso, serão consideradas preferencialmente as características básicas que definem o *slasher*, mas também outras questões como a homofobia interiorizada, má parentalidade, a crítica dura às autoridades ou uma certa inclinação para voyeurismo. Apesar da qualidade (ou falta dela) dos filmes selecionados, estas ideias são fundamentais para ilustrar as grandes semelhanças e discrepâncias entre os protótipos mais elaborados e os filmes *slasher* de série examinados neste estudo. A análise apresentada aqui revelará que estes filmes considerados "inferiores" têm de facto um enorme potencial (*queer*), especialmente no modo como subvertem ou trabalham temas muitas vezes ignorados noutros géneros e subgéneros cinematográficos.

Palavras-chave: terror, *slasher*, anos 80, SIDA, *queer*.

Abstract

With the famous words "I'm just a sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania," Dr. Frank-N-Furter proudly introduces himself to the audience of the postmodern horror musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) while simultaneously pointing out an important subliminal trend engrained in the horror genre since its beginnings: the association between the queer monster and cinematic horror. This MA dissertation, entitled "From Monsters to *Monsters*: Perverted Predators and Diseased Deviants – Queer Representations in American Slasher Film of the 1980s" aims to follow this reasoning by exploring depictions of queerness in the Slasher Film, a horror subgenre that rose in prominence in the 1980s.

More specifically, I will describe the hurtful consequences Hollywood's continuous horrific portrayal of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/ transsexual) individuals caused the queer community. Basing my argument on queer theory, I will support the idea that monstrous images do not need to necessarily be an evil victimizing LGBT individuals by pointing out that these 'misrepresentations' seen from today's standpoint can indeed also serve as a form of queer subversion.

I particularly chose to focus on the 1980s, not only due to the emergence of the slasher subgenre, but also because the decade generated an enormous backlash in regards to LGBT rights. The general atmosphere of homophobia pervading the United States stemmed from a socio-political return to ultra-conservative ideologies under the presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), as well as from the surfacing and rapid spreading of HIV/AIDS and the immediate association of the disease to the male homosexual community – a fear that was quickly adopted and exploited by the horror genre, and especially by the slasher subgenre, as a means to disturb heteronormative middle class America.

Keywords: horror, slasher, 1980s, AIDS, queer.

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Introduction

With the famous words "I'm just a sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania," Dr. Frank-N-Furter proudly introduces himself to the audience of the postmodern horror musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) while simultaneously pointing out an important subliminal trend engrained in the horror genre since its beginnings: the association between the queer monster and cinematic horror. This MA dissertation, entitled "From Monsters to *Monsters*: Perverted Predators and Diseased Deviants – Queer Representations in American Slasher Film of the 1980s" aims to follow this reasoning by exploring depictions of queerness in the Slasher Film, a horror subgenre that rose in prominence in the 1980s. More specifically, I will describe the hurtful consequences Hollywood's continuous horrific portrayal of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/ transsexual) individuals caused the queer community. Basing my argument on queer theory, I will support the idea that monstrous images do not need to necessarily be an evil victimizing LGBT individuals by pointing out that these 'misrepresentations' seen from today's standpoint can indeed also serve as a form of queer subversion.

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In order to contextualize this particular subject I first developed an introductory framework regarding the Horror genre. Hence, chapter 1, "The Monstrous Queer", and its first subchapter, "A Few Introductory Notes on Horror Movies as a Metaphor", will explore how far the concepts of monstrosity and queerness can be connected. To clarify this question, it will be shown that LGBT individuals are often exploited in a variety of homophobic or transphobic ways, which mirror the ostracism and fear regarding horror monsters or villains. Other horror genre-specific characteristics that make the genre interpretable as queer will as well be looked into, such as horror movies' generic narrative structure, the constant dissolution of heterosexual

unions in horror films by a (queer) monster, or queer viewing practices that help to decipher these films as such. Lastly, before moving on to the next subchapter, I engage with the question whether *queer* can be classified as a genre or rather as a subgenre, while also engaging with a theoretical definition of the term.

As the title of subchapter 1.2 "The Origins of Queer Monstrosity: The Gothic Tradition" suggests, this specific part will take into consideration the historic beginnings of the homophobically constructed association between queerness and monstrosity. In order to understand the foundations of modern day homophobic discourses, it is of particular importance to clarify certain signifiers and stereotypes attached to queerness by exploring their historical roots. To this end, it is necessary to address the gothic literary tradition, for the very reason that cinematic horror indeed arose from this literary genre. The gothic tradition is especially meaningful to this research, since, retrospectively speaking, gothic writing can be regarded as a very queer-tinged genre.

Moreover, the queer appeal of the genre becomes even more visible when considering that gothic literature arose in a time in which sexuality was introduced to a variety of discourses and with it sexual 'deviances' became of interest to a wider public. To this end, much of my research regarding this particular subject is heavily influenced by Foucault's seminal work *The History of Sexuality* (first published in French in 1976, followed by Vol. II and III in 1984). As will be explored in detail, historical happenings such as the case of Oscar Wilde will be of interest since they further pushed the notion of homosexuality into the public consciousness, while simultaneously establishing certain signifiers and stereotypes that would henceforth be associated with queer individuals. As will be further argued, a variety of 19th century discourses regarding queerness discussed in this chapter would continue to be repeatedly utilized throughout the 20th century, and some of these clichéd images have even survived to the present day.

Elucidating the roots of these erroneous conceptions regarding queerness is of the utmost importance since the gothic ways of playing with Otherness – which were crucial for associating sexual nonconformists with monstrosity – also influenced filmic depictions of queerness, especially in the cinematic horror genre.

Bearing in mind the research objective of this study, next I will particularly focus on early American horror cinema – or rather I will consider the father of American cinematic horror, James Whale (an assumed homosexual himself) – and the way he introduced a substantial degree

of queerness to the genre as early as in the 1930s. In particular, I will use Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) as case studies and disclose the films' queer subtexts in order to reflect upon the way the above discussed was deployed and adapted to the views of homosexuality in 1930s America.

My main focus will be on the postmodern, post-1960s horror film. Therefore, Chapter 2, "Postmodern Horror, and the Rise of the Killer Queer," represents a jump in time from the 1930s to the year 1960 when Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* was released. *Psycho* plays an essential role in this thesis as it can be considered as the originator of the slasher subgenre, a sort of proto-slasher film. It is also a movie that is often considered a pivotal point by film historians when it comes to the rupture with classical forms of horror and the introduction of an upcoming shift in sensibilities. In order to distinguish the changing paradigms of the genre, I have chosen to differentiate between 'classical' and 'postmodern' horror. Ensuing from a general discussion of the meaning of postmodernism, I will approach a definition of both types of horror filmmaking and point out their differences. Identifying the characteristics that constitute postmodern horror will be of prime importance for the understanding of the emergence of slasher movies, a process that will be closely discussed later on, in chapter 3.2.

A brief film analysis of Hitchcock's *Psycho* will follow in subchapter 2.1, "'We *All* Go a Little Mad Sometimes. Haven't You?': The Case of Psycho (1960 and 1998)". The main title is a quote taken from the movie that very concisely summarizes a fundamental idea concerning postmodern horror: the awareness of a lack of security and hope in a world without boundaries, in which anyone could turn out to be an unpredictable 'mad(wo)man'. A close study of the movie will follow, in which firstly the postmodern ideas earlier expressed are highlighted.

Simultaneously, *Psycho* also represents a landmark in terms of queer depictions on screen. As a matter of fact, we find a variety of ways of looking at queerness present in this movie – starting from gothic features that can be interpreted as queer, up to the idea of gender performativity, as well as outdated Freudian rationalizations regarding homosexuality – all of which form an amalgam of discourses concerning sexual and gender nonconformity. Here, special attention will be given to the influence of mid-century psychoanalysis, or rather the way Freudian ideas were misinterpreted to incorrectly depict sexual 'deviances' as unnatural or unhealthy. While the focal point of this analysis is the strongly queer-tinged protagonist Norman Bates, the role of other, secondary, characters will as well be looked into. I will demonstrate that

the gender-bending potential of the movie is all-encompassing, affecting every person supposed to be stable in his or her sexual and/ or gender identity. Thus, returning to the title of this subchapter, no stability is guaranteed in the postmodern world of *Psycho* – including traditional gender roles. Instead a queer madness reigns, with queerness being regarded as a psychosis in the homophobic and transphobic eyes of the conformist early 1960s American citizen.

To further illustrate the queer subtext of the movie, I will briefly equate the 1960 *Psycho* original with Gus Van Sant's eponymous 1998 *shot-by-shot remake* of the movie. While Hitchcock's original certainly plays with queer imagery, Gus Van Sant as part of the New Queer Cinema movement of the 1990s is able to closely dissect the queer undertones of its precursor. By comparing both films, emphasis is laid on the alteration of minor (sometimes not so minor) details in the script as well as in the actors' performances that bear the power to change the whole perception of queerness in the movie.

To further develop the deep transformation that depictions of queerness in movies would undergo from the 1960s onwards, I will also briefly consider the abolition of the Motion Picture Production Code and the resulting changing paradigms for moviemaking. At the same time, it is important to highlight the fundamental changes that were happening in American society due to the various civil rights movements. In this respect, particularly the birth of the Gay Rights Movement will be of utmost importance, which culminated in June 1969 when the Stonewall Riots took place in New York City. The mentioned cinematic and social changes influenced filmmaking significantly and led to a great increase in openly queer characters and topics in cinema.

While the queer monster eventually came out of the closet and onto American screens, its representations remained pejorative. The title of subchapter 2.2 "'Don't Dream It, Be It:' Out of the Sixties' Closet and Into the Seventies' Celluloid Shadows" is thus a direct reference to this conundrum. It furthermore adopts another movie quote, this time taken from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975). More specifically, it is part of a piece sung in the musical, which can be viewed as a form of queer anthem that reflects on gay liberation and empowerment, thus going hand in hand with my discussion of the queer liberation movement in this chapter. More than a celebration of LGBT rights, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is also a parody that plays with the queer subtext ever-present in the horror genre and consequently serves as a vital synthesis of all that has been discussed so far in the previous chapters.

Embarking from the shimmer of hope the 1970s gay liberation movement represented to the community, this analysis will dive into the shadows of the discriminatory 1980s in Chapter 3 "*Killers' Kisses*: Theorizing the Queer Predator of the 1980s." This chapter creates the theoretical framework that will build the basis for the film analyses of chapters 4 and 5. The title – a variation of Stanley Kubrick's 1955 film *Killer's Kiss* that indeed bears no thematic resemblance to the topic at hand but is rather used as a pun – has been chosen as it reflects on the conflation of sexuality and death, an association that became commonplace during the AIDS crisis. More precisely, it comments on the way that intimacy, or rather unprotected sex (the most common way of HIV transmission), turns into an act viewed as 'lethal'.

Subchapter 3.1 "*Early Frosts*: The AIDS Crisis, Reactionary Hypermasculinity, and the Fear of the *Diseased* Queer" again uses a slight alteration of a film title to reflect on the chapter's content by referencing John Erman's TV movie *An Early Frost* (1985), a filmic pioneer in regards to tackling the topic of AIDS. These 'early frosts' first and foremost evoke the image of the early decay and death many young individuals had to face in view of AIDS, while the title also unmistakably alludes to the early stages of the AIDS crisis as such.

In order to illustrate the high levels of discrimination the LGBT community suffered in the 1980s, this subchapter will provide an outline of the way misinformed ideas concerning AIDS emerged into the American consciousness as a disease that allegedly *only* affected male homosexual demographics. Therefore, governmental, media-related, as well as the general public's reactions that led to the silencing of the magnitude of the epidemic and the stigmatization of those affected by the disease will be closely inspected. Besides, the trend of embracing hypermasculinity that can be read as an attempt by the hetero- and homosexual community to distance oneself from the supposed 'frail' and 'effeminate' AIDS-affected queers, needs to be addressed in this context. A close analysis of these body politics will namely further describe the widespread misconception that gender-nonconformity, queer sexuality, performativity, and disease are somehow intricately linked – an idea that ultimately invaded Hollywood.

While subchapter 3.1 focuses on a more general theorization of LGBT issues in the 1980s, subchapter 3.2 will particularly concentrate on presenting the slasher film's distinguishing characteristics while also introducing the subgenre into the context of queer theory. The title of this chapter, "*Psycho Paths*: the Gender-Queering Slasher Film," is an allusion to the

documentary on the making of Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* named *'Psycho' Path* (1999), which has been chosen since it plays with the idea of looking 'behind the scenes' of the slasher's journey in becoming an established psychotic killer film subgenre.

As a preparation for the study of the subgenre, first a brief history of the slasher film will be elaborated. Here, I will particularly direct my attention to a variety of movies as well as genre forms, such as the Italian *giallo*, that influenced the slasher's development. This particular section is based upon the five slasher-defining tropes outlined by Carol Clover in her influential essay "Her Body, Himself" (1987). Next I will argue that the slasher film is an exceptionally queer subgenre. Crucial aspects such as the psychokiller as well as the 'Final Girl' (I will follow Carol Clover's (2015) example by using capital letters due to the fact that the Final Girl has become a category) – a female character that survives the attacks of the psychotic murderer – will thus be examined carefully for their gender-bending potential. Undoubtedly, the historical context in which the subgenre flourished also needs to be taken into account. It is evident that the slasher became popular amidst the 1980s AIDS epidemic. Thus, parallels between the killing of sexually active characters and the then lethal disease are inevitable.

The film analyses of chapters 4 and 5 will take up the debate initiated in the previous chapters, substantiating the theoretical background by analyzing four horror movies of the 1980s: *Dressed to Kill* (Brian de Palma, 1980), *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980), *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, 1983), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Jack Sholder, 1985). Since the former two films can be considered prototypes of the then evolving slasher subgenre, while the latter already include all established components of a formulaic slasher film, I chose to arrange and analyze them in two separate chapters. With this division I aim to highlight the close-knit ties between the paired movies, while simultaneously separating the different stages of development of slasher moviemaking.

The title of chapter 4 "1980 – *The Year of Dying Dangerously*" is again a borrowing from a movie, namely of the 1982 film *The Year of Living Dangerously* by Peter Weir. Although no narrative similarities between this film and the movies discussed in this chapter exist, the title has been chosen to hint at the violent killings of and by queer individuals present in both films and at a permanent *political* omnipresent danger. Having laid the groundwork for the demonization of queer characters in the 1980s before the advent of the AIDS crisis, *Dressed to Kill* and *Cruising* will be compared and analyzed in relation to one another: starting with the scandals both movies

caused, up to the repurposing of Hitchcock material, the presence of the voyeuristic gaze, or the critique of corrupt authority figures, a full array of parallels linking the two movies to one another will be disclosed.

Furthermore, bearing in mind the five slasher-defining tropes established in the previous chapter, it will be assessed how far these films can be considered prototypes of the slasher genre. At the same time, it needs to be evaluated how much *giallo* influence is present in both films, seeing that these two movies can be perceived as filmic variations placed in-between the slasher and the Italian *giallo* film. It will be argued that despite their liminal generic status these two slasher variations are essential for the present study in order to establish the slasher as a subgenre. Although both movies were hurtful to the LGBT community in the early 1980s, a deeper look reveals that underneath the superficial layer of homophobia there is also a blatant critique of a heteronormative, patriarchal two-gender system present. To some extent, the movies will be shown to sympathize with those who, having been ostracized by society, resort to violence as an act of self-defense.

Lastly, the title of Chapter 5, "Camp Nightmares" not only alludes to *Sleepaway Camp*, but furthermore plays with the concept of a 'camp' sensibility contained in both movies analyzed in this chapter. In contrast to the previous movies, *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* were already produced in the first years of the AIDS crisis, when the HIV/AIDS virus/disease was still deemed a form of 'gay cancer.' Therefore, it is of no surprise that both movies feature allusions to the epidemic. These movies furthermore focus on the difficulties queer teenagers face in everyday life and thus bear a sympathetic layer acknowledging these struggles.

Nonetheless, *Sleepaway Camp* draws its attention mostly towards the monstrosity of a gender-bending sexual identity. *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, the first sequel of the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise, takes a different path by playing with homosexual allusions on a metaphorical level. Taking into consideration that these movies are full-blown slashers, it will be demonstrated how they differ from the proto-slashers *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill*. Once again, both films will be scanned for the five standardized slasher tropes, while issues concerning internalized homophobia, 'wrong' parenting, a harsh critique of authority, as well as the inclination towards voyeurism will also be discussed. Regardless of the quality (or the lack of it) of the films selected, these ideas need to be taken into consideration to further illustrate the

great similarities and discrepancies between the proto-slashers and slashers examined in this study. Indeed, a discussion of the concept of 'camp' will reveal that these 'inferior' movies indeed bear enormous (queer) subversive power precisely because of the fact that they lack 'taste' or 'quality.'

Lastly, let us try to clarify the main title of this dissertation: it has been inspired by a quote uttered by the queer-tinged character Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger) in James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* – during the course of action he namely exclaims, "To a new world of Gods and Monsters." While *Gods and Monsters* (Bill Condon, 1998) has been appropriated as the title gracing a biopic about the last days of horror director James Whale's life, I chose to use a variation of this title "From Monsters to *Monsters*" to adapt it to the subject matter examined in this study. This way, I attempt to emphasize the development of the traditional gothic monster (and thus the 'proper' sense of monstrosity) to the queer individual seen as a diseased, psychotic monstrous slasher killer.

The second, modern version of the *monster* has been italicized to highlight the idea that this new monster is physically indistinguishable from his/her peers. Instead, monstrosity is solely based on the pejorative connotation queer sexuality has been culturally equipped with in an utmost homophobic and transphobic society, unfairly turning everyday human beings into 'diseased deviants' and 'perverted predators', as was the case in the United States of the 1980s.

1) The Monstrous Queer

1.1) A Few Introductory Notes on Horror Movies as a Metaphor

For a long time movies were the only place where Americans could catch a glimpse of LGBT individuals, since a public life out of the closet was unthinkable for the ostracized minority who faced harassment and discrimination on a daily basis. Hence, the frightening images created on screen were crucial to the public's imagination concerning the roles and lifestyles of queers in American society. Queer film historian Vito Russo further explains that "[t]he story of the ways in which gayness has been defined in American film is the story of the ways in which [queers] have been defined in America" (1981: xii). One genre in particular, the horror film, played a key role in cementing the images of queerness as predatory, dangerous, or contagious in the American mindset.

Popular opinion amongst film critics, as well as queer audiences, has it that the horror film and the queer go hand in hand. If one is to look up a general definition of the horror genre and to compare it to common stereotypes attributed to LGBT individuals, the connection between one and the other is quickly revealed. The horror genre is generally understood as a generic form that "address[es] both universal fears and cultural ones, exploiting timeless themes of violence, death, sexuality, and our own beastly inner nature, as well as more topical fears" in order to "elicit responses of fear or revulsion from [its] audience" (Grant, 2007b: 391). Not only does horror mirror societal anxieties but furthermore the genre is able to create and perpetuate what is to be dreaded, as Andrew Tudor explains:

> It goes without saying that horror movies are one aspect of the social construction of the fearful in our society: in their prosaic characteristics, first of all, and in the assembly of conventions that we grasp as part of our practical consciousness, they contribute to the shaping of our 'landscapes of fear'.
>
> (1989: 5)

These cultural anxieties include homophobia, a widely spread irrational fear felt by individuals in relation to homosexuality. Harry M. Benshoff, basing himself on a 1984 study by John Wayne Plasek and Janicemaie Allard, has summarized the most common types of

homophobia (which one might as well extend to transphobia) and divided them into three categories. In all three cases, homosexuality is perceived as a threatening counterpart to heterosexuality. Its supposed threat lies either in (I) the attack on the individual or an acquaintance that might be taken over by homosexuality and turned into a homosexual; (II) a physical or mental threat to fellow heterosexuals since "homosexuals have been frequently linked in the media to child molestation, rape, and violence;" or (III) a danger to the community as a whole, since homosexuality is feared to cause the "destruction of the procreative nuclear family, traditional gender roles, and […] 'family values'" (Benshoff 1997: 1). All three types of homophobia have been greatly disseminated, maintained, and influenced by cinematic depictions of queerness.

When comparing Benshoff's categories of homophobia to my initial definitions of the horror genre, one can understand that those fears condensed in homophobia are all contained in the basic ideas addressed in horror films: from the theme of "violence [and] death" as portrayed in form of the homosexual predator threatening the victimized heterosexual; to general concerns around "sexuality," most apparent in the breaking of heteronormativity and traditional gender roles; through to our own "beast within" (Grant, 2007b: 391), or more specifically, the fear of emerging homoerotic desires within oneself. This leads me to the conclusion that while horror movies can be interpreted from various different angles, queer readings are indeed legitimate approaches due to the fact that a variety of fears addressed by the genre are transferable to fears regarding LGBT individuals.

Queer film critic Robin Wood addresses the question of alterity in detail when exploring homoerotic trends in horror movies from a psychoanalytical point of view. Basing his analysis on Marx and Freud, Wood ponders on the force of human repression in relation to the perceived "Other," which he sees "not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outwards in order to be hated and disowned" (1979: 9). Thus, believing that a certain bisexual potential exists in every individual, it is the power of repression that turns us "into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists." He further argues that the heterosexual norm needs to be defended against the destructive forces of 'deviant' sexualities, since it is "the homosexual impulse in both men and women [that] represents the most obvious threat to the 'norm' of sexuality as reproductive and restricted by the 'ideal' of family" (1979: 8). As a result, this struggle for homogenizing human

sexuality leads to a general oppression of homosexuals and a self-censorship in regards to one's own homosexual tendencies. Through this kind of repression, "the healthy alternative" is prevented, namely "the full recognition and acceptance of the Other's autonomy and right to exist" (Wood, 1979: 9).

Ultimately, homophobia fails in so far as bisexual tendencies can never be wholly extinguished but are instead channeled in alternative ways: "what is hated in others is what is rejected (but nonetheless continues to exist) within the self." Wood comes to the conclusion that "it is the horror film that responds in the most clear-cut and direct way [to homosexual issues], because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept the repressed/ the other, in the figure of the Monster" (Wood, 1979: 10). The horror film with its monsters thus visualizes that which society dreads to see and prefers to suppress. In this manichaeistic world, in which heterosexuality is equated with goodness and queerness belongs to the realm of darkness and evil, the queer monster thus needs to stay in the shadowy realms so that an organized, heterocentrist everyday life can be perpetuated.

Apart from the queer themes horror films can encompass, the narrative structure of the genre also features queer elements. According to Andrew Tudor the horror genre has established clear conventions in regards to its narrative arrangement, due to the fact that "all horror movies pose some kind of threat to order and, invariably, to life and limb" (1989: 82). The horror narrative can thus be divided into three phases: "a monstrous threat is introduced into a stable situation; the monster rampages in the face of attempts to combat it; the monster is (perhaps) destroyed and order (perhaps) restored" (1989: 81). The insertion of a disruptive force into a patriarchal status quo can be associated with "the eruption of some form of queer sexuality into the midst of a resolutely heterosexual milieu" (Benshoff, 1997: 4). This is based on the fact that "[t]he very structure of Hollywood narrative form was and is heterosexist: it almost always contains a male-female romance, regardless of story line or genre" (Benshoff, 2007: 278). The subversive monster representing the supposedly non-procreative queer Other, who traditionally stands in contrast to the reproductive family-oriented heterosexual, thus poses a threat to fundamental heteronormative institutions such as marriage or the nuclear family.

An important question however remains: How are queer people depicted and dealt with in the horror genre? Harry M. Benshoff addresses this question by dividing horror films into four (oftentimes overlapping) categories in which they address queer issues. The first category of

queer horror features open and identifiable LGBT characters that are usually cast in the role of the monster or villain. This most obvious category, however, has only emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, after the abolition of the Motion Picture Production Code and the rise of the Gay Liberation Movement (Benshoff, 1997: 13-14), two major events that will be closely analyzed in chapter 2.2.

According to Benshoff, the heritage of these movies is a most destructive one, since they "have perhaps done much to cement into place the current social construction of homosexuals as unnatural, predatory, plague-carrying killers." The second category comprises horror films that were "written, produced, and/or directed by a gay man or lesbian, [or transgender individual] even if it does not contain visibly [queer] characters." Benshoff also argues that these movies, influenced by a director's or producer's sexual orientation, often feature a distinct "gay sensibility" (or rather *queer* sensibility) that is suggested "either consciously or otherwise" (1997: 14). Likewise, movies can feature actors that are indeed lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and who bestow a film with a similar queer aura. Most important, however, is the final category, which represents queerness in movies through subtext and allusions. Due to the fact that throughout a great part of American film history the overt portrayal of LGBT characters was prohibited, the hidden depiction of these 'sexual deviants' through queer signifiers of the respective era were the only way of dealing with queer-related issues in film (Benshoff, 1997: 13-14). Film historian Richard Dyer comments that such secretive and suggestive depictions, on the one hand, mirrored the daily lives of queer individuals and, on the other hand, simultaneously served as an instruction to a life in the shadowy realms:

> Most expressions of homosexuality in most of movies are indirect. And what's interesting is that that, of course, is what it was like to express homosexuality in life. That we could only express ourselves indirectly, just as people on the screen could only express themselves indirectly. There's a sense in which the characters are in the closet, the movie's in the closet and we're in the closet. (as quoted from Epstein and Friedman's documentary *The Celluloid Closet*)

Finally, when talking about these different interpretative approaches, it is important to take into account (queer) audiences' reception to homoerotic subtexts in movies. After all, "'queerness' [is] a mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity" (Doty, 1993: 2). Benshoff draws attention to the fact that

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the "cinematic monster's subjective position is more readily acceded to by a queer viewer – someone who already situates him/herself outside a patriarchal, heterosexist order and the popular culture texts that it produces" (1997: 12). Due to these so-called "identificatory practices" (1997: 37) an LGBT viewer has adopted a greater sensibility when it comes to potential hidden queer subtexts.

However, these interpretational approaches vary from person to person. Although the portrayal of homosexual characters in film has been mostly pejorative for a long time, a queer spectator must not necessarily perceive them as offensive or degrading since these movies often "allow for spaces in which normative heterosexuality is threatened, critiqued, camped up, or shown to be an unstable performative identity" (Benshoff, 2007: 278). Ultimately, these personal queer readings are valid readings, seeing that "[t]hey result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along" (Doty, 1993: 16).

A question that remains is whether it is appropriate to define a *Queer* genre since a variety of movies can contain queer elements as shown above. To answer this question, it is necessary to first take a look at a general definition of what constitutes a genre:

> Genres are categories of kinds or types of artistic or cultural artifacts with certain elements in common. In film, common generic elements include subject matter, theme, narrative and stylistic conventions, character types, plots, and iconography. (Grant, 2007a: 297)

Genres thus feature certain conventions that are collectively known by audiences and make a movie's content easily identifiable by a consumer (2007a: 298). While 'queer films' feature the common denominator of 'queer content', queer elements can appear in manifold ways and are not reduced to established conventions. Since practically any movie can be approached from a queer perspective and thus feature queer elements, I would therefore opt for defining queerness as an indication of a subgenre subordinating itself to an established genre convention, rather than a stand-alone genre. When I speak of 'queer horror' I thus refer to films of the horror genre that feature queer elements, the same way that I would for instance refer to 'vampire horror' when addressing horror films that play with vampiric themes or characters.

Before beginning my discussion on the history of the monstrous queer in the cinematic tradition, it is of importance to first define what I mean when referring to 'queerness' as opposed to the paradigms gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender/transsexual. Alexander Doty defines queerness as "a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight." Consequently, it is "an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extention [*sic*] of the gender binarism" (1993: xv). Queerness thus has the quality of breaking away these binaries by creating an inclusive space for those marginalized in a heterosexist society. Accordingly, Annamarie Jagose alerts us of the tendency to use queer theory as yet another constrictive label "[f]or part of queer's semantic clout, part of its political efficacy, depends on its resistance to definition, and the way in which it refuses to stake its claim" (1996: 1).

While LGBT individuals can indeed be described as queer, queerness does not need to be exclusively reduced to any of the categories the acronym represents. In truth, "heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements, and basically heterosexual, straight-identifying people can experience queer moments" (Doty, 1993: 3). An example for groups of people that do not identify as LGBT while simultaneously do not fit into the constrictive idea of traditional heterosexuality would be the BDSM community or people that engage in transvestitism while searching opposite-sex relations. After all, just like the LGBT community, both groups are oftentimes shunned by society when revealing their 'deviant' sexuality. Being in a liminal space of alterity, these individuals might be best described as 'queer'. Furthermore, in the words of Benshoff, queerness also integrates, "issues of race, gender, disability, and class […], making interracial sex and sex between physically challenged people dimensions of queer sex" (1997: 5).

While I will refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender when I address elements or characters that are defined by or identify with any of these categories since they "work within monogender or nonstraight bigender dynamics" (Doty, 1993: xviii), I will use the term 'queer' to address all those who do not fall into this gendered binary since their sexuality is (I) either too complex to be reduced to one of these categories; (II) these individuals consciously reject the categories gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender; or (III) a queer position is taken by a non-LGBT individual. Following Doty's classification, "'queer' [will be] occasionally used as an umbrella

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term […] when I want to make a collective point about lesbians, and/or gays, and/or bisexuals, and/or queers (whether self-identified queers or queer-positioned nonqueers)" (1993: xviii).

1.2) The Origins of Queer Monstrosity: The Gothic Tradition

Today's understanding of queerness has been greatly influenced by a variety of discourses, such as psychoanalytical, medical, literary, and cinematic ones. When taking into account the filmic depictions of queerness in the LGBT-hostile decade of the 1980s, it is of interest to go back to and to examine the roots of said discourses in order to get a better understanding of how they first emerged and how they evolved over time. The following two chapters will thus serve as a historical evolution of the 'monstrous queer' starting as early as in the 18th century and ending at sundown of the rebellious 1970s. By going back to deprive certain signifiers attached to queerness of meaning, I will reveal their artificiality by pointing out how and why these misconceptions were constructed over time. Furthermore, several landmark films that changed and influenced queer perception in (horror) cinema will be discussed to give an overview on the changing paradigms concerning queerness on screen.

Queer undertones have been part of the horror genre from its outset. In fact, the genre's origins can be traced back the English Gothic novel and the German *Schauer-roman*, both taking root in the second half of the 18th century (Carroll, 1990: 4). Here, the Gothic tradition in particular becomes of interest not only due to its frequent suggestive homoeroticism, but also for being deemed the first literary movement that took queer matters of various sorts into focus.

Homoerotic tendencies were found throughout this literary genre, starting as early as in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which is widely considered the foundational novel of gothic writing (Benshoff, 1997: 16-17; Cooper, 2010: 5). From the "excesses of aristocrats whose appetites for money and sex imperil normal domesticity" (Cooper, 2010: 62) in *The Castle of Otranto* to "[a] religiously repressed sexual hysteria and a transsexual demon" (Benshoff, 1997: 18) in M. G. Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), these early gothic novels established the basis for the connection between a monstrous self and homoerotic desire. In the late 19th century, this equation of the monstrous and the homosexual would be used when establishing the homosexual as a distinct identity. That is not to say that same-sex desire was non-existent at the time. While the signifier 'homosexual' was not created prior to 1870, same-sex attraction was

"usually understood as a preference for a specific range of sexual behaviors and not as an entire identity" (Benshoff, 1997: 17). Retrospectively one can nevertheless revise literary history and apply the idea of queerness to works published before the invention of the word.

While some critics set the end of the early Gothic novel around the 1820s, works relating to gothic conventions continued to be published throughout the 19th century (Cooper, 2010: 5). A true gothic revival, however, was only celebrated towards the end of the century in the form of "neo-Gothic" (5-6), a concept originally applied to revival architecture. As Benshoff (1997: 19) notes, these works belonging to the *fin-de-siècle* "gothic renaissance were even more explicit than their predecessors regarding the conflation of the monstrous with some form of queer sexuality." Popular queer-tinged literary characters were developed in this period, most notably the story of a potentially closeted gay man leading a double life in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), or the sexually seductive Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), who might be perceived as a "condensation of all things sexually deviant" (Cooper, 2010: 81) and able to transform his prey into bisexual predators just like himself (Benshoff, 1997: 19).

Simultaneously, a poetic and artistic movement known as 'The Decadents' was afoot, which epitomized "the association of homosexual behavior with elitism, death, and decay" since it engaged in "abnormal loves, necrophilia, and the ever-present image of the woman's corpse." The Decadents outward appearance and behavior, characterized by their "pale, thin, delicate, aestheticized, and emotional" (1997: 19) features, contributed much to homosexual signifiers still used today. In particular one of these male writers tremendously boosted the establishment of homosexuality as an all-encompassing representative feature for an individual. This writer was Oscar Wilde, whose *The Picture of Dorian Gray* fits perfectly into the 'monstrous' paradigm, alongside Frankenstein and Mr. Hyde.

At the expense of a short digression, before engaging closely with the birth of the homosexual identity and the accompanying trials of Oscar Wilde, it is important to take into consideration the sexual parameters of the times. Indeed, it is of no surprise that the first literary genre that would branch out to queer subject matters happened in the 18th and 19th centuries and that the definition and identification of 'deviant' sexualities took place during that period. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault explains that the 18th and 19th century were marked by the incorporation of sexuality into public discourses.

While in the Middle Ages a unitary sexual discourse centered around "the theme of the flesh and the practice of penance" existed, in the two aforementioned centuries this was "multiplied in an explosion of distinct discursivities which took form in demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, and political criticism" (Foucault, 1978: 33). The inclusion of sexuality into various public discourses had the primal goal to regulate the sexuality of the masses, as the philosopher further explores: "Through the various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described" (1978: 36).

To enforce the desired surveillance and persecution of these sexual deviations, "a new *specification of individuals*" (Foucault, 1978: 42-3) was required. In the case of same-sex desire, an identity had to be characterized and homosexuality had to become visible:

> Nothing that went into [the homosexuals] total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. (1978: 43)

Accordingly, same-sex desire was reduced to arbitrary, superficial signifiers, which became representative of a person as a whole. Foucault sets the birth of the 'homosexual' in the year of 1870 when Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal's article "contrary sexual sensations [*sic*]" was published, in which Westphal claimed homosexuality to be understood as an inversion of masculinity and femininity in an individual – or as Foucault puts it, an "interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul" (1978: 43). This shows that homosexuality has been linked to medicine and pathology from the outset. This being said, it should be highlighted once again that while 'the homosexual' as an identity defining a certain kind of person through specific signifiers was indeed a construct (such as gender itself might be perceived as an artificial creation, as discussed in greater length in the following chapter), same-sex desire and relations have always been a natural part of human sexuality. The idea of 'the homosexual' rapidly spread throughout Europe and was soon adopted in the US:

By the 1880s, same-sex attraction had been discovered in the United States, and articles about it popped up in domestic, scientific trade journals and magazines. There were only a few articles at first, but as the century came to a close, case studies were published across the country and by 1900, books and articles were commonplace. (Hatheway, 2003: 2)

Apart from the medical writings on homosexuality, another event helped the newly designated homosexual identity to enter the public consciousness. Namely, in a series of three trials held in London in 1895, British writer Oscar Wilde was prosecuted and convicted for "the commission of acts of indecency *in private* with members of the own sex," resulting in his two-year imprisonment accompanied by hard labor (Hyde, 1962: 19). These trials eventually helped to popularize the concept of homosexuality by "giving the pathologized category life in the popular consciousness" (Cooper, 2010: 61). Oscar Wilde became the representative for a homosexual identity and many characteristics associated to him would become general signifiers attached to the sexual orientation. After all, "parts of *Dorian Gray* were, or were used as, a handbook of gay style and behavior" (Sedgwick, 1985: 95). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick even argues that "by the turn of the 20th century, after the trials of Oscar Wilde, the 'aristocratic' role had become the dominant one available for homosexual men of both the upper and middle classes" (1985: 94). This equation of homosexuality and aristocracy was closely linked to the believed life of excess amongst aristocrats, be it of financial or sexual nature (Cooper, 2010: 62). Here, the first link between Wilde, although not an aristocrat, and the Gothic can be established as Cooper explains: "To the denizens of normality who felt threatened by Wilde's proclivities, Wilde looked like a Gothic villain. This resemblance enabled 'the normal' to equate Gothic characterizations with same-sex desire" (2010: 62) – a connection that naturally becomes even more obvious retrospectively from a 20th or 21st century perspective.

Further popular tropes established at the time and derived from the case of Oscar Wilde were, amongst others, the "criminal type like the ones found in *Dorian Gray*" (2010: 60), or the trope of homosexuality as "the love that dare not speak its name" (2010: 63). It should be noted that the signifiers associated with homosexuality mostly applied to men, as lesbianism in the United Kingdom only entered the public discourse in 1928 with the 'obscenity' trials against Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness* (2010: 62).

When homosexuality was eventually adopted onto the screen, similarly, the demonization

would be mostly exerted against male individuals. Vito Russo explains this phenomenon in the introduction to his influential book *The Celluloid Closet* by pointing towards the sexism inherent in homophobia:

> Weakness in men rather than strength in women has consistently been seen as the connection between sex role behavior and deviant sexuality. And while sissy men have always signaled a rank betrayal of the myth of male superiority, tomboy women have seemed to reinforce that myth and have often been indulged in acting it out. (1981: 4-5)

The inaccurate quick dismissal of the existence of female same-sex attraction and relationships led to the widespread belief that "lesbianism is never allowed to become a threatening reality any more than female sexuality of other kinds." This fact makes itself clear when considering the widely-spread male pornographic heterosexual fantasy of lesbianism, in which lesbian love is not regarded as a threat but rather "as the preliminary to the 'real' event, sex between men and women" (Russo, 1981: 5). This being said, lesbianism was actually suggested in some early films such as Cecil B. DeMille's *Manslaughter* (1922). Nevertheless, these were marginal representations that mostly played with different arrays of signifiers than male homoeroticism and caused a different reaction in audiences. This is to say that lesbian characters "were simply perceived to be 'like men,' and they conjured up a far more appealing androgyny than did male sissies" (1981: 6).

Undoubtedly, the cinematic medium played a key role in the building and dissemination of stereotypes attributed to LGBT individuals. Harry M. Benshoff reasons that since the invention of cinema, "[t]hose images [on screen] carried considerable cultural weight; for many people, these images were all they ever 'saw' or 'knew' about homosexuality before the sexual revolution of the 1960s" (2007: 277). The first known-of footages featuring homoerotic layers mostly played with the idea of gender 'deviation' through cross-dressing, aiming at making audiences laugh. Russo refers to filmic footage as found in William Dickson's *The Gay Brothers*, a 1895 short film featuring two men dancing a waltz, or films by Edwin S. Porter that featured cross-dressers at the beginning of the 20th century (1981: 6). Examples for queer depictions in early cinema were, however, scarce and would remain marginal for decades to come. Jumping ahead in time, it was in the 1930s that the monstrous queer would reach large American

audiences through the emerging American horror film. Many of these early horror movies set horror conventions that are still applied today, including the ways in which homosexuality was dealt with on screen.

Though a slight digression, an important fact to remember when talking about American cinema from the 1930s onwards is the implementation of the Motion Picture Production Code, which was created in 1930 and enforced, particularly since 1934, until 1968 (Monaco, 2010: 31). The Code was used to monitor 'indecent' onscreen behavior and had the means to censor most movies in the entire American movie market on grounds of being offensive. One of the great prohibitions was the ban of onscreen 'sex perversion', which included the depiction or naming of homosexuality in movies (Benshoff, 1997: 35).

Nevertheless, "Hollywood cinema under the Code continued to suggest queerness via the presence of effeminate men and mannish women, but these characters were never explicitly acknowledged as homosexual" (Benshoff, 2007: 278). Generally speaking, after the rise of the Production Code, queer-coded characters in horror films were mostly cast in the role of villains, "tinged with the era's signifiers of male homosexual culture, being finely acculturated, somewhat dandified, and given to bizarre modes of dress, make-up, and deportment" (Benshoff, 1997: 46).

By adapting works of the English literary gothic tradition as was the vogue in horror cinema of the 1930s, James Whale's 1931 screen adaptation of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its follow-up sequel *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) – a merely cinematic variation with no literary basis – epitomized many of the discussed gothic signifiers and fears in regards to homosexuality. It is of interest to take a look at these two movies and the director as Whale and his films were placed in a very interesting and unique position in Hollywood.

Recalling Benshoff's four ways in which a horror film can contain queer characteristics, James Whale's persona and work undoubtedly fulfilled three of the categories. Firstly, James Whale was an openly gay man, a fact that might have been responsible for his downfall in Hollywood – a circumstance closely examined in the 1998 biopic *Gods and Monsters* by Bill Condon. Consequently, his movies featured a certain homoerotic tinge that one might connect to his personal life. Secondly, Whale employed gay actors such as Ernest Thesiger, who was known in England for his female impersonations (Benshoff, 1997: 41-2). Lastly, as I will demonstrate on the basis of two of his masterpieces, Whale's movies often offered a queer thematic that was suggested through connotation.

In Whale's *Frankenstein* we encounter the young Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive), a scientist who creates life out of dead body parts he gathers with the help of another male character, his sidekick Fritz (Dwight Frye). The creation of life by two men without female input certainly mirrors the idea of same-sex procreation, another trope established during the early gothic literary tradition that still finds an echo today. More specifically, what L. Andrew Cooper refers to as "pathological reproduction" are imagined monstrous ways in which homosexuals are to engage in procreative functions without a female partner. This homosexual form of reproduction is perceived as "different, dark, pathological." Since a homosexual couple is unable to naturally reproduce with one another, "[h]omosexuals must be anti-life, anti-reproduction, and anti-future to make good on the threat of social collapse" (Cooper, 2010: 65). Michel Foucault elucidates the roots of the fear concerning the threat same-sex desire supposedly poses to human reproduction. According to Foucault, every human society is based on a so-called "*deployment of alliance*" (1978: 106).

Herewith he means "a [heterosexual] system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" whose main goal lies in regulating human relations and hence ensuring human reproduction. All in all, the deployment of alliance thus serves to maintain the "social body." Yet, its power was greatly reduced by the "*deployment of sexuality*," a new form of discourses of power and vigilance that began in the 18th century, as previously discussed. Unlike the reproduction-oriented deployment of alliance, the deployment of sexuality "is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible these may be" (Foucault, 1978: 106-107). The focus of discourses has consequently shifted from the regulation of social benefits of permitted relations (marriage and childbearing) to the surveillance of desires and sensations allowed to be acted out. It is necessary to bear in mind that before the discourses concerning sexual deviance flourished, queer identities were not part of the general mindset and thus were not thought about.

However, as soon as the homosexual identity comes into existence, same-sex unions are perceived as a way of controlling and reducing reproduction to a certain extent and consequently pose a threat to the deployment of alliance. In other words, homosexuality is seen as threatening the family as the core reproductive union, threatening future generations, and therefore threatening the future of societal living and human existence on earth. If a homosexual couple suddenly were to find a way to procreate, the homosexual would theoretically become enabled to

partake in the deployment of alliance. Since same-sex desire is, however, to be feared, in the public mind its potential offspring must be as monstrous as the breeder himself or herself. To return to the subject at hand, both Mary Shelley's popular novel *Frankenstein* (1818) and its adaptation by James Whale, are perfect examples for the fear of same-sex reproduction. As expected, the outcome of such reproductive practices is horrific and poses a threat to society.

Being completely obsessed with his experiments, Henry neglects his fiancé Elizabeth (Mae Clarke) and is therefore prevented from entering into the sacred bond of marriage. In fact, the whole town is anxiously waiting for the wedding. Slowly understanding that Henry's mind has set other priorities, Henry's father, Baron Frankenstein (Frederick Kerr), even nervously exclaims, "unless Henry comes to his senses, there'll be no wedding" (as quoted from Whale's *Frankenstein*). The Baron next begins a speech about the importance of the wedding tradition, illustrating how it has been handed down through the family's bloodline. Henry thus faces a double pressure, i.e. one of domestic and one of public nature. The solitary life he has chosen in the isolated lighthouse in which he conducts his experiments stands in great contrast to his family-oriented duties as a supposed patriarchal figure.

Flashing forward, after Henry successfully completes his experiment and understands the darkness he has created in the form of the monster (Boris Karloff), he is convinced by his peers to retreat to village life and to finally marry Elizabeth. The monster in this movie might well be interpreted as the arising homoerotic desire in Henry: a secret too dark for the world to see and only to be explored in the shadowy realms. He thus hides the monster in a dungeon, as if locking up his same-sex desire in a figurative closet.

Once the monster breaks out it wreaks havoc in the heteronormative world. Standing for Henry's closeted homosexual drive, according to the idea of pathological reproduction earlier discussed the gothic monster must be 'anti-life' and hence kills several innocent people, including a child, the symbol of a future (heterosexual) generation. On the day of Henry and Elizabeth's wedding the monster – and with it Henry's homoerotic feelings – reappears and hinders the big event to take place by kidnapping the bride. This detail is of utmost importance to this queer approach of the film, since by separating the couple, Henry's queer monster prevents the heterosexual institution of marriage. An angry mob, arguably standing for the homophobia of the masses, thus follows the monster to eliminate it. During this event, Henry looses the search party and is confronted with the monster on his own. It is in this moment that he has to face his

inner demon and decides to fight it. His attempts to wrestle his creation, or more precisely his struggle against his secret feelings, are fruitless as the creature escapes. Only the mob is eventually able to kill it by burning down a mill in which the monstrosity has found refuge. Eventually, the aggression and anger exerted against the monster present the way society crushes the individual and its desires through homophobic acts of violence.

Bride of Frankenstein takes up the events of *Frankenstein* by continuing the story where it was left off. It is revealed that the monster, after all, did not die during the fire but instead escaped, finding itself on the run again. Being hunted by the villagers, the monstrous creation murders a few individuals in self-defense. Despite the fact that Frankenstein's monster is still characterized as a threatening force, the monstrous queer nuance of this sequel is not embodied by the monster but displaced onto another character that makes the queer subtext of the story even more visible. Namely, the movie's queer appeal is introduced by the character of Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger), a scientist intrigued with the idea of creating a female mate for Frankenstein's monster.

Pretorius, a character condensing several homosexual signifiers of the 1930s, can be described as an "odd, sissified" (Russo, 1981: 51) man, who "oozes a gay camp aura over the entire film" (Benshoff, 1997: 50). Due to his refined British accent and extravagant behavior, such as having a meal in a crypt on a table decorated with a skeleton, American audiences could easily identify the character as the effeminate, extravagant queer aristocrat earlier described. In this very same scene Pretorius obliges a couple of criminals to help him exhume a body in a crypt. The criminals admit that this procedure exceeds their tolerable limits, lamenting "[that] this is no life for murderers" (as quoted from Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*).

Consequently, the dialogue not only equates the perceptibly queer Pretorius with the gothic trope of the homosexual criminal, but furthermore suggests that homosexuality is more degenerate than murder. Even Minnie, the Frankenstein family's devoted servant describes the man as "a very queer looking old gentleman" (as quoted from Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*) after first meeting him. According to Harry Benshoff both expressions 'gay' and 'queer' were already used in homosexual slang of the time period and can thus be regarded "as further evidence of homosexual codings in popular culture at this particular point in time" (Benshoff, 1997: 47). Nevertheless, in the 1930s 'gay' was still equated with happy and 'queer' with odd or strange before becoming an insult and ultimately a banner.

Despite his queer aura, Dr. Pretorius also occupies a narrative function that connects him to the role of the homosexual predator. He namely plays the part of the disturbing force separating the heterosexual couple by turning their heteronormative world upside down. One night the sinister-looking Dr. Pretorius appears at the doorstep of the Frankenstein residence, disturbing the engaged couple in the intimacy of their marital bed. Narratively as well as formally, the scene in which he enters the couple's bedroom identifies him as the actual villain of the movie: when approaching the lovers, he casts a monumental chiaroscuro shadow upon the room while the lovers hold each other tight with an expression of fear on their faces. However, they disentangle quickly and Elizabeth is asked to leave the two men alone. Although Henry at first blocks Pretorius' invitation to participate in his experiments, explaining that "[he is] to be married, [he is] going away" (as quoted from Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*), he is nevertheless soon blackmailed into joining Pretorius. According to Young, by taking Henry away from his wife, Dr. Pretorius becomes "Elizabeth's rival as a lover" (2000: 133).

Curiously, Henry's motivation in joining Pretorius is left in ambiguity and does not become perfectly clear. Is Henry really being forced to go along with Pretorius or is he actually interested in joining the man pursuing the same passions as he does on his own free will? Indeed, we see Henry rambling on about his obsessive interest in his experiments – or figuratively, his immersion into homoerotic realms – right before the somber doctor seeks him out. He thus explains to Elizabeth that "[i]t's never out of [his] mind" (as quoted from Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*).

Notwithstanding the fact that *Bride of Frankenstein* was an industrial sequel to the enormous success of the original, we can take into consideration that (I) the monster representing Henry's homosexuality in the first *Frankenstein* movie was immune to the outrage of a homophobic society and survived the deadly attack and that (II) Henry's desire to resume to his (homosexual) practices is a constant interior struggle. This proves that homosexuality in this context is seen as an unbreakable, innate part of someone's identity. Henry tries to fight it forcefully but seems to be always drawn back to the shadowy realms of queer desire. Once the two men find themselves in Pretorius' home, the elderly doctor "puts the moves on Henry" (Benshoff, 1997: 50) by drinking to their new partnership and making a toast "[t]o a new world of gods and monsters" (as quoted from Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*). Pretorius becomes possessive of Henry, constantly reaffirming their partnership by referring to Henry as "my

partner" and enumerating the future possibilities that both – "you and I together" (as actually quoted from Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*) – can create.

In fact, together the two men create a mate for the monster in a scene filled with phallic, homoerotic, and orgasmic imagery, as Young clearly points out: **"**[F]rom the long shaft that elevates the bride to the roof, where she will receive lightning conducted from the storm raging outside; to the men's excited shouts of 'It's coming up' as she is raised; and finally to the orgasmic quality of the lightning hitting the bed" (2000: 133). Once alive, the female creation, whose premise of birth was to form a heterosexual liaison with her male monstrous counterpart, immediately rejects the male monster and thus mirrors the sexual deviance of her creators. She shrieks at the monster's advances and instead prefers her queer solitude.

According to the classical horror order-disorder-order narrative formula, in the end the evil queer characters are collectively destroyed in an explosion, while the heterosexual couple is able to survive. Yet, the ending is not necessarily a joyous one, "given the instability that has preceded their happy coupling, it is doubtful that the [heteronormative] system as a whole now looks so smooth; at the very least, the violence with which such eruptions must be suppressed has been exposed" (Young, 2000: 134). It is also questionable whether the monsters and the mad scientist, or rather Henry's homosexuality, were truly eliminated this time, seeing that the previous attempt to kill the monster in *Frankenstein* and his survival already proved the difficulty of this endeavor.

As a pioneer in the matters of American horror film, James Whale introduced a degree of queerness to horror movies when the genre was first introduced to Hollywood. As will be shown in the following chapters, many of the queer markers and signifiers presented here will emerge repeatedly in other films of the genre. Although queerness on screen would appear over and over again in coded and suggestive form for years to come, the representations did not evolve much during the next two decades. An important break with tradition only arose in the year 1960 with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

2) Postmodern Horror and the Rise of the Killer Queer

Hitchcock's *Psycho*, a filmic adaptation of the 1959 pulp thriller by Robert Bloch, is regarded as a major pivotal point in film history in many ways. Firstly, it reinvented the horror genre in that it started a new wave of horror filmmaking that brought about a radical rupture to the way horror movies were produced in the past. With these changes, the worldview presented in most horror films to come was turned upside down. Most importantly for the present discussion, however, was a new visible queerness first presented in this film, embodied in the character Norman Bates.

Many film historians and critics agree that "a distinct shift in emphasis somewhere in the sixties" (Tudor, 1989: 102) took place that separated pre-1960s horror from post-1960s horror. This is not to say that the genre changed all at once but it is widely agreed that a slow transformation of horror conventions began in this decade and became fully established in the seventies and eighties (1989: 104). Although there is some consent in regards to the fact that a historical split exists, the naming of pre- and post-1960s horror forms differs from critic to critic. While Andrew Tudor differentiates between 'secure' and 'paranoid' horror and thus brings into focus the worldview assumed by these types of horror movies, Isabel Pinedo defends the terms 'classical' and 'postmodern' horror, concentrating on the blurring of boundaries that post-sixties horror movies are known for (Tudor, 1989: 103; Pinedo, 1996: 17). Others simply distinguish between 'classical' and 'post-classical' or 'modern' horror movies, such as Linda Williams (2004: 165). For this purpose, I will adopt Isabel Pinedo's definition of 'classical' and 'postmodern' horror, a choice I will elaborate upon over the course of this chapter. At any rate, all the presented approaches are legitimate designations, name two distinctive worlds of horror movies in a clear dichotomic opposition, and moreover all bear a common core.

Since a key point that demands analysis in this chapter is the postmodern blurring of boundaries that gains special significance when addressing *Psycho*, I will turn to a brief definition of postmodernism by Pinedo:

> The postmodern world is […] an unstable one in which traditional (dichotomous) categories break down, boundaries blur, institutions fall into question, master narratives collapse, the inevitability of progress crumbles, and the master status of the universal (read: male, white, monied, heterosexual)

subject deteriorates. Mastery is lost, universalizing grand theory is discredited, and the stable, unified, coherent self acquires the status of a fiction. (1996: 17-18)

The above-described postmodern world is thus defined by unraveling certainties. Pinedo links this phenomenon to a "cumulative outcome of repetitive historical stresses, including the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, the Cold War, the war in Vietnam, the antiwar movement, and the various liberation movements associated with the 1960s" (1996: 18). The outcome of these rupturing events was instability; a loss of a uniform worldview. More precisely, all of these events, and in particular an awareness of the existence of atomic bombs ready to destroy humanity with a single 'click', had a profound impact on everyday life in America.

From scientific nuclear experiments in the southwest deserts of the United States, to popular media and cinema focusing on images of Armageddon, through to "schoolchildren practic[ing] drills in school and watch[ing] government-sponsored films" or the building of "tiny concrete bunkers located in basements and backyards," American consciousness was infiltrated by paranoia and fear (Badore, 2014: 1-2). Art as such responded to this by blurring traditionally fixated boundaries and so did the horror film, which greatly relied on the fear permeating society. To illustrate the postmodern stance of post-1960s horror, I will now take a look at *Psycho*, which, again according to Linda Williams, after all can be "viewed as a quintessentially postmodern film" (2004: 166).

2.1) "We *All* Go a Little Mad Sometimes. Haven't You?": The Case of *Psycho* (1960 and 1998)

Psycho introduces us to the story of Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) who finds herself on the run after having stolen money from the real estate office where she works. On the way to meet her lover Sam Loomis (John Gavin), Marion checks in to the Bates Motel, managed by Norman Bates and his mysterious mother who is never explicitly shown throughout most of the film. During that stay, Marion is brutally murdered in the shower of her room. The remaining plot deals with a search for the missing Marion conducted by Marion's lover Sam, her sister Lila Crane (Vera Miles), and the private investigator Milton Arbogast (Martin Balsam) – the latter becoming a murder victim himself. In the end it is revealed that the psychotic Norman Bates

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dresses up as his mother, whom he killed years prior to the present incidents, partly to pursue his murderous instincts.

First, what immediately attracts attention is the early death of the (female) protagonist in *Psycho*, a rather uncommon way of structuring the plot as opposed to the classical narrative structure of horror film. As I noted earlier, the basic plot development of a conventional horror film can be reduced to three narrative points, i.e. (I) an initial introduction of a monster/ threat into an ordered world, (II) the destructive course the monster takes in order to destroy society and (III) an outcome that might either be (III.a) the restoration of the social order by a male expert or military authority, or (III.b) the survival and continuation of the threatening force (Tudor, 1989: 81; Pinedo, 1996: 19). It is in the development of point (III) that the great distinction between classical and postmodern horror lies. In other words, the closed narrative of the restoration of order is a characteristically classical horror ending, while the open ending of the survival of the monster is mostly found in postmodern horror films.

The classical horror film thus presents a *secure* world (according to Tudor's designation), which "draws relatively clear boundaries between the contending camps of good and evil, normal and abnormal, and the outcome of the struggle almost invariably entails the destruction of the monster." The security thus does not only lie in the fact that "[g]ood triumphs over evil" (Pinedo, 1996: 22), but also in a Manichean worldview, in which good can be separated from evil. These clear boundaries are furthermore reflected in the fact that these movies distance "their monsters from everyday life by locating them in an exotic time or place" (1996: 19).

In contrast, the postmodern horror film's open ending is usually rather bleak. In fact, postmodern horror can take on "various forms of open ending: the monster triumphs (*Henry* [John McNaughton, 1986]); the monster is defeated but only temporarily (*Halloween* [John Carpenter, 1978]), or the outcome is uncertain (*Night of the Living Dead* [George A. Romero, 1968])" (Pinedo, 1996: 19-20). Furthermore, the setting of postmodern horror is mostly positioned in an everyday world. The male expert that traditionally saves his community from a monstrous threat is accordingly replaced by an ordinary commoner (1996: 20). Horror now not only resides amongst us and has become part of everyday life, but "disorder often emerges from *within* humans to potentially disrupt the whole ordered world" (Tudor, 1989: 103). Evil forces thus exist in any American. Consequently, the world as such becomes an instable, *paranoid* place where no safety can be granted. Another key feature of postmodern horror is the victim's

"subject[ion] to high levels of explicit, sexualized violence, especially if the victim is female" (Pinedo, 1996: 20). Violence and sex have steadily grown in horror films, especially from the 1970s onwards, and have become an integral part of the genre.

Psycho undoubtedly features a variety of these postmodern characteristics. In terms of its narrative structure the film broke new ground by first introducing the female lead Marion Crane, whom the audience could identify with, and then, halfway through the plot, making her the victim of a murder. Not only is Marion Crane killed, but also, more importantly, she is murdered after repenting for stealing from the company she works for and deciding to return the stolen money. These facts thus have a double "destabilizing effect on audiences" (Williams, 2004: 171). On the one hand, the forward movement of the traditional narrative and with it audience's expectations are disrupted; on the other hand, the timing of the murder in terms of the film's morale seems unjustified. Seeing that Marion is punished after deciding to atone for her criminal acts takes away all security that a classical horror movie would have provided. To use Marion Crane's words in *Psycho*, the movie shows that "[s]ometimes just one time can be enough" to cause one's personal downfall. The world presented in *Psycho* is completely indifferent and unforgiving to its human population. It is a cruel world, in which all bad decisions have even worse consequences.

It is, however, also a world in which no universal good and evil exist. Looking at the two central characters, Marion and Norman, it becomes clear that neither of them represents an absolute fraction on the good vs. bad axis. Rather, these personas are constructed as ambiguous and as blurring the boundaries between the dichotomic archetypes established during the classical period. After all, Marion, the first person the audience tends to identify with, is a criminal, a thief, and from the general moral, somewhat puritanical perspective of the early 1960s, a sexual outlaw for having secretive sexual encounters out of wedlock. On the other hand there is Norman, who is first introduced as a shy and polite man, but as the story evolves, it is revealed that underneath his anxiety-ridden and sensible façade lies a ruthless psychotic killer.

Norman's remark, "We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?" (as quoted from Hitchcock's *Psycho*) can thus be read as a general statement about sanity in modern times. In other words, anyone can go 'mad.' Tudor notes that "[i]n such a world madness is a morbid disposition inherited at birth or created as a consequence of fearful physical or mental tortures" (1989: 190) and thus can overcome any average citizen. Indeed, Hitchcock's *Psycho* is frequently

regarded as one of the movies that "mark the beginning of the modern psycho-movie" (1989: 192), a horror subtype that would reach its peak with the rise of the psychotic slasher subgenre in the 1980s. The setting of the movie further underlines the idea of a paranoid world going mad. Most importantly, since the horror is inserted into everyday life, any commoner can become a victim or a victimizer. Moreover, the horror that Norman emits is of a psychological nature, and thus is even closer to us; a horror that resides within us.

The evolution of the monster from the outside in was a tradition in literature before its integration into horror cinema. If we look at Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), for instance, the monster is still portrayed as the Other. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), on the other hand, places the monster already inside the hero, the monster thus being an aspect of the protagonist. In *Metamorphosis* (1915), a story strongly influenced by Freudian theories, Franz Kafka takes this concept even further by making the monster the protagonist. Namely, Gregor Samsa wakes up as a monstrous insect as soon as the story beings. In this case, the monster has conquered the self entirely.

Another key feature, first seen in *Psycho* and later in slasher franchises, was the movie's "link[ing] [of] an erotic display of sexual attractions to a shocking display of sexualized violence" (Williams, 2004: 176). This connection will be further scrutinized in chapter 3. Taking a look at *Psycho*'s opening, it is possible to observe "one of the most sexually charged scenes in American movies up to this point" (Greven, 2013: 64), showing the post-coital scene of a couple getting dressed. Here, it must be remembered that *Psycho* was in fact produced while the Production Code was theoretically still valid and thus the display of sex, especially the display of non-marital sex, was strictly interdicted. However, by the early 1960s, the Code was already losing its relevance and, in turn, its influence. In this respect, *Psycho*'s famous shower scene was even more groundbreaking, as it was "more visceral and violent than anything audiences had seen before" (Goble, 2015: 210).

Certainly, one of *Psycho*'s greatest innovations lies in the movie's breaking with conventional gender identities. At the center of the movie stands the gender-nonconforming Norman Bates, whose gender identity lies somewhere in-between male- and female-identifying, or more precisely, within his Norman-as-Mrs. Bates self, due to his schizophrenic tendencies. The queer aspects of the movie do not end here: in fact, the movie features multiple layers of non-hetero-conforming qualities that will be closely explored in the course of this chapter.

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Overall, *Psycho* can be regarded as a successor of the gothic literary tradition. This is particularly due to the way it "continues to investigate the symbol of the dark and foreboding house, complete with a fractured personality and perhaps Hitchcock's most horrific family secret–a macabre variation of the 'madwoman in the attic'" (Bishop, 2015: 136).

Moreover, the movie strongly invigorates archetypical gothic tropes concerning queerness, especially when considering the character of Norman Bates. Firstly, we encounter a clear conflation of the monstrous and the queer, the pathologized and the criminal, in the character of Norman. Norman Bates is the queer killer and thus becomes (like the supposedly non-reproductive homosexual) 'anti-life.' Similar to the Decadents, which I addressed when mentioning Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, Norman's obsession with taxidermy associates him as well with death, decay, and to 'abnormal loves' such as necrophilia. Although not an aristocrat, Norman also contains the visual and aural signifiers of the Decadents, i.e. the "pale, thin, delicate, aestheticized, and emotional" (Benshoff, 1997: 19) characteristics the movement was known for.

Apart from these queer gothic signifiers, Norman discloses a variety of other behaviors that might be deemed queer. In fact, Norman Bates' sexuality is an utterly complex matter to which the movie offers no conclusive answer. There are moments in the movie that hint at Norman's heteroerotic tendencies, especially the scene in which he peeps through a hole in a wall to observe Marion while she undresses. Yet, every heterosexually-inclined moment is queered and thus Norman's sexuality is left to the realm of speculation. To begin with, Anthony Perkins' performance as Norman Bates has contributed much to the Norman-as-homosexual readings. The shot that is mostly quoted in this respect is the one in which Norman goes up the stairs of the Bates house, swinging his hips effeminately.

A moment later, Norman returns, carrying his mother down the stairs in order to hide her in the fruit cellar. Here a clear duality in Norman's gendered behavior can be detected, which ultimately points towards the performativity of gender. Namely, "[i]n this one scene, Norman moves fluidly and weirdly from the swishy gay male to the male who stands up to Mother and dominates Woman" (Greven, 2013: 82). Although effeminacy is no indicator for homosexuality, in the public mind – especially in homophobic America of the 1960s, still uneducated in matters of gender and sexual studies – being effeminate was easily (but incorrectly) equated with being gay.

Perkins' performance thus serves as a form of deconstructing the male-female gender

binary. To better understand the issue being presented here, I will refer to Judith Butler's theories regarding gender and its performativity. As I explained in a previously-published paper,

> Butler's main claim is that sex and gender are in no way naturally connected to the physical body, but the notions of gender are social and cultural constructs (Skodbo 2007, 5). This means that genders "can be neither true nor false" (Butler 1999, 174). Thus, gender belongs to the realm of performativity, i.e. the repetition of diverse cultural and social acts and discourses, which reassert the gender identity of individuals in certain social contexts:
>
> > In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (1999, 173).
>
> > Butler also criticizes the unifying of gender into two categories, i.e. male and female, which firstly supports the maintenance of the so-called two-gender system and further serves the perpetuation of the standard "compulsory heterosexuality" (42). In short, the gender system is an excluding one; while promoting heterosexual men and women, all other "deviant" forms of sexuality or gender are rejected. By exposing this unifying of gender as a fantasy and thereby questioning the validity of gender singularity, Butler reveals the ultimate gender queerness. More precisely, she renders visible the plurality of gender while demanding the broadening of tolerance towards the diversity of gender in all its fluent variants.
> > It is through interpellation, i.e. ongoing reinforcing acts of naming by authorities in order to force upon individuals certain character traits, that the two-gender system has been able to be fostered and moreover has turned into a naturalized self-evidence embedded in our minds (Skodbo 2007, 39-40). However, the system itself is not unchangeable but does leave room for acts of subversion. As interpellation and performativity are never-ending processes and genders are indeed only "produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity," (Butler 1999, 174) the identity-naming process is open to re-signification and re-contextualization and thus can be reversed through repetitive counter-acts that broaden the possibilities of embodying gender.
> > (Klein Martins, 2016: 117-119)

In regards to *Psycho*, Norman's switching between feminine and masculine behavioral expectations, "destabilize[s] masculine and feminine altogether" (Williams, 2004: 179). This subversion of gender norms comes to a pinnacle when Norman appears in female drag:

Butler suggests that drag and cross-dressing are means to "fully subvert[] the distinction between inner and outer psychic space," ([1999:] 174) enabling us to play with and destroy traditional gender identities through parody. Drag works as a deception, as it insinuates a feminine outward appearance (gender) but simultaneously implies a male biological body underneath the mask (sex). Thus, drag functions as "a fantasy of a fantasy" (Butler 1999, 175); in other words it relies on a performative strategy to render the performativity of gender visible to believers in a stable gender binarism. As a result, "[i]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structures of gender itself – as well as its contingency" and consequently highlights that gendered experience is indeed an act, which has been naturalized. (Klein Martins, 2016: 119)

In this context, Linda Williams reveals the scandalous nature of this scene in the early 1960s: "At the precise moment that Norman's wig begins to slip off in his struggle with Sam—when we see a masculine head emerging from under the old-lady wig—we witnessed what was at the time a truly shocking absence of gender stability" (2004: 180). Ultimately, it is Norman's cross-dressing that is the most obvious act of gender subversion found in *Psycho*. Despite the complex and confusing way the character's sexual orientation has been constructed, "men's wearing women's clothes is connected with homosexuality by most people" (Doty, 2000b: 167). Doty here refers to a common misinformed generalization that unifies all gender-bending aspects of queerness under the idea of the 'deviant' homosexual, inspiring a conflation of gender and sexuality. Although incorrect, this belief must be taken into account, given that it was widespread in the early 1960s and still is, as a matter of fact, today.

On top of these performative qualities, Norman also embodies several psychoanalytical clichés regarding homosexuality. Since the movie introduces a psychoanalyst that attempts to explain Norman's sexuality in rather reductive terms, it is of interest to dismantle the conservative and simplistic ways in which psychoanalysis justified queerness at the time of the movie's production. The first stereotype that needs to be addressed is the connection between homosexuality and incest. Alexander Doty explains that "in patriarchal cultural discourses and representation mother-son closeness and incest is almost always connected with homosexuality" (2000b: 159). The basis for this prejudiced assumption can be traced back to conservative Freudian psychoanalysis, or more precisely to the way "Freud's complex theories were simplistically distorted and homophobically deployed in American psychiatry and its mass circulation in the Cold War era" (Greven, 2014: 172).

The essence of these theories lies in the claim that a boy will turn out homosexual if the mother-son bond during the phallic stage of his psychosexual development is too strong: "A son who (over)identifies with his mother—with the 'feminine'—might pervert the classic Oedipal trajectory and place himself in the position of his mother desiring the father/men" (Doty, 2000b: 161). This makes the character of Norman Bates a "cinematic representation par excellence of the Freudian homosexual male with an unbreakable fixation on his mother" (Greven, 2014: 172). Norman is the son who chooses to preserve his mother's corpse to keep her incestuously close beyond death and eventually *becomes* his mother, as "a way for him to take on/ in 'the feminine,' a way to remain permanently close to his mother" (Doty, 2011: 485).

Norman's over-identification with his mother has become possessiveness. Feeling abandoned and left out when Mrs. Bates met his stepfather, his jealousy "pushed him over the line and he killed them both" (as quoted from Hitchcock's *Psycho*). The psychiatrist at the end of the movie clarifies this, explaining: "Because he was so pathologically jealous of [his mother], he assumed that she was as jealous of him. Therefore, if he felt a strong attraction to any other woman, the 'mother' side of him would go wild." For this reason, Norman is unable to engage in any kind of 'healthy' sexual relationship and instead turns into a psychotic killer. Although the "attraction to any other woman" the psychiatrist mentions might indicate Norman's heterosexuality, we should not forget that "[s]ince [Norman] is 'never all Norman,' even his moments of heterosexual desire are immediately queered by the incestuously jealous mother elements in him" (Doty, 2000b: 163).

Another misconception regarding homosexuality will shed further light on this matter. Namely, an additional erroneous belief directly linked to Norman's mother-obsession is the popular misconception that homosexual men are quintessentially misogynistic. This idea is a "classic cultural stereotype of homosexuality: homosexual men are jealous of, and therefore hate, (straight) women" (Doty, 2000b: 164). Again, this misbelief has a psychoanalytical foundation linked to the Oedipus complex. More precisely, the reason for this alleged resentment lies in the fact that "homosexual men are unsuccessful in turning women into fetish objects in order to overcome the castration fears women's penis-lacking bodies represent" (2000b: 170). This supposedly places Norman in a dilemma: on the one hand, he desires his mother; on the other hand, he despises her female body. The contradictory act of Norman killing his mother and subsequently resurrecting her turns him into a prime subject of Freudian psychoanalysis. An

alternative way of understanding his resurrection of Mrs. Bates within himself is that "Norman uses the mother side of him as a cover for his homosexual dread and hatred of straight woman and their sexuality" (Doty, 2000b: 164).

In other words, according to the Freudian misconception above described, Norman is supposed to believe that he has the obligation to desire women, but the thought of opposite-sex relations deeply repels him. Consequently, by killing the (false) objects of his desire Norman can prevent any sexual relation with women. At the same time, the penetrative act of stabbing a woman serves as "the substitution for the sexual act he wanted but could not commit" (Greven, 2013: 77). It should be stressed once again that misogyny is not a compulsory result stemming from homosexuality but indeed this is a false belief that was widely spread in the early 1960s and thus needs to be taken into consideration in this context.

Yet, this groundbreaking destabilization of gender norms is not only limited to Norman Bates. Instead, almost every character, male or female, plays a part in *Psycho*'s grand gender-bending plot. Starting off with the movie's male cast, "masculinity is depicted, when not bumbling, as alternately troubled and menacing in *Psycho*" (Greven, 2013: 77). According to traditional gender roles, all male "authority figures should help, rescue, and illuminate, but [in *Psycho* they] end up failing utterly in their purported missions." This is exemplified in characters such as the policeman or the car dealer, two "men who suspect Marion looks 'like a wrong one' but do no further investigate the matter" (2013: 78). Then there is Arbogast, the private investigator who is unable to solve the mystery of Marion's disappearance and who becomes another victim of the Norman/Mrs. Bates murders. The fact that Arbogast is the only (known) male victim in the chain of murders further feminizes his character.

Most interesting, however, is the way in which Sam Loomis' masculinity is deconstructed throughout the movie, an undertaking that again reveals the performativity of gender in accord with Butler's theories. As early as in the very first scene, Sam is introduced to the audience as the "*Hunkus americanus*" (Greven, 2013: 73), the paramount example of virile (heterosexual) American masculinity. As the plot progresses, however, "Hitchcock refuses to allow us to view Sam as the masculine embodiment of stability, of moral, emotional, and demeanor-related normalcy" (2013: 76). Instead of a confident and straightforward character, we get to see a rather reluctant and passive person in Sam. His reluctance shines through when he finds several excuses to not officialize his relationship with Marion.

The same passivity makes itself clear after Marion and Arbogast have gone missing and Lila demands that Sam help her search for the private detective. Since Sam again reacts hesitantly, the gender roles in this scene are reversed. In place of the supposed male hero, here the traditionally passive female character, i.e. Lila, becomes active, pushing the action forward. The ultimate deconstruction of Sam's masculinity, however, happens in the scene in which he engages Norman Bates in conversation as a form of distraction to enable Lila to secretly search the Bates residence. In this scene, the physical similarity between Norman and Sam becomes apparent: set against each other, at first glance, Sam could appear to be the heterosexual, healthy, and sane "counterbalance to the psychotic Norman" (Greven, 2013: 76).

Looking closer, however, the physical similarity of the two men makes them interchangeable. Positioning Sam and Norman face to face – as if one is looking into his mirror reflection – equates one with the other. This means that underneath his charming exterior, Sam could be just like Norman: a closeted homosexual, a murderer, a psychotic. Once again, this highlights the paranoid world of the postmodern horror discussed earlier, in which anyone can go 'mad.' On top of these formal aspects, Sam's behavior in this scene *queers* him even further. David Greven has closely analyzed the dialogue between the two men and their body language and has come to the conclusion that, although Sam is not particularly a homosexually-coded character, in this specific scene his behavior "is more than sexually suggestive; it's downright cruisy" (2013: 65). The scene begins with Sam blocking the door to keep Norman from looking for Lila. The shot being filmed through a doorframe "*forces* them into physical intimacy." Next, "Sam places his body directly against Norman's. Indeed, Norman looks *down*, crotchward, in surprise" (2013: 78). Standing face to face, the men visibly check one another out, Norman looking Sam up and down, smiling cheekily. In the next shot, as if trying to seduce Norman, "[Sam] asks, 'You are alone here, aren't you?' Then, he slouches against the counter and adds, 'Would drive me crazy'" (2013: 80).

Greven further comments that Sam's body language "is remarkably sensual, almost louche; it is simply not a conventional leading man's physical position, especially when talking with another male character." Eventually, Norman becomes aware of Sam's intentions and inquires where Lila is, as if knowingly asking " 'Where's that girl you came here with—and why are you trying to seduce me and not her?'" Caught in the act, Sam's body language "shifts from the oddly seductive and homoerotic position […] to that of a much more stereotypically straight

male character" (Greven, 2013: 81). This means that Sam's strong homoerotic behavior in this particular scene has been a cunning behavioral adaptation, a performative strategy to pass as a potential homosexual object of interest to Norman in order to keep him distracted from Lila's investigation. This again underlines the performative aspects and the fluidity of gendered behavior.

The conversation ends "[i]n perhaps the ultimate [gender] reversal, as it is the queer Norman who overpowers the ostensibly strong and stalwart heterosexual male Sam, conking him on the head with an object." On the contrary, "Sam can only overpower Norman once he is *feminized*, dressed up as Mother" (2013: 82). This takes away the male status of universal authority and subjectivity, empowering the queer and the feminine/feminized. In other words, since the misogynistic suppression of the female greatly served (and still serves) to maintain the status quo of patriarchal supremacy, the feminization of men in gender-conformist mid-century America speaks of breaking down the patriarchy as such.

If the patriarch falters, the traditional heterosexual couple fails. Indeed, almost every heterosexual relationship in the movie is presented as troubled. This is a great break with tradition since conventionally one of the core arguments of Hollywood movies lies in the assertion "that the formation of a heterosexual couple is both desirable and necessary, and that this couple will survive all challenges to make the world (of the narrative) a better place" (Doty, 2000b: 171). The movie introduces a romantic plot right in the first scene in form of the relationship of Sam and Marion.

However, this couple presents a rather unconventional love story. Sam is a divorced man who meets his lover Marion secretly every now and then when on a business meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. Right from the beginning their relationship is characterized as problematic, seeing as Sam's financial difficulties are all they discuss in their short time together. Marion expresses her discontent with being trapped in a secretive relationship and accuses Sam of "mak[ing] respectability sound disrespectful" (as quoted from Hitchcock's *Psycho*). When Marion is killed halfway through the plot, any possibility of a happy ending for the couple dies with her. With Lila's appearance, a potential new love interest for Sam is introduced. Yet, no chemistry exists between the two characters. Although they go on pretending to be a couple, their relation remains distant.

One could attribute Lila's reservation to the fact of her being a lesbian/queer character for

the very reason that Lila's behavior breaks with the tradition of passive femininity. Even if we do not necessarily follow such a path, one thing is certain: Lila is not a conventional female character due to the fact that she does not participate in a heterosexual romantic subplot that ends up with the woman subjugating herself to a male counterpart. On the contrary, Lila is a very independent character who speaks up against the men surrounding her. On top of this, of her own accord she plays an active role in the investigation of her sister and Arbogast's disappearance. Lila thus plays the decisive part of the investigator, a role that is traditionally associated with male characters (Greven, 2013: 80).

Before moving forward with this analysis, it is important to acknowledge Laura Mulvey's famous feminist essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which sheds further light on this matter. According to Mulvey, cinema has been structured by "the unconscious of patriarchal society" (1975: 14) since its beginning. In other words, the art of filmmaking has almost always been dominated by male subjectivity. Moreover, "[cinematic] pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." Women in film thus need to remain passive and silent for the perpetuation of the patriarchal order, while simultaneously serving "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (1975: 19).

In contrast, the male plays "the active [role] of advancing the story," while "articulat[ing] the look and creat[ing] the action" (Mulvey, 1975: 20). Mulvey further explains that in psychoanalytical terms, these distinct gender roles are based on "[the woman's] lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure." One of the ways of coming to terms with these anxieties for the male character/ audience member lies in "the preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery)" (1975: 21), followed by sadistically "asserting control and subjecting the guilty person [i.e. the woman,] through punishment or forgiveness" (1975: 22).

Comparing Lila's performance in *Psycho* to these traditional female gender roles, one immediately becomes aware of the many ruptures to classical cinematic gender conventions she embodies. Firstly, as has been noted, Lila plays an active role in the movie, bringing the action forward by inciting the search for her sister. When Lila eventually goes on to investigate the Bates' residence, she becomes the identifying character for the audience and, in this position, subjugates any audience member to her female subjectivity. Another break with traditional

female roles described by Mulvey lies in the fact that, instead of being investigated by a man in order to be demystified, "Lila becomes a kind of voyeur as well as investigator, penetrating the mystery of Mother and her house as well as of Norman" (Greven, 2013: 80). Thus, Lila is the bearer of the look, instead of the movie's "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 1975: 19); what she sees, the audience sees. As I will further discuss in chapter 3, many of these characteristics make Lila the first prototype of the 'Final Girl', a female archetype of the slasher genre that is the sole survivor of the psychopath's killing spree.

Lila's queerness becomes fully apparent when analyzing the scene in which she rummages through the Bates house. Seeking for the truth about two female characters, i.e. Marion and Mrs. Bates, Lila enters the gothic house, and by doing so begins a journey of self-discovery. Upon entering Mrs. Bates' room, Lila is confronted with images of sexual repression. The furnishing of the deceased woman's room namely strongly "evokes nostalgia for Victorian maternal femininity" (Greven, 2014: 175), setting a stark contrast to Lila's gender-nonconformity. Paradoxically, Lila as a clear subverter of gender norms faces a similar repression in life: she is not allowed to openly express her sexuality. While exploring the empty room, Lila spots her reflection in a mirror, which startles her. A second mirror placed opposite the first reflects her frightened image *ad infinitum*. The mirror shot is like a snapshot beyond time, revealing the infinite identities that Lila inhabits.

To some extent, these reflections are reminiscent of Baudrillard's postmodern concept of simulacra – a string of copies with no known original. Transferring Baudrillard's idea to Lila's gender identity, one can read the mirror shot as a moment of clarity in which Lila detects that her allegedly stable identity is constructed out of infinite performative layers that help her to fit into a society based on compulsory heteronormativity. In other words, the 'closeted' Lila has unconsciously become a copy of infinite gender prescribing copies. In order to survive, she needs to repress her identity the same way the Victorian room once repressed Mrs. Bates sexual desires.

Seeing herself in the mirror helps Lila finally realize the possibilities she can aspire to by fully embracing her gender nonconforming identity. Only now that she detects her own queer potential can she face Norman Bates' queer mystery. With the queer knowledge gained, she is able to invade and understand Norman's innermost secret life by entering his childhood room. Now "having unparalleled access to Norman's life, Lila shares in his abjection, a queer abjection that unites them both" (Greven, 2014: 177). Having gained sympathy and a feeling of solidarity

with her male queer counterpart, Lila is able to move even further into Norman's mind; she thus descends into the fruit cellar, the "chthonic recesses of the basement, that Freudian metaphor for repressed desires and the unconscious" (2014: 177).

It must be noted that revealing Lila's queerness is of utmost importance to the understanding of the basement scene. Having a second, 'sane' homosexual counterpart to the psychopathic Norman humanizes the queer as far as it shows that Norman is not a psychotic killer *because* he is queer (Doty, 2000b: 177). Thus, the horror Lila faces when in the basement is not based on Norman's queerness but derives from her understanding of Norman's darkest, homicidal, necrophilic tendencies. Having opened herself up to her own repressed queer feelings, Lila is able to solve the murder mystery.

Gus Van Sant would rework the *Psycho* thematic thirty-eight years after the release of Hitchcock's film in an eponymous 1998 shot-by-shot remake of the movie. Although Van Sant always "desire[d] not to be pigeonholed as a 'gay' or 'queer' director" (Doty, 2000a: 499), his unique queer perspective and influence on the New Queer Cinema movement cannot be denied. New Queer Cinema, a term coined by critic B. Ruby Rich in 1992, was a cinematic movement that

> began with a group of American films that received high-profile press coverage after they had successful screenings and won awards at the Sundance, Toronto, and Berlin film festivals of 1991 and 1992 […] For most critics, two qualities that distinguish these independently produced films from other gay and lesbian films past and present is their assumption of a queer audience as well as their desire to break from traditional narrative forms. (Doty, 2000a: 497)

Psycho, known for its break with traditional narrative structuring and its great queer appeal, was thus a valuable movie to be remade in accordance with the new cinematic movement. Although Van Sant's *Psycho* is a great jump in time from the 1960s, it is important to take a look at this movie and to compare it to its original for a number of reasons. Firstly, many things had happened since the 1960s in terms of the gay rights movement (which will be closely inspected in the following chapters) and with these changes a new perspective on queer matters would be explored in the 1990s. Namely, in the late 1980s and early 1990s a new appreciation and critical awareness arose in regards to queer identities.

Ever since the 1970s several individuals such as black or trans women, did not feel

represented by the "all-white, heterosexual, middle class intellectual elit[ist] [discourse]" (Skodbo, 2007: 38) within the various civil rights movements, including the gay liberation movement. This much-needed discursive space for marginal identities would eventually be introduced with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), a publication marking the beginning of what is now known as 'queer theory' (Jagose, 1996: 5). The birth of a respectable academic form speaking for the ones left out of the official historical discourse helped to elevate alterity into the public consciousness. By 1998 the social perception and acceptance of queer matters had changed drastically and with it the socio-political framework in which *Psycho* was screened had evolved for the better.

The film was thus edited by history; what was once perceived as a negative portrayal of queerness, could now be deemed as just another way of representing queers amongst many existing representations. Revising a cinematic work from this updated standpoint is of utmost relevance to this study since the comparison between *original* and *copy* – or should I say "palimpsest" (Torres, 1999: 6) – will not only highlight the changing perspectives but will also reveal how movies that are almost identical can bear very different meaning.

Interestingly, Gus Van Sant shifted the primary source of queerness in his movie from Norman to Lila. Norman Bates (Vince Vaughn) bears less homosexual signifiers than in the original film, to some extent due to Vaughn's less 'effeminate' portrayal of the character. More importantly, however, are a few crucial scenes that link him closer to a heterosexual identity. In this regard, one of the most indicative moments is the 'peephole scene,' which has been modified in so far as Norman Bates masturbates while spying on Marion (Anne Heche). This takes away much of the homosexual coding of the character since it is shown that he is actually sexually stimulated by a woman and derives pleasure from spying on her.

Another crucial scene that heterosexualizes Norman is the one in which Lila finds a pornographic magazine filled with naked women in Norman's room. Alexander Doty explains that the "bound volume that looks as if it could be a family photo album […] in the original book is filled with pornographic pictures" (2000b: 178). While in the Hitchcock adaptation the pornographic content is thus left ambiguous and could indeed be of gay interest, Gus Van Sant deliberately chooses to make it heterosexual. Then there is the earlier discussed dialogue scene between Norman and Sam. In the remake this particular scene loses its 'cruisy' atmosphere, due

to the actors performances. No suggestive looks are exchanged, no luscious poses are assumed. The dialogue becomes a neutral conversation between two men.

The performance of Viggo Mortensen as Sam in Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* also creates discrepancies to the original character of Sam. Instead of John Gavin's frailty, in Van Sant's version we see Sam as aggressively masculine. Hence, for instance in the opening scene of the movie Van Sant focuses on Mortensen's hypermasculine naked body. While, on the one hand, the choice of undressing Sam definitely stresses his masculinity, on the other hand it plays with the idea of pleasing the voyeuristic gay male gaze.

While the link between the psychotic and the queer is removed from Van Sant's movie by taking away Norman's queer signifiers, a more positive queer character is introduced in form of Lila. In the reworked version of *Psycho* Lila's performance is strongly 'butched up' by Julianne Moore's acting – a conscious choice that was made by both actress and director (LoBrutto, 2010: 82). Lila's whole body language and attitude accentuate the independence the character emits. There are several key scenes, which further reveal her queerness.

Firstly, in the scene in which Sam and Lila walk towards their motel room after registration, Sam tries to put his arms around Lila but, unlike what happens in the original film, she shrugs it off harshly, showing her disinterest in men and especially in Sam. The ultimate disclosure of Lila's queerness, however, happens in the basement scene. In contrast to Hitchcock's film, instead of fainting into Sam's arms after being revealed as the murderer of the plot, Norman wrestles Sam and defends himself. Lila as the definitive 'Final Girl' is the one who defeats the villain by kicking Norman unconscious and saving Sam. Here the absolute reversal of gender roles takes place: the queer, female heroine saves the heterosexual male.

The choice of portraying Norman as less queer, while exposing the queerness in Lila to a higher degree, sheds a more positive light on queerness in general. Namely, queerness is not equated with monstrosity but with strength and independence. It is indeed remarkable how changing small details in certain scenes can change the whole perception of a movie. Likewise, the importance of acting should be highlighted here, since Anthony Perkins and Julianne Moore's subtle adaptations of known queer signifiers contribute greatly to the films' queer appeal.

What the original movie and its remake both have in common is the survival of the monstrous killer stuck in a realm between genders. Keeping in mind all of the above, we can go back to the open endings that characterize postmodern horror cinema, and say that *Psycho* indeed

ends openly and on a somber note. Although at the end of the movie Norman's secret identity is revealed and he is caught by the authorities, the final images of the movie do not leave its audience with a sense of closure but instead speak a language of unease and discomfort.

Norman breaking the imaginary fourth wall by facing the camera and looking the audience directly in the eye symbolizes a confrontation and questioning of the audience's position in regards to the diegetic world. Through his stare, Norman communicates important facts about the world he inhabits, namely the understanding of a world without gender limitations, a world without the stability of a heterosexual, patriarchal, authoritarian order, a world in which evil can awaken in anyone of us. By breaking the separating wall between the film and its audience, we as viewers are included into the dark place *Psycho* creates. Norman's gaze and malicious smile reveal that the voyeuristic audience has just been like Norman all along. The world he inhabits and the madness that surrounds him are revealed as being ours.

2.2) "Don't Dream It, Be It": Out of the Sixties' Closet and Into the Seventies' Celluloid Shadows

Psycho's break with the Production Code's restrictions was an undertaking that in fact had already started in the 1950s when Otto Preminger released the movies *The Moon is Blue* (1953) and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955). Both films celebrated considerable successes although they never received the seal of approval by the Production Code administration due to their depiction of taboo subjects such as adultery or drug addiction (Russo, 1981: 118).

As the Production Code administration tried to adapt to the new cultural paradigms of the times, in the following years many taboos were withdrawn their indecency status. Yet, the rubric of 'sex perversion' remained as the sole restriction in filmmaking until the beginning of the 1960s (Russo, 1981: 120). Only after great pressure had been applied by filmmakers, on October 3, 1961 the administration changed their regime by declaring, as transcribed by Vito Russo: "'In keeping with the culture, the mores and the values of our time, homosexuality and other sexual aberrations may now be treated with care, discretion and restraint'" (1981: 121-122). What Production Code officials meant by this was the continuing effort of depicting homosexuality derogatorily in film. The pejorative depiction of LGBT individuals was now conducted more openly and less connotatively since the 'queer evil' could be called by its name. Like this, the

overt portrayal of queer individuals served as a warning to the general population and as a form of morality tale about the personal demise homosexuality allegedly always entails.

A formula for the fate of queer characters in movies was quickly established, namely that of being "cured, killed, [or] rendered impotent in suitable nasty ways" (Russo, 1981: 162). While American screenwriter and director Barry Sandler remembers that "growing up in that period in the sixties all we had were images of unhappy, suicidal, desperate gay people," filmmaker Jan Oxenberg adds that "these images magnif[ied] the sadness, the hatred of [homosexuals], the prediction that [they] will not find love" (as quoted from Epstein and Friedman's documentary *The Celluloid Closet*). Movies such as *Advise and Consent* (Otto Preminger, 1962) or *The Detective* (Gordon Douglas, 1968) are prime examples for these tragic, self-loathing, and victimizing depictions of queer characters in the 1960s.

What propelled the Production Code administration to update their regulations were the changing cultural paradigms introduced by the different civil right movements happening in the 1950s and 1960s. In terms of gay and lesbian liberation, the so-called 1969 'Stonewall riots' paved the way for the modern LGBT civil rights movement. Stonewall happened as a simple reaction against a daily form of oppression but its outcome was of huge symbolic importance to the LGBT community, attaining an enormous social impact. In fact, the riots were spurred by a common discriminatory practice of the 1960s:

> Bar owners and patrons were subjected to periodic police harassment, which served several purposes: intimidation of bar owners and their homosexual customers; providing city officials the appearance of a dedication to law and morality; and creating conditions in which brought payoffs to the police from bar owners hoping to avoid raids and closings. (Eaklor, 2008: 118)

One of these raids occurred in the night of June 27, 1969 at a popular gay bar called the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, New York. This time, however, the customers started resisting the police harassment and fought back. The resistance soon escalated, turning into an angry mob of thousand protesters that would continue rioting until 3:30 am of the following day before police troops were able to control the crowds (Eaklor, 2008: 123). The riots were sustained in various other forms of resistance in New York until July 2.

It must be noted that Stonewall did not happen out of nowhere, but various events led up to this pivotal occurrence:

> From a broad historical view what came together that night were elements of American culture, sixties counterculture, and multiple subcultures. … The rise of a counterculture contributed radical politics among the young–an inclusive view of oppression that critiqued capitalism and imperialism while advocating pride and resistance to authorities. […] Finally, it is hard to imagine Stonewall happening without the sub-subculture of militant homophile activists, already defiant, proud, and willing to show their faces in public as lesbian and gay.
>
> (Eaklor, 2008: 123)

In other words, the understanding that liberation and the achievement of civil rights was possible by fighting as a collective and unified group, as seen in the different countercultural movements of the time, greatly inspired the gay community to resist the oppression and discrimination LGBT individuals faced on a daily basis. This new willingness to fight as a community was furthermore possible due to an "already long-standing queer [communitarian] presence that had flourished during and after World War II" (Eaklor, 2008: 117).

Naturally, these communities were reduced to great urban centers, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, or New York, to name a few (Eaklor, 2008: 117-22). Though prior to 1969 marches were held and LGBT associations were founded with increasing regularity, it was indeed the Stonewall riots that would ultimately push gay liberation to another level, "spark[ing] new attitudes toward queer self-acceptance and the struggle for equality" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 130). The newly gained pride, sense of community, and disposition to fight for civil rights of LGBT individuals would become most apparent one year after the riots when thousands of LGBT individuals gathered for the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade in June of the year 1970 (Eaklor, 2008: 127).

Although after Stonewall almost no changes were implemented in regards to the negative depiction of queer subject matters in Hollywood, for the first time LGBT individuals had a collective voice to protest against such inaccurate cinematic representations and to reveal the absurdity of such images. On top of this, a few filmmakers would take on the challenge to shoot queer-positive movies in order to oppose the degrading mainstream filmic representations. One of the most memorable of these empathetic queer movies was *The Boys in the Band* (William Friedkin, 1970), a filmic adaptation of an eponymous theater play by Mart Crowley. The movie almost exclusively takes place in a New York City flat, in which a group of nine gay men

celebrate a birthday party.

During this event, a variety of issues these characters face in daily life are laid bare, revealing the difficulty of urban gay life in the early 1970s. Though the movie was criticized by parts of the gay community for perpetuating stereotypes and portraying self-loathing characters, it was one of the first movies that spoke about queer issues in a complex way, starring several homosexual men as protagonists. While Friedkin did indeed draw on a variety of gay clichés, he still depicted his characters in a sympathetic way, creating a whole range of personalities and presenting different façades of gay life.

The most progressive feature of this movie was, however, a simple fact that the character Michael draws attention to: "It's not always like it happens in plays. Not all faggots bump themselves off at the end of the story" (as quoted from the film). Indeed, no one dies at the end of *The Boys in the Band*. For the first time homosexuals do not play the role of victims or victimizers in a movie. Instead, they are portrayed as human beings, trying to survive in a society that marginalizes them by creating a sense of community within queer culture. This form of solidarity was essential for queer moviegoers as it "provided isolated queers of the 1960s with the much-needed evidence that people like them did exist and that there was possibly hope for a better tomorrow" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 139). Unfortunately, movies like *The Boys in the Band* would remain scarce and the mockery of queerness would persist throughout the 1970s.

In more general film historic terms, the first half of the 1970s is best known for independent filmmaking invading mainstream cinema. Voices and stories silenced for a long time thus gathered momentum. Yet, even within this inclusive and progressive filmic movement, the voices of gay liberation were seldom heard or represented in a good light. The major studios took advantage of the new and fresh recipes independent and young filmmakers presented since they "made a lot of money for the studios, all of which were struggling after an almost generation-long box-office slump." Yet, this freedom in filmmaking was only temporary. Once the crisis was overcome by the mid-seventies, less independence was granted to filmmakers and old formulas were reinstated (Lewis, 2007: 7).

Parallel to the rise of independent film, there was an explosion of various forms of low-budget exploitation movies. Most popular were the so-called Blaxploitation films that often played with inversed ideologies, namely that black protagonists were granted the power to fight white supremacy. The same formula was for instance also applied to kung-fu movies featuring

Asian warriors. Once again, homosexuality was not part of this trend: "The overt queer was exploited in many films of this period, but he or she (with the exception of the lesbian vampire) rarely got to attack the patriarchal order which oppressed him or her" (Benshoff, 1997: 203).

Similar tendencies were visible in the horror genre of the 1970s. Independent filmmaking and exploitation films allowed exploring the genre in new ways "by offering the public a fresh, often outlaw vision that the bigger studios were either unwilling or unable to duplicate" (Dixon, 2010: 123). This new willingness to experiment met with the endless possibilities the post-Production Code freedom granted and would change the genre fundamentally. Similarly important was the social turmoil that started in the 1960s and was still felt in the seventies, such as "concerns over the Vietnam War and the protests against it, the Watergate scandal, the civil rights movement, feminism, and environmentalism as factors underpinning a widespread discomfort with and questioning of dominant social structures and belief systems" (Hutchings, 2014: 297).

As a result, certain horror trends that were initiated in the 1960s were able to fully bloom in the 1970s since the changing cinematic and social framework conditions allowed and asked for such alterations. Thus, the main threat in horror movies shifted from an exterior, alien, foreign threat to "a profound insecurity about ourselves, and accordingly the monsters of the period [were] increasingly represented as part of an everyday contemporary landscape. That is why of all horror movie creatures it is the psychotic that is pre-eminent" (Tudor, 1989: 48) from the 1970s onwards. The conglomeration of social and cinematic changes also led to a radicalization of the horror genre, most perceptible in the sexualization and graphic portrayal of violence initiated by Hitchcock's *Psycho*, now taken to new extremes.

The genre became darker, more shocking, its thrills were more and more based on a gory titillation of audiences – such as in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) or Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). Open endings developed into the norm, because many horror movies began to celebrate a more postmodern stance. As was the case for most filmic genres of the times, queerness in horror was as well still represented in utmost negative ways. Again, the only great change now laid in the detectability of queer characters, which "conflated with the increasingly violent content of this era's horror films [and] made the linkage of monster and homosexual even more indelible" (Benshoff, 1997: 220).

One horror movie stood out of the filmic swamp of degrading queer depictions and embraced the ostracized position of queerness as a place of freedom outside the constraints of a heterocentrist world. "I'm just a sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania," Dr. Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry) proudly pronounces in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), while dropping his vampiresque cloak to reveal an ensemble of lingerie gracing his male body. Starting off as an underground midnight movie, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* soon rose to fame as a cult classic, gaining a large fan base. More interestingly, however, the movie introduced American moviegoers to the queerness engrained in the cinematic horror genre by means of parody and the blurring of traditional boundaries.

In a clearly postmodern fashion *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* parodies and references several sci-fi and horror movies such as *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), or *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack 1933), all of which bear great queer subtexts. In this way, the movie reveals much of what the present study has shown so far: the horror genre is a queer genre to the core. Its mad scientist Dr. Frank-N-Furter becomes the embodied of the connection between the monstrous and the queer.

Furthermore, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* connects two genres that could not be more oppositional in their treatment of 'deviant' sexualities, i.e. the musical and the horror film. While the former is an utmost heterocentrist genre, celebrating a utopian vision of heterosexual love, the latter with its queer monsters tries to destroy such heteronormative notions. This clash between one genre and the other reflects the initial conflict of the film, namely the one of the normative versus the queer. More precisely, the film begins with the movie's "hero" (as proclaimed in the movie's credits) Brad Majors (Barry Bostwick) making a wedding proposal to the film's "heroine" Janet Weiss (Susan Sarandon). Accordingly, the movie starts with the patriarchal tradition of the *deployment of alliance*, and is hence set at the pinnacle of heteronormativity.

On their way to a meeting with the man who introduced the couple in the first place, Brad and Janet get lost and find themselves stranded in front of a gothic castle. In fact, this entire scene is immersed in gothic signifiers: from the castle with its dark towers vanishing into the night, to the atmospheric lightning, through to the quick recognition of the residence as the "Frankenstein place." Brad's comment that the castle is "probably some kind of hunting lodge for rich weirdos" (as quoted from the film) immediately establishes the connection between the queer and the extravagant gothic aristocrat mentioned in chapter 1.2. The parody of classical horror movies

continues once Brad and Janet find out that the gender fluid owner of the property, Dr. Frank-N-Furter, is about to create a man to satisfy his strong sexual urges. Herewith, the idea of pathological reproduction of the *Frankenstein* story is taken to the next level: the creation of another male human being by a man is acknowledged openly as only serving the fulfillment of ones homoerotic sexual desires.

In fact, the purpose of these experiments perfectly mirrors the *Weltanschauung* of the hedonistic Frank-N-Furter, namely to "Give yourself over to absolute pleasure" and to do everything conceivable to "swim in the warm waters of sins of the flesh" (as quoted from Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*). On that note, throughout the film the boundaries of the supposed heterosexual couple, Brad and Janet, are taken to their limits and the universality of their (hetero)sexual orientation is put into question. Both Brad and Janet ultimately engage in sexual relations with Dr. Frank-N-Furter, whose "transcendence of gender makes [him] an appealing sexual partner for a plethora of individuals, even when his partners insist (for a while, anyway) on maintaining their own gender identities" (Lamm, 2008: 198). Giving in into a broadened understanding of sexuality is not presented as an 'either-or' situation but is demonstrated to be a liberation from the constraints of society's constructed binary sexual system.

The initially prude Janet thus exclaims towards the end of the movie that "[she] feel[s] released, bad times deceased, [her] confidence has increased, reality is here" (as quoted from Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Janet's newfound understanding of gender and sexuality becomes even more apparent in the scene, in which she has sexual intercourse with Rocky but imagines a variety of different people as sexual partners instead. This proves that "Janet has indeed 'wised up' to her sexual potential, imagining the erotic potential of heterosexual and lesbian, as well as transgendered, sex" (Lamm, 2008: 201).

All in all, the movie is predicated upon the deconstruction of patriarchal, heteronormative hegemony, the deconstruction of queerness as damaging, and of sexuality as a binary system. Years before Butler's take on the deconstruction of gender and the rise of queer theory, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* already consciously played with the notion of the performativity and artificiality of gender. This is best visualized in the film's climax scene in which each of the characters finds himself or herself in drag, mimicking Frank-N-Furter's gender fluid look. These individuals have been ultimately converted by Frank's libertine worldview and as new advocates

for a life outside the restrictions of gender are able to play with male and female signifiers. This scene ends in a swimming pool orgy, while Frank sings the powerful queer liberation anthem "Don't Dream it, Be it." What follows, namely Frank-N-Furter's sudden death, therefore seems like a step back to the traditional fate of queers in film; the queer 'deviant' must die so that heteronormativity can be re-established.

At first glance, the ending thus might appear to stand in contrast to the queer-positive vision of the rest of the movie. However, when keeping in mind the movie's parodic stance, the ending gains new meaning:

> *Rocky Horror* is a parody on multiple levels, and just as Rocky himself parodies the masculine normate, the "victory" of the norm is here a parody of normative subjugation, a parody of abjection and its associated exclusion of the queer, and a parody of texts that pacify queerness. (Hixon, 2008: 188)

Queer storytelling does not need to subject itself to (hetero)normative ideas of a closed ending. As Ben Hixon explains, "no happy, normative, 'fairy tale' ending [is offered], whereby the queer is offered a place in the norm and is allowed to live happily ever after. The authentic queer does not love happily ever after; it is murdered by the normative society in which it lives" (2008: 189).

The film's ending takes an utmost subversive stance by killing Frank-N-Furter. Nonetheless, Frank's legacy of sexual liberation is not killed because his descendants, Brad and Janet, will go on living his dream of queer deviance. In American everyday life, this vision of a sexually liberated world would, however, soon come to an end as the coming decade of the 1980s brought a conservative backlash to the United States accompanied by a new virus that would turn libertine sexual promiscuity into a lethal weapon and bring the gay and lesbian rights movement to a halt.

3) *Killers' Kisses***: Theorizing the Queer Predator of the 1980s**

The 1980s encompassed a tremendous and devastating backlash in regards to LGBT rights. Every achievement accomplished during the fight for gay liberation faced strong opposition and countless obstacles as the new decade dawned. The turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s entailed profound changes that many Americans, especially the older generations, were not willing to accept. Not only did the Civil Rights Movement, with its rightful demands for equality, visibility, and its continuous protests strike the nerve of many Americans, but furthermore a series of socio-political disappointments happening during the 1970s induced many to wish back a time, in which "the government was trustworthy, standards of living only got higher, resources never ran out, and the military always won wars (if one ignored the undeclared war in Korea)." Instead, the American public was confronted with the failure of the Vietnam War, political corruption as seen in the Watergate break-in, and a failing economic situation (Eaklor, 2008: 167).

The clashes these disillusionments caused helped a new political right rise to power at the end of the 1970s. This so-called New Right would be especially harmful to LGBT individuals since it was greatly based on conservative Christian values that were taking over the arena of American politics. More importantly for the present study, this meant a return to traditional 'family values', an anti-feminist regime, and moreover a new and open demonization of queer individuals on all fronts (Eaklor, 2008: 169). To these groups, the queer community represented a threat to American society, since "the nuclear, two-heterosexual-parent, male-headed family was [claimed to be] the foundation of America's strength." In this regard, a wave of paranoia concerning a 'gay agenda' – an imaginary conspiracy of homosexuals to take over the world – was fueled, as Eaklor further explores: "Because homosexuals cannot reproduce (at least as a result of same-sex activity), the reasoning goes, they need to recruit others to their cause […] This was added to older fears of homosexuals as sexual predators unable to control their impulses" (2008: 170).

Once again, this shows that gothic models of demonizing queers can be aroused and revived at any time to aggravate fears of different eras and kinds. More precisely, in the context of the 1980s, the well-trodden idea of 'pathological reproduction', discussed in depth in chapter 2.1, was recovered to serve the New Right in wrecking the accomplishments the queer

community relentlessly fought for. As if a conservative backlash was not enough to fight, the American right wing was handed a devastating new weapon in 1981 which served to drastically scapegoat the LGBT community: the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, also known as HIV.

3.1): *Early Frosts*: The AIDS Crisis, Reactionary Hypermasculinity, and the Fear of the *Diseased* Queer

In June of 1981, individual articles started surfacing in a few American magazines, such as the *The San Francisco Chronicle* or *The New York Times*, describing a newfound disease associated with the homosexual community (Gross, 2001: 195; Eaklor, 2008: 174). Since the affected demographic consisted mostly of healthy gay men, the condition was soon referred to as 'GRID', an acronym standing for "gay-related immune deficiency" (Hart, 2000: 4). As can be seen, the incorrect association between HIV/AIDS and the male homosexual community, which still exists today, was established from the outset. To a certain extent, this association can be regarded as a continuation of the discourse of homosexuality-as-diseased formed as early as the 19th century in psychoanalytic fields and now transferred to medical ones (see chapter 2.1).

These first articles immediately coined the disease a 'gay plague' or 'gay cancer', cementing the aforementioned connection in the public mindset. Interestingly, "the first heterosexual patients with similar health conditions, including the first women, were reported by the [Centers for Disease Control (CDC)] that same summer" (Hart, 2000: 45). The scientific world thus knew early on that the disease was not limited to gay male demographics, yet few undertakings were made to straighten out this misconception.

Furthermore, the media typically portrayed AIDS victims as white gay men (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 203). Hence, lesbians were not as demonized and discriminated against as the male homosexual community. Only one year later, in 1982, the name GRID was updated to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) to highlight that the disease did indeed affect a wider range of individuals, other than gay males (Hart, 2000: 4). However, by then the harm was already done: "Despite the new name and information […] the public association between the condition and homosexuality was pretty much fixed" (Eaklor, 2008: 175). Eventually in 1984, the virus infecting AIDS patients was isolated for the first time, an important finding that proved that infections were not limited to a group of people but rather to certain behaviors, such as

unprotected sexual activity or the sharing of unsterilized needles. At last, in 1986 the term HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) was connected to AIDS and the first test able to show HIV antibodies in a patient's blood was developed (Eaklor, 2008: 175).

Overall, the AIDS crisis could not have had a worse timing. The association of an epidemic linked to social outcasts, such as homosexuals or drug abusers, coupled with the conservative backlash arising in the late 1970s was an explosive brew. This is to say that, generally speaking, the reactions to the newfound disease lacked compassion for the ones affected with HIV/ AIDS; encouraged violence and marginalization towards the groups that were blamed for the health crisis; and were marked not just by media-related but also by social and political silence as well. Vicki L. Eaklor has closely analyzed these various responses to AIDS and exposed many of them as being characteristic American ways of coping with danger in times of crisis.

Firstly, Eaklor links the tendency of putting the blame on the (diseased) victim instead of showing sympathy for the ones in pain directly to the myth of the "self-made man" inherited from the 19th century: "After all, if one's economic success was due to hard work and living right, then the opposite traits accounted for failure […] Americans often are critical of misfortune, it seems, with the brunt of the hostility aimed at the unfortunate" (2008: 176). Therefore, homosexuals and drug abusers leading a 'deviant' way of life were thought of having brought the disease on themselves. This "us-versus-them ideology," as Kylo-Patrick L. Hart explains, "makes it easier for members of the general population to separate themselves from the people who have the disease and, indirectly, from the disease itself" (2000: 36). Here, 'us' represents the "heterosexual, middle to upper class, family centered, non-pleasure seeking, and unaddicted" (2000: 36), while 'them' are the already stigmatized Others – the homosexuals and drug addicts that were further ostracized by being directly linked to the disease.

Secondly, overall, U.S. youth-, beauty- and health-oriented society is very retrogressive when dealing with illness. This is aggravated by "Americans' faith in science, especially medicine, literally to cure all ills, [which make] disease and death become 'unnatural'" (Eaklor, 2008: 176). To be in denial about people dying of AIDS and to remain silent about the crisis and ways of preventing new infections is thus closely linked to America's fear of illness – which in turn is related to the previously discussed fear of failure. Matters are complicated further by the fact that untreated cases of AIDS – or rather opportunistic infections taking advantage of a

weakened immune system – oftentimes bring along physical changes in the ones affected, such as cutaneous lesions or tremendous weight loss. American society bore witness to the great shock of seeing healthy, young men and women suddenly collapse and turn into lifeless shadows of their former selves. In this respect, Susan Sontag explains that "dehumanizing" diseases are the most dreaded ones, because

> the moral judgments attached to disease are aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny […] What counts more than the amount of disfigurement is that it reflects underlying, ongoing changes, the dissolution of the person. (1989: 41)

People suffering of AIDS consequently were not only stigmatized as being ill or frail, but furthermore were physically transforming into 'alien beings' that had the means to horrify others. This idea of the alien Other threatening America conjures up the image of sci-fi movies of the 1950s, especially those produced during the worst times of McCarthyism, such as Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) or Gordon Douglas' *Them!* (1954). These films are known to have processed the widely-spread anxieties regarding a communist invasion as well as the fear of atomic warfare in form of alien invaders. In comparison, in the 1980s the fear of AIDS infections was handled similarly in American society as well as in film, as the danger was condensed to the homosexual Other (*them*) supposedly able to destroy the innocent heterosexual American community (*us*).

Lastly, "Americans are unusually prudish about any direct mention of sex or sex-related terms" (Gross, 2001: 100). HIV being a sexually transmitted retrovirus thus has two implications in the American context. Firstly, having in mind American's puritanical attitude towards sexuality and the association of AIDS with sex, the disease was not talked about since it made people uncomfortable. Secondly, when the AIDS-sex correlation was discussed, people-with-AIDS were blamed for their infections, as Susan Sontag synthesizes: "Getting the disease through sexual practice is thought to be more willful, therefore deserves more blame" (1989: 26). Yet, more than just being a sexually transmitted disease "AIDS is understood as a disease not only of sexual excess but of perversity" (1989: 26). Here, the 'perverted' and 'diseased' homosexual comes into play. As has been previously stated, the media played an active and important role in accusing the gay community from the first moment AIDS was discovered, "suggest[ing] that the

behaviors of gay men were directly responsible for the disease and that it was directly related to their deviant sexual practices" (Hart, 2000: 45). Not only was the male homosexual community falsely depicted as a promiscuous plague-carrying group but furthermore as one that irresponsibly put other people at risk (2000: 52). As a matter of fact, a number of groups within the gay community living in urban centers, such as New York or San Francisco, were enjoying a promiscuous lifestyle in the 1970s. It needs to be noted that the gay liberation movement, although overall having different aspirations, profited from the general sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Susan Sontag adds that, as a result, sex became an integral part of gay culture:

> The view that sexually transmitted diseases are not serious reached its apogee in the 1970's, which was also when many male homosexuals reconstituted themselves as something like an ethnic group, one whose distinctive folkloric custom was sexual voracity, and the institutions of urban homosexual life became a sexual delivery system of unprecedented speed, efficiency and volume. (1989: 76)

It is also important to look beyond the sexual shaming of gay men exerted by politicians, the religious right, and often society as such, and see the sexual culture of the 1970s as a form of gay community and identity building. Thus, for many gay men particularly gay 'bathhouses' and other urban spaces of sexual encounters were of utmost importance in regards to gay liberation:

> For the gay community, gay bathhouses represent a major success in a century-long political struggle to overcome isolation and develop a sense of community and pride in their sexuality, to gain their right to sexual privacy, to win their right to associate with each other in public, and to create "safety zones" where gay men could be sexual and affectionate with each other with a minimal threat of violence, blackmail, loss of employment, arrest, imprisonment, and humiliation. (Bérubé, 2003: 34)

Nevertheless, time and time again these places where sexual encounters took place were used by the media and religious groups to shock the prudish American public and to attack the homosexual community. One important cinematic artifact from the early 1980s that completely exploited the cruising for gay sex was William Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980), a film that will be closely discussed in chapter 4. Yet, one needs to remember that sexual freedom and promiscuity were "[h]ardly an invention of the male homosexual subculture, recreational, risk-free sexuality

is an inevitable reinvention of the culture of capitalism, and was guaranteed by medicine as well" (Sontag, 1989: 77). With the advent of AIDS, the liberating factor of sexuality became nullified. (Homoerotic) sex was linked to death since there was neither cure nor treatment for AIDS. The community of men supposedly in the prime of their lives was dying on a huge scale.

Instead of immediately reacting and focusing on preventative measures in order to reduce the spread of the virus, the media and, more importantly, the government remained silent and instead chose to scapegoat the diseased soon to be dead. Without proper media coverage in the first years of the epidemic, the public was unaware of the rapidly spreading disease and of measures, which would avoid further infections. In fact, "television networks did not even mention AIDS on their nightly newscasts until 1982" (Gross, 2001: 96). Only after all-American actor Rock Hudson publicly declared that he was dying of AIDS in 1985 did the media gain interest in the matter.

The impact of Rock Hudson's outing as a gay man diagnosed with AIDS only becomes fully fathomable when reflecting on the enormous influence he had as an actor: "Hudson was unquestionably the strongest box-office attraction Universal had from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s, and arguably the most popular male star of the time overall (albeit with stiff competition from Cary Grant)" (Klinger, 1994: 99). Furthermore, it is important to recall that the falsely publicized image of rooted heterosexual hypermasculinity created for the star helped him to his stardom. To be more precise "Hudson enjoyed tremendous popularity as a beefcake idol and romantic lead" (1994: 98) because he "embodied a certain brand of sexual normalcy, a normalcy every bit as important in defining the tenor of the times as the more excessive" (1994: 99). Up until Hudson's public outing, AIDS was widely perceived as a somber, vague disease associated to social deviants. Rock Hudson as a man with AIDS gave a "face to the crisis that was recognizable to most of America (as opposed to shadowy homosexuals and drug users)" (Eaklor, 2008: 203). Now, all of a sudden, the disease could be linked to an all-American cinematic hero, who in turn was able to serve as a representative for the idea that "anyone could be susceptible." This had deep implications for the public interest in AIDS: "Hudson's public admission precipitated a 270 percent increase in AIDS reporting by the end of 1985" (Klinger: 1994: 121).

The political reluctance to react to the epidemic was even more suffocating than the media's. President Ronald Reagan drew an absolute veil of silence over the matter. Not until

1987, i.e. six years into the crisis, he briefly addressed the subject of AIDS in a political speech (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 204). All things considered, it was not a specific group of people or a particular lifestyle that caused the AIDS crisis to reach the damaging proportions still felt today but it was misinformation and shaming caused by the silencing of the issue at hand that are to blame for the worldwide health crisis.

While many remained silent, the religious Right took advantage of the epidemic as a ground to stoke hate and violence against the LGBT community. Since homosexuality had been de-pathologized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 and was thus not attacked by psychiatric institutions with the same vigor as before, the religious Right now viewed it as their mission to destroy the queer community (Benshoff, 1997: 182, 237). In the eyes of these religious groups, homosexuality was often claimed to be "a Disease-of-the-Devil that sinful people accept and willfully spread to innocent victims" or a "contagious disease somehow transmitted via its open display" (1997: 242). By virtue of this line of reasoning, homosexuals deliberately attack innocent heterosexuals in order to infect them with their contaminating sexual orientation. When AIDS came into play, the illness offered a concretization of what right wing religious groups had preached all along: homosexuality is an illness. Moreover, the epidemic was used as a trump card in the already highly homophobic environment of the 1980s to, in effect, physically brutalize queer individuals, as Eaklor further explores:

> Given all this, and the timing of the crisis amid the backlash against the "permissive" and "anti-family" sixties and seventies, homophobia reached a level not seen since the Cold War, and perhaps never expressed quite so openly. Harrassment and violence directed at gay people continued (and more than doubled from 1985 to 1986), but now seemed justified. (2008: 176)

The AIDS crisis, however, not only changed the mainstream perception regarding homosexuals but also had a deep impact on heterosexuality as such. Namely, despite the great progress the gay liberation movement achieved during the sixties and seventies, in the 1980s "the term *gay*, which had been wrenched away from the earlier pejorative discourse of homosexuality, was reloaded with stereotypical connotations of effeminacy, contagion and degeneracy" (Hart, 2000: 47). In reaction to the idea of physically diseased and frail homosexuals, a new wave of hypermasculinity emerged in order to distance one's heterosexual self from the 'effeminate',

AIDS-affected, queer Other.

This emerging trend might be perceived as a counter reaction to a general gender crisis in America. In particular masculine identities were set against a variety of challenges. As previously discussed, the sixties and seventies were a time of great ruptures in American society, in which many traditional standards, especially patriarchal ones, were put into question: "All the marginalized groups whose suppression had been thought to be necessary for men to build secure identities began to rebel" (Kimmel, 1996: 174).

These marginalized groups included Second Wave feminists, the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement, but also non-minority groups such as the hippies with "their long hair and flowing, feminine clothes, [who] rejected the corporate clone as a model for manhood" (1996: 174). This means that the image of the untouchable norm of virile, white male heterosexuality lost its claim for universality during the Civil Rights Movement, when discourses shifted to minority struggles concerned with race, gender, and class (Arosteguy, 2010: 120). Those who sustained ideals of male supremacy were not only attacked on a public level but also on a domestic one. In particular, "inconsistencies in the function of fatherhood, competition in the workplace, new standards of sexual conduct [...] new ideals for the male body, and the internalization of feminist ideologies by a new generation" (Bordin, 2014: 34) slowly withdrew the prestige and power of the patriarch. Masculinity was therefore seen as failing.

To make matters worse for traditionalists, conventional manhood was also assaulted on a political level. The humiliating loss of the Vietnam War is one of the most evident and greatest traumas in terms of a failing masculine ideal, causing "the soldier/protector [to fall] into such disrepute as the news about Vietnam filtered home that even today Vietnam veterans are seen by some as having acted out an excessive and false hypermasculinity" (Kimmel, 1996: 174). This was followed by political and economic shocks and disappointments such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a young and vital man that died in his most potent prime, the Watergate scandal, or the first trade deficit in U.S history (Kimmel, 1996: 177-179; Eaklor, 2008: 167).

To better understand the direct impact these events had on masculinity and patriarchy, one needs to recall Judith Butler's view on gender-as-a-construct, discussed in chapter 2.2. Butler states that neither femininity nor masculinity are natural givens but instead function as cultural principles that serve as prescriptions of performances in daily life. According to this, if one shakes the notions regarding traditional masculine and feminine roles, it can lead to enormous

confusion amongst the respective gender groups. In times of fluctuating gender ideals, everything a gendered individual was taught in regards to one's position in society can be discredited as an illusion. If one takes away the traditional position of men, they lose power since power is connected to their proscribed roles as patriarchs.

The queer community as well has had an enormous influence in deconstructing hegemonic masculinity while promoting other ways of masculine being. Seeing that the general perception of gay men has been that gays are failed men since they are prone to femininity, the gay individual poses a certain discomfort to heterosexuality: "The gay man is a threat to the macho man, since he reveals explicitly that which the macho man must suppress as deeply as possibly: his need for the love of other men, and the possibility of taking the feminine role" (Horrocks, 1994: 91). Instead of bowing down to the clichéd role society imposed on queer men, after Stonewall they worked hard to prove that they as well could be perceived as 'true men' (according to the heteronormative paradigm) by adapting certain ways of behavior and superficial signifiers that made them pass as 'straight':

> [A] new gay masculinity emerged in gay enclaves of America's major cities. In these "gay ghettos," the "clone," as he was called, dressed in hypermasculine garb (flannel shirts, blue jeans, leather) and had short hair (not at all androgynous) and a mustache; he was athletic, highly muscular. In short, the clone looked more like a "real man" than most straight men.
>
> (Kimmel, 1996: 184)

As a result, gay men could not be reduced to their supposed natural femininity anymore but instead had shown that through adaptations of predefined performative roles they were able to become successfully virile men as well. Being homosexual but at the same time assuming a hypermasculine look thus deconstructed an outdated paradox:

> Gay men have often been criticized as being woman like or at least less than male, a traitor to their sex due to their gender. But body image in the image of the athletic, muscular male in some ways constitutes a type of a "gender fuck," someone who is labeled less than male can perform and be accepted as completely male. (Billman, 2006: 5)

Yet, with the advent of AIDS, many HIV-positive gay men lost their physical strength

and the images of the gay community circulating in the media were those of sick and weak men. As a reaction to this, more heterosexual as well as homosexual men started to strive for body builder physiques to distance themselves from the diseased (Billman, 2006: 4). Nevertheless, due to persistent media representations of the queer community as weak and thin, the public eye continued to view gay men simply as diseased weaklings dying of AIDS. Heterosexual men, however, were able to develop a new masculine ideal, the one of the bodybuilder, which served as a new template for masculinity.

A highly muscular body offered a way to gain back one's supposed virility and with it the long-lost privilege of the hegemonic patriarch. The existing queer 'clone' was completely disregarded as he did not fit into the binary vision of strong heterosexual masculinity versus weak, diseased, effeminate homosexuality. To portray gay men as effeminate, while codifying heterosexuality as strong and virile was a strategy to distance one sexual orientation from another, even if these generalizations were (and still are) at odds with the diversity of identities found in both sexual orientations.

As has been suggested earlier, the media – and especially Hollywood productions – played a major role in disseminating these images of hypermasculinity as an exclusive form of masculine behavior. Many film critics are in agreement about the idea that genre forms that are perceived as virile and masculine usually celebrate a comeback in times, in which dominant masculine ideals and values seem to be threatened or put into question. Specific genres are thus valuable in disseminating specific desirable norms of manhood. The western, for instance, is one of those genres that perfectly mirrors these cultural tendencies since it holds the power of reverting its audience to a time in which "independent masculinity had unquestionable relevance" (Bordin, 2014: 42). In the 1980s, so-called "hard body" movies featuring hypermasculine heroes with over the top bodybuilder physiques, became particularly popular as a reaction to the dwindling principles of virility in the previous two decades (2014: 40).

Movies such as *Rocky* (Avildsen, 1976), *Rambo* (Kotcheff, 1982), or *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984) are prime examples of this hard body film cycle. After all, these all-American virile heroes serve as an empowering way to distance oneself from the dubious, nonconformist 'Others'. However, seeing that some supposedly 'American' male film icons, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger or Jean-Claude Van Damme, were indeed not American-born heroes, one should rather speak of heroes turned American. Thus a man that follows the long-standing tradition of

virility – which in turn is traceable all the way back to the American superheroes found in comics – can become a true American hero. As will be shown in the film analysis of chapter 4, hypermasculine heterosexuality is often set in contrast to queer effeminacy – with the possible exception of Friedkin's *Cruising*, in which the queer community assumes the role of the hypermasculine and is consequently, to some degree, perceived as intriguing to the protagonist.

When it comes to AIDS representations in cinema, this differentiation between 'us', i.e. the heterosexual norm, and the deviant diseased monster queer Other was highly encouraged by mass media that "focused on sensationalistic tropes of death, decay, victimization, and isolation" (Eaklor, 2008: 203). While independent and (cable) television productions released a number of AIDS-themed movies, such as *An Early Frost* (John Erman, 1985) or *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood, 1986), Hollywood followed the example of the government by staying silent on the matter of AIDS during the 1980s. Trying to respect the prevailing consumer demands of a predominantly homophobic American society, AIDS was simply labeled as an unmarketable subject matter. Yet, movies that played with AIDS narratives on a subliminal level started to emerge in increasing numbers (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 205-208).

This trend is particularly highlighted in the horror genre, which is very susceptible to playing with societal anxieties on a subliminal level. The genre namely started referring to the AIDS crisis early on by means of plague-carrying queer monsters. According to Benshoff, by reviving gothic monster tropes, movies of the 1980s were one of the main culprits in propagating the equation of homosexuality with monstrosity (1997: 242): "In the vast majority of Reagan-era horror films, monstrosity and queerness are still linked in retrogressive ways. The modern horror films' focus on visceral gore and bodily fluids neatly dovetails into AIDS hysteria as well" (1997: 243).

As is evident from this quotation, blood, an integral part of the horror genre, received a whole new meaning in the context of the AIDS crisis, for now it was being equated with disease and contamination. As has been noted at an earlier point, the horror genre became gorier after the 1960s, reaching new heights of violence in the 1980s:

> In the 1980s gore made its way from the margins to the mainstream via horror films—especially slasher films—whose directors routinely sought to top what others had done; thus, while an innocent bystander's head was exploded with a shotgun in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), the entirety of John Cassavetes's body

exploded at the end of *The Fury* (1978). (Kendrick, 2014: 314)

The act of killing being linked to higher degrees of bloodshedding can thus be read as a metaphor for the life-giving forces in our body – blood and sexual fluids – as turning against their hosts. Blood became more present and more visible in a large variety of horror movies since it now bore an extra layer of meaning and of shock value – the fear of becoming infected with HIV/ AIDS.

Another trend present in many 1980s horror films is that "the killers of many of these films turn out to be queers, either transvestites or transsexuals" (Benshoff, 1997: 231). By being directly linked to AIDS in the public eye, queer individuals were socially constructed as diseased and contagious and thus as predators to the (heterosexual) American everyday citizen (Hart, 2000: 46). Just like a rampaging killer, queer persons were perceived as a walking lethal weapon able to attack any HIV-negative victim with their fluids of death. Yet, the phenomenon of employing queer killers in horror films is not only linked to the common demonization of queer individuals in the 1980s but furthermore it goes back to the earlier discussed distancing of hypermasculinity from the supposedly feminine queer.

By resorting to transgender or gender-fluid killers, the fear of femininity gaining the upper hand in a male body reaches its pinnacle: transgendered individuals are often wrongly perceived as being the ultimate embodiment of the effeminate gay man accepting his inner femininity by wanting to become a woman. Naturally, being transgender and being homosexual are two separate aspects of sexuality, the former denoting one's gender, while the latter being a sexual orientation. However, for an uninformed homophobic individual, both are seen as deviant sexualities alike.

It now becomes of importance to take a look at the ways these gender-bending killers are dealt with in horror films. Firstly, it is noteworthy that the gender fluidity of these characters is not revealed until the end of the movie, when a violent unmasking of their gender identity takes place. Jeremy Russell Miller notes that "[b]ecause the characters are presented as actively hiding their transgender identities from others, they must be trying to deceive others" (2012: 109). Following this prejudiced reasoning, not only are these characters hiding their gender identity to pass as heteronormative people, whose gender-identity conforms to the gender of their biological sex, but furthermore their coming out must be forced upon them. This conveys the idea that these

characters are hiding something shocking, something that should not be brought to light.

Instead of discursively investigating the reasons why these characters choose to hide their gender identity, the revelation is only reduced to visual cues (Miller, 2012: 144). This can happen in various ways, such as through a removal of a wig (*Psycho*, 1960 or *Dressed to Kill*, 1980) or the exposure of their gender non-conforming bodies and genitals (*Sleepaway Camp*, 1983). As a result, these visual cues lead on to the idea that the "[t]ransgender identity becomes, in this sense, just another movie monster costume, with wigs, dresses, and makeup taking the place of the masks of Jason and Michael Myers or the clawed glove of Freddy Krueger" (Miller, 2012: 155-6). The fear of these gender-bending characters is further poked by the fact that the psychoses that turn them into killers and their gender identity are oftentimes interweaved in a way, in which the audience believes that one is responsible for the other. They are killers *because* they are transgendered individuals and vice versa. Lastly, it is mostly the female side of these characters that commits the murders (2012: 114-115), a fact that can again be linked to the misogynistic fear of the female gaining the upper hand of a supposedly male body.

As will be discussed in the next subchapter, the described development of exploiting queerness as a means of generating shock value was used over and over again in the slasher genre, a particular subgenre of the horror film that found its peak of popularity in the 1980s and greatly based its thrills on the blade-wielding queer killer.

3.2) *Psycho Paths*: the Gender-Queering Slasher Film

The United States of America is known for its profound interest in serial killers. This becomes most apparent not only in the fact that crimes receive major media attention – one only needs to consider TV channels, such as the Crime & Investigation Network, completely devoted to crime stories – but also that many factual stories about serial killings have been adapted to film. This trend has reached a point in cinema, in which violence is, to a certain degree, glorified, as can be seen in movies such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967). Charles Derry argues that violence has become an inherent part of everyday American life desired by many as a form of entertainment:

In fact, violence is now so common and expected as to routinely go unreported by the media unless a specific violent act incorporates a mind-boggling, grisly variation theretofore unheard of, or some spectacularly high body count, in which case the media exploits the violence in *Guinness Book of World Records* style. (2009: 119)

The same applies to horror films, which, as stated in chapter 2.2, highly increased in body counts and became increasingly gory after the 1960s. Furthermore, it is a known fact that many horror movies featuring psychotic murderers were indeed inspired by real murders. Serial killer Ed Gein for instance, a man "who killed and mutilated his victims from 1947 to 1957, turning their body parts into utilitarian objects such as bowls and belts" (Derry, 2009: 118), indirectly inspired a whole array of horror films, such as *Psycho*, the bloody *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), or *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). Although very different at their cores, these movies can be linked to the serial killer due to the idea of taxidermy present in each one of them: while Norman Bates stuffs dead animals and conserves the body of his deceased mother, Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massa*cre wears a mask constructed out of human skin and decorates the family's house with human remains. Lastly, Jame Gumb, the killer in *The Silence of the Lambs*, mirrors Ed Gein's wish of male to female transition by creating dresses out of women's skin.

Interestingly, the serial killers that receive most public attention are those who "operated out of a sexual pathology; and the killers with a homosexual orientation especially galvanized the attention of a homophobic American society struggling with the issue of sexual orientation" (Derry, 2009: 118). This goes hand in hand with what was discussed in the previous subchapter regarding the queer killers in horror film. Once again, it demonstrates that homosexuality and violence or crime are incorrectly connected on a plethora of discourses that reach far back to the 'criminal type' associated with Oscar Wilde and homosexuals of his time, as described in chapter 1. Since a few real life killers known to the public are homosexual (such as John Wayne Gacy or Jeffrey Dahmer) the reasoning goes that queerness must be murderous and psychotic.

The originators of the psychotic serial killer movies, which would in the late 1970s and 1980s blossom into the slasher, were Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* and the UK production *Peeping Tom* (1960) directed by Michael Powell (Tudor, 1989: 192). It is a remarkable coincidence that both movies were released within months from one another, while both play with psychosexually

distressed killers murdering their victims with phallic objects. *Peeping Tom* tells the story of the young photographer and cameraman Mark Lewis (Karlheinz Böhm), who murders women using a tripod attached to his camera. The topic of voyeurism is clearly present in this movie since Mark gazes at his victims through his camera while he kills them.

Comparatively, Norman Bates spied on Marion Crane before the shower scene murder. In the same way, Mark's and Norman's victims are punished for being sexually active women, or at least women that arouse them in a sexual way. This leads to the conclusion that "[o]ur understanding of Mark and Norman is framed by a number of narrative and stylistic references to sexuality, voyeurism, repression and the expression of sexual desire in violence" (Tudor, 1989: 194), all of which will be of utmost importance when discussing the slasher film. Furthermore, Norman's and Mark's psychosexual distress is based on a childhood trauma. Both movies allude to the fact that an obsessive parent is responsible for the child's sexual deviance and murderous instinct as adults.

Another film that is frequently credited as a forerunner of the slasher film is Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), a movie about a cannibalistic family killing and torturing a group of youngsters in their grotesque home. Again, this movie features many elements that would become essential characteristics of the slasher film, "particularly a community of young people threatened by a relic from the past as well as a Final Girl, albeit one who merely escapes with her life, leaving the cannibalistic clan largely alive and intact" (Kendrick, 2014: 323).

Probably the first movie containing all of the elements that define the slasher subgenre was Bob Clark's *Black Christmas* (1974). For a better understanding of the topic at hand, before continuing with the discussion of the history and development of the slasher subgenre, a short definition of the slasher film is necessary. Slasher films are distinguished by their basic narrative structure as well as iconographic elements. The fundamental story structure of the slasher film consists of a group of teenagers enjoying recreational activities with one another, while unknowingly being stalked by a psychokiller. As the films progress, these teenagers are killed one by one in most 'creative' ways, most commonly with bladed, phallic weapons. Generally, at the end of the movie the sole survivor, usually the so-called "Final Girl" (Clover, 2015: 35), stumbles upon the corpses of her friends and a lengthy escape sequence begins, in which she tries to flee from the killer. Eventually, the Final Girl is either saved or, as is the case in most slasher

films, she defeats the psychokiller herself.

Black Christmas introduces a group of sorority sisters staying on campus over the Christmas holidays. The girls start receiving obscene phone calls from a stranger and, one by one, they are killed: only the protagonist Jess (Olivia Hussey) survives the maniac's attacks. Interestingly, throughout the film the pregnant Jess struggles with the decision of whether to proceed in having an abortion, a topic that gives the movie a socio-political edge: "[T]he producers of *Black Christmas* [made] their film marketable to a generation of politically-informed female patrons that were perceived to subscribe to the central tenets of second-wave feminism as they entered adulthood in the early 1970s" (Nowell, 2011: 73). Feminist-tinged elements will reappear over and over again in slasher films, thus becoming another integral element of the subgenre. The importance of *Black Christmas* in regards to slasher film history, however, lies especially in the fact that the movie features all of the five main components that define the slasher subgenre: a psychosexually distressed killer; a terrible place; a variety of weapons of death; a group of young victims; and the Final Girl (Clover, 2015: 26-41) – all of which will be discussed in detail in the further course of this chapter. While this film was a big success in Canada, its distribution in the US market was only moderate. Yet, it "represented a moment at which a new textual model was added to the plethora of options that, in theory at least, were available to filmmakers" (Nowell, 2011: 76-77).

Due to the commercial failure of *Black Christmas*, other film producers were not inspired to take the risk of reusing the film's formula. It was only four years later, in 1978, that an American filmmaker ventured on such a project. More specifically, John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) adopted the basic slasher formula first used in *Black Christmas* and transferred it to American small town suburbia. Therefore, the movie's narrative structure is similar to the one of its predecessor. The movie tells the story of serial killer Michael Myers (Tony Moran) who escaped a mental institution and now stalks the babysitter Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) and her best friends in order to kill them one by one. Although *Halloween* is oftentimes coined as the first successful slasher that initiated the slasher hype of the 1980s, more recent scholarly works tend to distance themselves from this myth:

> By overlooking the fact that the film was only just being recognized as a
> moderate financial success by the spring of 1979, almost half a year into its
> theatrical run, scholars have tended to over-state *Halloween*'s impact on film

production, film content, and the development of the first teen slasher film cycle. (Nowell, 2011: 103)

This is reinforced by the factor that "no similar films went into production during *Halloween*'s first eighteen weeks in circulation" (2011: 103). Attention should be paid to the fact that slasher films were independent productions since big production companies were not interested in being associated with this low budget film form.

In order to keep up lucrative deals, "rather than jumping immediately onto new trends, most American independents actually preferred to follow trends that boasted more established track records" (2011: 108). On account of the movie's moderate success, making another movie based on *Halloween*'s formula turned out to be a high risk endeavor. Typically, a new film cycle starts with a movie that gained enough commercial viability to guarantee the success of follow-up cash-ins (2011: 50). Seeing that *Halloween* did not achieve the necessary ticket sales and influence, it was not the movie starting the first teen slasher cycle of the 1980s. Nonetheless, it can be credited as having inspired the release of other movies centered on a psychokiller's rampage:

> [A] hit often initiates a range of textually different Cash-ins because filmmakers tend to draw different conclusions as to what content has attracted audiences, thus emphasizing, downplaying, and/or omitting different elements of the hit, and counterbalancing the content they replicate with material drawn from a variety of different filmic sources. (Nowell, 2011: 111)

This detail needs to be highlighted at this point, since two of the movies to be discussed in chapter 4, *Cruising* (William Friedkin 1980) and *Dressed to Kill* (Brian De Palma 1980), will both be referred to as prototypes of the slasher genre, although they were released after *Black Christmas* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978). It is in the liminal space between the release of the first American slasher (*Halloween*) and the time needed to differentiate its marketable and successful elements that Friedkin's *Cruising* and De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* can be situated. Many elements of both movies greatly intersect with those of the slasher films, while at the same time there are some fundamental differences between one and the other. It thus needs to be underlined that even if these two movies are fundamental to establish the slasher as a subgenre, they are indeed

variations and present differences when compared to the other two full-blown slasher films that will be analyzed in chapter 5.

The actual movie that eventually started the first slasher cycle was Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980). Considering that this movie was released in the summer of 1980, right after the theatrical run of *Cruising* had ended and two months prior to the release of *Dressed to Kill*, one can assuredly say that these movies can still be perceived as prototypes of a then still-evolving subgenre.

Nonetheless, it needs to be remembered that neither of these were movies designated as prototypes of the slasher genre, nor were slasher films actually called 'slashers' in the early 1980s. As a matter of fact, the descriptor 'slasher' only became prominent in the mid-eighties: "Instead, critics, filmgoers, and various commentators employed a wide range of adjectival modifiers, including 'stalker,' 'dead teenager,' 'women in danger,' 'psycho,' 'slash-and-chop,' 'stalk and slash,' 'teenie-kill,' and 'slice-'em-up' movies" (Kendrick, 2014: 316). This further supports the idea that the subgenre was not completely matured back then. As a matter of fact, this is a very common trend seeing that not only slashers, but a variety of categories only come into existence retrospectively. This means that only when looking back from an advanced, future viewpoint, one is eventually able to decipher appropriate designations for them.

Friday the 13th cleverly applied the setting of a teenage summer camp – youth summer camp movies being in vogue in the early 1980s (Nowell, 2011: 125) – to the already crafted narrative structure of the slasher film and landed a hit in doing so. Moreover, the movie introduced the idea of eye-catching death scenes, which followed a horror tradition first started by the possession horror film *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) (Nowell, 2011: 131).

Henceforth, these creative deaths would become associated as another integral part of the slasher subgenre. The success of *Friday the 13th* led to a boom of slasher films that soon saturated the market. As a matter of fact, "a new teen slasher had been released on average once every six weeks across the [next] fifteen months" (2011: 235). By 1981 the first slasher parodies, such as *Student Bodies* (Mickey Rose & Michael Ritchie, 1981) or *Class Reunion* (Michael Miller, 1982), started surfacing, indicating that audiences were familiarized with the slasher conventions to a degree that they were able to understand a parodic portrayal of the subgenre (Nowell, 2011: 244-5). Slasher films had become predictable and thus lost their interest to audiences. After the market saturation in late 1981, "[a]n additional three teen slasher film cycles

have unfolded, first from 1984 to 1989, then from 1996 to 2000, with the most recent beginning in 2005 and continuing unabated" (2011: 11).

Before moving forward to a detailed definition and analysis of the slasher subgenre, another originator needs to be taken into consideration. Other than *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*, the genre has a second important precursor, namely the Italian *giallo* film. *Gialli* are Italian vernacular films of the 1970s that are in turn rooted in British crime and mystery novels:

> The word *giallo* simply means "yellow" and is the metonymic term given to a series of mystery novels that the Milanese publisher Mondadori began producing in the late 1920s. These paperback novels, often translations of English-language novels by writers like Arthur Conan Doyle, Ngaio Marsh, Agatha Christie, and Edgar Wallace, were presented with vibrant yellow covers. (Koven, 2006: 2)

The term *giallo* in Italy nowadays stands for the entire literary murder-mystery genre. While the tradition of filmic adaptations of a literary *giallo* could be traced back to Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), the cinematic *giallo* gained its genre-specific mold with the release of two movies by Mario Bava in the 1960s, namely with *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963) and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) (2006: 3-4). The former introduced the particular narrative structure of cinematic *gialli*: "an innocent person, often a tourist, witnesses a brutal murder that appears to be the work of a serial killer. He or she takes on the role of amateur detective in order to hunt down this killer, and often succeeds where the police fail" (2006: 3-4).

The latter film familiarized specific visual tropes that would thereafter be used in most *gialli*. These include the graphic violence exerted against women, as well as "the archetypal *giallo* killer's disguise: black leather gloves, black overcoat, wide-brimmed black hat, and often a black stocking over the face" (2006: 4). Finally, Dario Argento joined the described narrative structure and the visual tropes in a single movie, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970), which started a whole cycle of *giallo* productions in Italy (2006: 4). These Italian movies were eventually imported to the US "to alleviate the product shortage of the early 1970s […] The giallo films were not hits in the US, but the production of American versions […] suggests that they resonated deeply with some American filmmakers" (Nowell, 2011: 130).

This influence will become particularly apparent when discussing both *Cruising* and *Dressed To Kill*. The *giallo*'s pervasive influence can, however, also be felt in the slasher genre

as a whole. There are, in fact, many parallels to be found between these Italian movies and the slasher film. Similarities between both subgenres include a killer driven by a past trauma who murders a group of young adults consecutively with the help of a bladed weapon, the discovery of all the murdered bodies in a single place, and the escape sequence of a surviving Final Girl and her rescue (Koven, 2006: 162-6).

Yet, we also need to distinguish between the differences of both film forms. In comparison, *gialli* tend to concentrate on the investigation of the murders, whereas slasher films highlight the victims' struggle to survive. While *gialli* take place in urban settings, slasher films are mostly set in isolated spaces. Koven explains that this fact is closely related to the different time scales of both subgenres. More precisely, *gialli* take place over several nights or a week, the slasher's action, however, is confined to a single night or a couple of nights at best:

> Because the ultimate focus of slasher films is inherently different from the *giallo*, concentrating on the chase and avoidance of the killer over the span of a few hours rather than the puzzle aspect, there is no need to incorporate the relative spatial safety of an entire city to allow for a spatial and temporal reprieve in order to reflect on the murders and figure out who is responsible for them. (2006: 164)

Another great difference is the endings of both film types. In *gialli* the Final Girl is typically rescued by a male savior, whereas in slasher films she generally defeats the killer herself. Since both *Cruising* as well as *Dressed to Kill* intersect with the *giallo* and the slasher film, it is important to keep in mind this discussion.

As previously addressed, there is a variety of iconographic elements present in most slasher films that distinguish this subgenre from other horror movies. Here one needs to take into account Carol Clover's essay "Her Body, Himself" (1987), a text of the utmost importance to the study of slasher films. This study was one of the first accounts of an academic critique of the slasher film – next to Robin Wood's essay "Beauty Bests the Beast" (1983) and Vera Dika's PhD dissertation *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (1985) – and is especially meaningful to horror studies since it "rescued the horror genre from a […] feminist backlash, legitimating it as an academic subject" (Greven, 2011: 171) while Clover is commonly credited as one of the first scholars to "pose detailed definitions and structural/ ideological analyses of the slasher film" (Kendrick, 2014 317). In her essay it is Clover who

distinguishes between five particular slasher components: the killer, the terrible place, the weapons of death, the victims, and the Final Girl.

The killers are generally perceived as being the strong point of many slasher movies seeing that they are oftentimes the fixed characters present throughout an entire slasher franchise (such as Freddy Krueger in *The Nightmare on Elm Street* films (1984-2010) or Michael Myers in the *Halloween* films (1978-2009)). Similar to Norman Bates and Mark Lewis, the killers in slasher movies are usually "propelled by psychosexual fury, more particularly a male in gender distress" (Clover, 2015: 27). The cause of this psychotic disturbance is often caused by a dead parent, most prominently a dead mother, acting from beyond the grave (2015: 27-8).

A childhood trauma thus provokes a sexual disturbance in these killers. Here, the close link to Hitchcock's *Psycho* becomes immediately apparent, since the sexual disturbance queering these killers very much parallels the way Norman Bates has been queered by the ever-present mother inside him. Another direct link to *Psycho* is the slasher killer's use of phallic weapons as substitutes for the act of penetration. Consequently, "the horror male monster is essentially nonphallic in terms of his own sexual identity, no matter how many knives, axes, or chainsaws he wields" (Greven, 2011: 156). Indeed his battered masculinity is further highlighted by the fact that the killer in slasher films "ranges from the virginal or sexually inert to the transvestite or transsexual, is spiritually divided ('the mother half of his mind') or even equipped with vulva and vagina" (Clover, 2015: 47).

Clover further points out that female assassins are rarely found in slasher films. However, when present, they generally show no indication of a gender confusion (2015: 29). The male psychokiller's "lack of a functional sexuality of any kind" (Greven, 2011: 155) stands in stark contrast to the sexually active victims of the slasher film. Interestingly, these victims are time and time again killed after the murderer has spied on them and caught them in sexually charged situations. Sexuality thus appears to disturb the psychokiller. In his/ her world, "violence and sex are not concomitants but alternatives" (Clover, 2015: 29). Another key point in regard to the psychosexual nature of the killer is his scopophilic desire. His spying on the teenagers is mostly presented through the use of a subjective camera.

As will be discussed in the further course of this subchapter, the subjective camera identifies the viewer with the killer. In this way, his voyeurism turns into a self-reflexive commentary on the voyeuristic art of cinema itself. In this sense, one could argue that the slasher

killer's voyeuristic point-of-view gaze originates from Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, since in the movie Mark Lewis already used a camera (and thus a point-of-view shot) when observing his prey. Furthermore, Mark's film camera was attached to a tripod, the weapon with which he penetrated his victims. The link between the voyeuristic camera and male, violent desire (the tripod representing an erected penis) was thus already present here. Lastly, the psychokillers in slasher films are usually tinged with a supernatural or superhuman aura. Not only does the killer survive a number of attacks before he is finally defeated (Clover, 2015: 30), but moreover "he appears to have mastery over space and vision that far outstrips that of his victims, allowing him to appear and disappear at will" (2015: 317).

Next, Clover describes a so-called 'terrible place' featured in many slasher films. Slashers are usually set in non-urban settings, which isolate the young victims from the responsibility of an adult world supposed to protect the youngsters. Common slasher settings are thus summer camps, high schools, colleges, or small towns (Kendrick, 2014: 319). The terrible place itself is usually a house or a tunnel, in which the Final Girl attempts to find shelter while escaping from the psychokiller, but which in the end turns out to be a trap, a place of death: "The house or tunnel may at first seem a safe haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in" (Clover, 2015: 31).

It is commonly in these places that the Final Girl understands the severity of the situation she is in, as it is here that she usually encounters the bodies of her murdered friends. Again, the element of the terrible place follows a gothic horror tradition that "can be traced back to Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory and Dracula's castle" (Kendrick, 2014: 319). Just like the isolated lighthouse, in which the queer Henry in Whale's *Frankenstein* finds a way to pursue his deviant urges, or the Bates residence in *Psycho*, these terrible places often harbor "murderous, incestuous, cannibalistic" (Clover, 2015: 30) secrets.

Although a great number of deadly weapons are used in slasher films to guarantee a variety of *creative* deaths, they usually follow the same patterns. Most weapons used are bladed ones to guarantee a direct penetration and a closeness of victim and killer during the act of killing. After all, "being stabbed is a deeply personal, physically close violent action" (Kendrick, 2014: 319) and thus further equates violence with the sexual act of penetration. Clover suggests that "[k]nives and needles, like teeth, beaks, fangs, and claws, are personal extensions of the body

that bring attacker and attacked into primitive, animalistic embrace" (2015: 32). This again underlines the corporeal characteristics these weapons gain – as if they represent a direct substitute for the male phallus that the killer is lacking.

Carol Clover also declares the victims as an integral element of the slasher subgenre. The victims are usually a group of teenagers or young adults "engag[ing] with each other recreationally, from mildly transgressive deeds like casual sex and recreational drug taking, to innocuous free-time activities, including sports, games, and general horseplay" (Nowell, 2011: 21).

These scenes first and foremost serve as a form of comic relief to the rather somber and violent main content of slasher films (Nowell, 2011: 23). Being away from their parents and from any kind of adult authority, these young people push the boundaries they usually face in everyday life. Carol Clover argues that the sexual transgression of these teenagers, just like the sexual transgression of Marion Crane in *Psycho*, is oftentimes linked to their early deaths. In utmost conservative fashion, teenagers are therefore punished for their promiscuity and moralistic lawlessness (2015: 33). Since both sexes equally fall victim to the murderous psychopath, Clover concludes that it "is an imperative that crosses gender lines, affecting males as well as females" (2015: 34). Yet, she claims, that the killing of female victims is "filmed at closer range, in more graphic detail, and at greater length" (2015: 35). This statement has, however, been contested and reviewed by many critics afterwards:

> [I]t would have been commercially suicidal for an independent filmmaker to target MPAA-members with a film that opened itself up to accusations of glorifying violence against women. The reason for this was quite simple. Misogynistic films were highly susceptible to the X-rating, the receipt of which would have made the negotiation of an MPAA-member distribution deal all but impossible and left the filmmakers facing the distinct prospect of incurring substantial financial losses. (Nowell, 2011: 221)

As implied in the previous subchapter, many scholars have linked the equation of sexual intercourse and its subsequent death sentence in slasher films with the arising AIDS crisis in the early 1980s (Benshoff, 1997: 231; Derry, 2009: 113). Although the first AIDS cases in the United States only became public in 1981 while the first slasher films emerged in the 1970s, the actual slasher boom only gained popularity during the course of the 1980s (Benshoff, 1997: 231). This

is to say that because of the AIDS crisis, slasher movies with their high levels of sexuality gained a new, horrifying double layer. The ones having unprotected sex out of wedlock thus put themselves and others at risk. In this regard, the slashing psychopath's killing hand reflects the virus bringing death to the sexually reckless. For this reason, just like the media of the 1980s, "slasher movies [incorporated] the trope of punishment for illicit sex and link[ed] it to certain types of 'morally deviant' others" (Hart, 2000: 16).

While the premature killings of sexually active teenagers might appear as conveying a rather conservative and moralistic lesson, slasher films simultaneously feature a rampant critique of traditional authority, in the same fashion as Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Attention should be paid to the fact that while the teenagers in these movies find themselves far off from the adult world, there are, nevertheless, a few adult supervisors present in most slasher films. Yet, they fail to detect the imminent danger, they fail to protect the youngsters, and they eventually fail in their roles as authoritarian figures: "Policemen, fathers, and sheriffs appear only long enough to demonstrate risible incomprehension and incompetence" (Clover, 2015: 44). Nowell comes to a similar conclusion by stating that "teen slashers actually invited their youth target audience to recognize and to denounce this type of extreme social conservatism […] by pitting likeable groups of hedonists against caricatured puritanical nemeses in struggles over appropriate behaviors" (2011: 221).

Lastly, the Final Girl is one of the most emblematic characteristic features of the slasher genre. As stated above, she is the sole survivor of the killer's slashing spree and eventually survives long enough (I) to be rescued or to escape her predicament, or (II) to defeat the killer herself (Clover, 2015: 35). No matter on which note the movie ends (rescue or single-handed killing), the Final Girl remains the hero of a slasher film: "The last moment of the Final Girl sequence is finally a footnote to what went before—to the quality of the Final Girl's fight, and more generally to the qualities of character that enable her, of all the characters, to survive what has come to seem unsurvivable" (2015: 39).

The ability of survival lies deeply entrenched in the Final Girl's personal characteristics. Right from the beginning of the movie she can be distinguished from the teenagers surrounding her. She is not interested in sexual activities or any kind of intimacy with the opposite sex; "[a]s a result she is not easily reduced to a sexual object" (Kendrick, 2014: 321). Thus the Final Girl does not become an immediate target of the killer's psychosexual fury. In addition, she is

"watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers. Above all she is intelligent and resourceful in a pinch" (Clover, 2015: 39). This helps her to stay focused and alert in regards to any imminent danger. Seeing that her "perspective approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation" (2015: 44), we as viewers easily identify with this teenage girl. All of these characteristics underline her queer potential.

Indeed, the Final Girl possesses aspects of the feminine and the masculine, queerly blurring gender boundaries. In this respect, to some extent, she becomes the counter-image of the effeminate male killer. Her boyishness is most apparent in "[h]er smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance" (2015: 40); all attributes which many of the remaining, traditionally constructed female characters in slasher films do not possess. The gender-neutral names many Final Girls bear further ally them with their fellow teenage boys, such as Jess in *Black Christmas*, Stretch in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Tobe Hooper, 1986), or Marti in *Hell Night* (Tom DeSimone, 1981).

Nonetheless, despite all these masculine attributes, the Final Girl is, just like all the other victims, feminized during the chasing sequence when she falls victim to the bloodthirsty maniac. Carol Clover argues that the victim's position is traditionally associated with femininity since

> there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male. Sex, in this universe, proceeds from gender, not the other way around. A figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers. And a figure is not a psychokiller because he is a man; he is a man because he is a psychokiller. (2015: 12-3)

Hence, just like Arbogast, and just like every other male teenage victim, all of "whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again" (2015: 35), the Final Girl on the run becomes feminized. Yet, she emasculates herself from the position of the victim when she defeats her opponent (Kendrick, 2014: 321). Similar to Lila Crane in *Psycho*, the Final Girl assumes the 'investigating gaze' to uncover the killer's mystery. More precisely, in the slasher film it is indeed common that we see the killer for the very first time through the eyes of the Final Girl (Clover, 2015: 48). The voyeuristic gaze is the source of power the killer possesses since he is the one who sees while remaining unseen.

Having now uncovered the killer's identity, the Final Girl gains the killer's powerful gaze to fight back. Simultaneously, the killer loses his invisibility. In many slasher movies the Final Girl eventually defeats the killer with his own phallic weapon. Having become the "phallic girl" (Greven, 2011: 156), she will execute "the castration, literal or symbolic, of the killer at her hands." By doing this, the Final Girl eventually "not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with" (Clover, 2015: 49). Going back to the traditional depiction of victim and hero, "those who save themselves are male, and those who are saved by others are female. No matter how 'feminine' his experience [is], the traditional hero, if he rises against his adversary and saves himself […], will be male" (2015: 59). The Final Girl becomes the ultimate phallicized gender-queer hero. This is where the deep queer potential of the slasher film lies. The gender-fluidity of its characters shows that "slasher films present us in startlingly direct terms with a world in which male and female are at desperate odds but in which, at the same time, masculinity and femininity are more states of mind than body" (2015: 22).

As has been hinted earlier, Lila Crane can be regarded as a prototype of the Final Girl, seeing that her function in *Psycho* parallels many aspects of the Final Girl – be it her function of propelling the narrative forward, the adoption of the investigating gaze, or the solving of the killer's mystery. Yet, the Final Girl goes beyond the deeds of Lila Crane: "It is not merely a question of enlarging the figure of Lila but of absorbing into her role, in varying degrees, the functions of Arbogast (investigator) and Sam (rescuer) and restructuring the narrative action from beginning to end around her progress in relation to the killer" (Clover, 2015: 40).

The queer elements that constitute the Final Girl are moreover transferred to the slasher film's audience. Here, I would like to especially focus on male audience members, seeing that they firstly comprise the main spectators of horror films (Clover, 2015: xii), and, secondly, they are the ones to identify with a main protagonist of the opposite sex that blurs gender lines. While viewers are first associated with the serial killer through a subjective camera that invites them to occupy the psychopath's voyeuristic gaze, in the course of action the identification shifts to the Final Girl (2015: 45).

Namely, once the Final Girl is placed into the position of the escaping victim, she converts into the spectator's character of identification. This becomes evident as the film starts focusing on the Final Girl in terms of its narrative and camera-wise. Instead of observing the course of action through the killer's point of view, we as viewers are paired with the Final Girl

and her limited perception of her surroundings. Her struggle becomes ours until, in the end, we are able to cheer for the death of the killer and her survival (Clover, 2015: 46). It is interesting that a male viewer would accept the identification with a female lead this easily. In this respect, it is essential to understand that

> [t]he Final Girl is, on reflection, a congenial double for the adolescent male. She is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terrors and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality.
>
> (Clover, 2015: 51)

Clover thus calls the Final Girl a "transformed male" (2015: 52), an idea reminiscent of the performativity of a boy in female drag. Since the male viewer is looking at a "transformed male," he "[is] more willing than we might expect to feel himself on the receiving end of brutal and humiliating acts, one after another, including sexual penetration" (Clover, 2015: xii). Like this the male viewer experiences a moment of queerness while watching a slasher film:

> What is represented as male-on-female violence, in short, is figuratively speaking male-on-male sex […] [T]his logic reads the femaleness of the Final Girl (at least up to the point of her transformation) and indeed of the women victims in general as only apparent, the artifact of heterosexual deflection. It may be through the female body that the body of the audience is sensationalized, but the sensation is an entirely male affair. (2015: 52)

Through the Final Girl, male audience members can thus live out a covert homoerotic experience. In conclusion, as has been shown, the slasher genre is drenched in queer elements. From the killer, to the Final Girl, to the audience's experience, we find that crucial elements of this subgenre are of a queer nature. Additionally, as will be further explored in the next two chapters on the basis of four movies, namely *Dressed to Kill*, *Cruising*, *Sleepaway Camp*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Jack Sholder 1985), many slasher films indeed feature coded or openly queer characters and subplots, which further enhance the queer appeal of this horror subgenre.

4) 1980 – *The Year of Dying Dangerously*

The year 1980 started with two uprisings of film-historic significance that proved American queer communities had gained a voice to collectively protest the discrimination exerted against them by the media and politics. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, this queer momentum was soon to be lost into conservatism's clutch of the unfolding decade.

When filmmaker William Friedkin announced that he was planning to make a cinematic adaptation of the 1970 pulp novel *Cruising* by Gerald Walker, *Village Voice* reporter Arthur Bell, who had years earlier criticized Friedkin for arguably exploiting gay men in *The Boys in the Band* (1970), rose to the occasion to impede yet another homophobic picture in the director's oeuvre (Guthmann, 1980: 2). Thus, a year prior to the film's release – i.e. even before the first scenes were shot – the movie was "accused of slanderously and dangerously implying a link between the gay lifestyle and violence that would lead to violence against gays" (Davidson, 2005: 25).

Cruising presents the story of Steve Burns (Al Pacino), a police officer who accepts an undercover assignment to infiltrate New York's gay male sadomasochism and cruising subcultures to solve a number of murders connected to these scenes. Burns hands himself over to this mission, completely immersing into the shadowy world of homosexual kink. Although only suggested but never fully disclosed during the course of action, the viewer gets the feeling that Burns begins to struggle with his sexual identity and desire the further his mission leads him into the depths of gay nightlife. While he is eventually able to catch a suspect, it is also implied that Burns himself might have turned into a copycat killer. The movie's title is thus a double entendre alluding to both police patrolling and the act of cruising for a sexual partner. Surprisingly, Bell's articles calling for a boycott of the movie mobilized "large segments of the gay male ghetto community in New York City (and, to a lesser extent, in a number of other North American centers)" (Wilson, 1981: 98). Willing to destroy any possibility of the movie's release, the angry mobs' rage led to a wave of vandalism – "windows were smashed, cars overturned, technical equipment on Friedkin's set damaged" (1981: 103). Apart from this urge for destruction, more sophisticated and direct tactics to prevent the crew from filming were developed, such as "shining mirrors onto sets and blowing whistles during sound takes" (Davidson, 2005: 25). Even though the queer community was able to show that they were indeed a factor to be reckoned with, in regards to their aim to stop the film's production they failed. Despite all interruptions, the film

was released on schedule, although approximately sixty percent over budget (Wilson, 1981: 98; Guthmann, 1980: 3). The only change achieved was a disclaimer added at the beginning of the movie, explaining that "[t]his film is not intended as an indictment of the homosexual world. It is set in one small segment of that world, which is not meant to be representative of the whole" (Davidson, 2005: 25).

Following the great controversy surrounding *Cruising*, yet another movie that caused a similar, though less radical, scandal was released later that very same year. Although Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* was mainly critiqued and protested against by feminists for the film's graphic killing of a woman, it was also condemned by the queer community for once again resorting to the idea of a gender-queer killer. *Dressed to Kill* introduces us to Kate Miller (Angie Dickinson), a middle-aged mother and wife, unfulfilled by her marriage, especially in sexual terms. While on a visit in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, she encounters a stranger, whom she follows home after a prolonged and sexually charged cat-and-mouse chase, and with whom she spends the day in bed. Unbeknown to Kate, she has been followed by her gender-confused psychiatrist, Dr. Robert Elliott (Michael Caine). Dressed as his female alter ego 'Bobbi', Dr. Elliott stabs Kate to death in an elevator right after her sexual encounter.

What infuriated many critics at the time was that Kate's murder seemingly represents a form of punishment for her extramarital sexual activity. The murder is witnessed by the prostitute Liz Blake (Nancy Allen), who now becomes actively involved in the criminal investigation since she, as the sole witness, becomes a murder suspect. However, as sole witness, Liz also becomes the killer's next target. The movie progresses with Liz, and Kate's son Peter Miller (Keith Gordon), trying to solve the mystery of Kate's murder, eventually revealing Dr. Elliot as Kate's assailant. It is then disclosed that Dr. Elliott is indeed a transgender individual with a split personality, too confused to be able to decide whether to go through with sexual reassignment surgery.

Besides the anger stirred by both films, there are a variety of other essential parallels connecting the two. Interestingly, Brian De Palma had written a yet unpublished screenplay for Walker's novel *Cruising* before the directorial rights were granted to William Friedkin. This led De Palma to write another movie instead, namely *Dressed to Kill*. David Greven thus argues that De Palma's film "plays out as a much more heterosexually oriented story, yet it bears some elements of *Cruising*'s plot and is not without a few queer elements of its own" (2013: 183).

While the films are indeed very different in terms of content and narrative structure, they both play with the sexual act of cruising – be it of heterosexual (*Dressed to Kill*) or homosexual (*Cruising*) nature.

Another factor linking Friedkin's film to De Palma's is their close connection to Alfred Hitchcock. While this link is more apparent in *Dressed to Kill* – a very open and obvious homage to Hitchcock's *Psycho* – *Cruising* also features a few elements of the 1960 film. All these parallels not only build up a dialogue with *Psycho* but also place both *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill* in the lineage of movies that originated the slasher; in this sense both films can be understood as prototypes of the slasher subgenre. Brian De Palma began directing a series of Hitchcock influenced films in the early 1970s, starting with his thriller *Sisters* (1973) and ending with *Body Double* (1984) (Greven, 2013: 213). He builds up an intertextual relationship with Hitchcock's oeuvre that "is centered on a complex dialectic of affinity and difference" (Wood, 2003: 124). Instead of simply copying his inspirational source, rather, De Palma is interested in interrogating the movies of the grand master, with the purpose of trying to "defy, parody, exceed, and radically re-envision the texts he repurposes" (Greven, 2013: 208). In other words, Brian De Palma's homages reimagine narratives, plot structures and thematic drives found in Alfred Hitchcock's work from an updated, personal point of view, while simultaneously questioning the originals on which he bases his stories (Wood, 2003: 125-6). His films are thus directed at an audience that is on familiar ground in regards to film history. As a result, the film-viewing experience becomes greatly interactive since audiences can actively compare source and intertextual homage during viewings.

The similarities in terms of *Psycho*'s and *Dressed to Kill*'s narrative structures are striking. Both movies begin with a female lead trespassing the boundaries of morality, each one being murdered for doing so halfway through the plot by a sexually ambiguous killer. Next, a transference of female protagonism occurs, i.e. from Marion Crane to Lila Crane (*Psycho*) and from Kate Miller to Liz Blake (*Dressed to Kill*). While in *Psycho* Arbogast builds the connecting part between Marion Crane's disappearance and her sister Lila's sudden involvement in the investigation, in *Dressed to Kill* "the investigator in the film's second half witnesses the murder that closes its opening movement, and the narrative hiatus is abruptly bridged" (Wood, 2003: 132). A transference of characters occurs as well in *Cruising*, although with greater subtlety. This is to say that instead of a character swap, Steve Burns' personal characteristics begin to

fundamentally change throughout the movie. As will be analyzed in detail during this chapter, Burns is introduced as a heterosexual police officer, but soon starts to show personality traits paralleling those of the queer killer he is chasing.

Moving on, *Psycho*'s infamous shower scene is also parodied on several occasions in Brian De Palma's film. The movie begins with a dream sequence, in which an autonomous camera slowly travels from a shadowy bedroom into a luminous bathroom. Two figures appear before the camera. First we see Kate Miller's half-naked husband Mike (Fred Weber) focused on shaving in front of a mirror. The camera then approaches Kate, who is taking a shower right behind him.

Voyeuristically, the camera explores every inch of her naked body, fetishizing each body part, observing her while she feels herself with relish and masturbates. This camera, intruding the privacy of a couple in a sexualized moment, first of all reminds us of the opening scene in *Psycho*, featuring a camera that similarly searches out the hotel room in which Marion and Sam are dressing after intercourse. Even more so, this scene relates to Van Sant's 1998 version of *Pycho* due to its overt portrayal of masturbation. One might thus even go as far as to claim that Van Sant's film was not only inspired by Hitchcock's original but indeed his adaptation was only *possible* after the viewing of De Palma's film. The connection to *Psycho* is further explored when, suddenly, a stranger appears behind Kate, covering her mouth, lifting her up and raping her – a direct reference to the murder of Marion Crane in the shower.

The shower, a safe haven of supposed intimacy and vulnerability, once again becomes the site of horror. Simultaneously, the cause-and-effect relation of sexuality and violence, as well as the punishing gaze – two subjects repeatedly broached in slasher films – are established like this in the very first scene of the movie and will be constantly returned to throughout its narrative. In a circular fashion, the movie closes with another nightmare sequence, this time dreamt by Liz Blake. Liz finds herself taking a shower in Kate Miller's house, the scene of the first nightmarish fantasy. Suddenly Liz feels Bobbi's presence in the room. While searching for an object to defend herself against the intruder, she is surprised by the psychokiller who slits her throat from behind. Finally, there is a third scene referring to *Psycho*'s shower murder, namely the actual murder of Kate Miller in the elevator. Yet this reference is less literal and bears more symbolic value. Just like the shower, the elevator is a confined space where the murder occurs equally unexpectedly. The stabbing itself is shown in a montage sequence consisting of a number of

isolated shots, again an approach clearly reminiscent of Hitchcock. Further, Bernard Herrmann's specific staccato violin screech is mimicked in this scene, again alluding to the text repurposed. Evidently, the three shower scenes referenced in *Dressed to Kill* all play with the postmodern horror paradigm that real horror is located in everyday life, even in the safety of our family home.

While *Cruising* does not include a shower murder of any kind, the film's diverse murder scenes can nevertheless be connected to Marion Crane's killing. Namely, just as in Hitchcock's film, an association between sexuality and violence is formed, as every murder in *Cruising* happens immediately before, during, or after sexual intercourse. Furthermore, the idea of an unaware and unsuspecting victim is also present, as the murderer literally stabs his victims in the back. Therefore, what unifies these different murders is the fact that there is no direct confrontation and the victims are completely unaware of any impending danger.

Dressed to Kill adopts a male-female couple (Liz Blake and Peter Miller) investigating the murder and eventually exposing the murderer, evocative of the duo Lila Crane and Sam Loomis from *Psycho*. Also, both movies end with an explanation by a psychiatrist. Since De Palma borrows a scene, which many scholars have criticized as being superfluous in *Psycho,* and which seems just as redundant in *Dressed to Kill*, Pauline Kael argues that "there is a slight suggestion of parody here, but more likely the resemblance is an homage; the kicker is that it's an homage to–arguably–Hitchcock's worst scene" (1984: 40), which is probably true.

In addition, following the tradition of postmodern horror film, in *Dressed to Kill* as well as in *Cruising* there cannot be a final resolution with the catching of the criminal. Thus similar to *Psycho*'s bleak ending, *Dressed to Kill* closes with Liz Blake's nightmare, which undoes any possibility of a happy ending: the nightmare namely implies that the murder she witnessed will haunt her as a trauma for the rest of her life (Greven, 2013: 230). In the same vein, *Cruising* ends with another mutilated corpse discovery after the supposed killer has been arrested – this time possibly a murder committed by the protagonist Steve Burns. Here as well, violence is depicted as omnipresent, contagious even, and surviving any attempt at being conquered. In both films, the arrest of the criminal is thus overshadowed by the recognition that evil is indestructible and, therefore, present everywhere: the actual ending is suspended.

Naturally, we also find the queerness exploited in *Psycho* in both movies at hand. *Dressed to Kill* features a killer that equates Norman Bates' gender-transgressing potential, while "*Cruising* takes to a delirious degree the doubling of straight and queer masculinities in

Hitchcock's film" (Greven, 2013: 183). More importantly, in all three films queer elements are homo- and transphobically portrayed as violent and murderous.

Cruising furthermore plays with another distinct plot element that links Marion Crane's journey to Steve Burns': "Like the first half of *Psycho*, Friedkin's film is about a descent into the underworld on the part of a 'normal' protagonist" (2013: 185). Not only does this establish a direct connection to Hitchcock, but it also follows the tradition of film noir: "As in many classic noir texts, the protagonist's task […] necessitates his descent into a labyrinthine 'underworld'— here, the gay ghetto—that is normally hidden from 'mainstream' culture." The descent of a noir detective into an underworld furthermore "entails an unsettling of his self-conception" since during this journey the boundaries between "the normative and the deviant" (Davidson, 2005: 26) are blurred. Similarly, Steve Burns will immerse into the depths of the male homosexual S&M and cruising circles, making him question his identity.

Yet, as addressed in the previous chapter, both movies have also been greatly influenced by Italian *giallo* film. In the tradition of *gialli*, both *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill* are murder mysteries that focus on the investigation of a murder instead of the survival of the victims, as is the case in most slashers. Other elements linking these films to *gialli* is the fact that the murders and investigations occur over a long time span and take place in urban settings instead of isolated places. Even visual tropes from *gialli* are detectable in De Palma's and Friedkin's movies, as their killers feature elements of the typical *giallo* killer's disguise: Bobbi wears leather gloves, a black overcoat, and masks herself in female drag – a substitute for the typical black stocking the *giallo* killer uses to camouflage his identity. The killers (or the killer?) in *Cruising* also dress in black and hide their faces in the shadows cast by their leather biker hats. When taking a closer look at the murders, the killer's slashing rampage in *Dressed to Kill* reflects *gialli* in so far as in both we witness graphic killings of women.

In *Cruising* on the other hand, it appears as if one suppressed minority group (women) has been exchanged by another one (homosexual men) to play the role of the victim. Because gay men are often associated with femininity in the public mind, what really falls victim to these psychokillers is femininity, no matter if the victim is a man or a woman. *Dressed to Kill* furthermore adopts the basic plot structure for which *gialli* are known. To be more precise, an innocent person, Liz Blake, witnesses a murder and becomes an amateur detective.

However, unlike *gialli*, no serial killing but only the murder of Kate Miller is

investigated. Another plot development comparable to the *giallo* genre is the fact that Liz also succeeds in driving the investigation forward whereas the police fail in doing so. In comparison, *Cruising* uses the trope of serial killing but does not feature an amateur detective. The film's investigation is undertaken by a police detective, alluding to another *giallo* form, namely the so-called *poliziotto*, which are "films where the police are the protagonist" (Koven, 2006: 7).

More than just copycat *giallo* films, the two movies can moreover be considered *giallo*-slasher hybrids since they also feature a variety of thematic, plot-structuring, and iconographic elements of the slasher subgenre. Here, I would like to recall the five basic elements of the slasher film according to Carol Clover – the killer, the terrible place, the weapons of death, the victims, and the Final Girl (2015: 26-41) – and discuss their presence in both films. Yet, it should be noted that the terrible place is not included in either movie. Instead, it is shown that evil can lurk anywhere in a city.

Although the shadowy gay nightlife in *Crusing* might, to some extent, be perceived as a terrible place due to the violence to which it is connected, it is still too vast a space to correspond to the idea of an enclosed place where all the frightening atrocities of the movie find their pinnacle. Rather, it conforms to the extensive urban settings usually found in *gialli*. Furthermore, most homosexuals in the gay scene seem to be enjoying themselves and are actually quite cheerful about their night out, thus taking away the horrific connotations of the terrible place. Also, the weapons of death used in both films do not require further insight. In each movie the killers use bladed weapons, i.e. knives and blades, which represent the phallus, a point to which I will revert when discussing the murders in closer detail.

Before launching a discussion on the parallels between the killers in both movies and the ones in traditional slasher films, it is important to first clarify who the killers in *Dressed to Kill* and *Cruising* are. In *Dressed to Kill* the killer's identity produces bafflement during the course of the film due to the fact that he is a biological male wearing female attire. However, once Dr. Elliott is revealed to be the criminal behind the mask, the question regarding the killer's identity is immediately settled. When it comes to identifying the killer in *Cruising* the task becomes more ambiguous. As a matter of fact, one might say that it is simply impossible to point out who the one/ the ones responsible for the murders is/ are. While the movie provides an answer to an unobservant viewer, namely that the arrested Stuart Richards is guilty of the crimes, this plain and obvious solution seems unsatisfactory since there remain too many unresolved issues.

The movie first establishes the connection between Stuart and the killings in a dream sequence, in which Richards talks to his deceased father. This dialogue is intercut with images of the previous murders, linking Richards directly to these killings. Yet we should not take these connections at face value. One might instead argue that, maybe, the intercut moments in the dream sequence are the concoction of an unreliable narrator aiming at further confusing the viewer. Nonetheless, there is also the hard evidence of his fingerprints on a coin found at the peep show crime scene. It needs to be remembered that nothing in this film can be taken for granted. The fingerprint might thus be a lie made-up by the police. In fact, Edelson (Burns' superior) and Burns are facing great pressure to solve this case. The incarceration of Richards might thus be an act of desperation on the side of the police (Davidson, 2005: 32; Wood, 2003: 55-6; as reiterated by the internet article by Bill Krohn, 2004). By solving the murder not only do both avoid losing their jobs but furthermore it allows "Steve [to gain] his gold badge and clear the books of all murders Edelson has been taxed with solving" (Krohn, 2004).

Apart from this, an even weightier discrepancy in the movie needs to be addressed: namely, in each murder scene we see a different actor playing the murderer. The murderer's physical appearance thus varies from murder scene to murder scene, as well as his voice, his clothes, his sunglasses, and even the knives he uses to kill his victims (Snyder, 1989: 111, Wood, 2003: 56, Krohn, 2004). This leaves us to conclude that "[t]here are, then, probably at least two different killers" (Snyder, 1989: 111), if not more. Accordingly, this very much reflects the uncertainties of a postmodern world described in chapter 2.2, where "everything becomes a matter of 'if,' 'maybe,' 'let's pretend,' rather than '*this* is what happened'" (Wood, 2003: 56).

However, the fact that Stuart Richards tried to stab Burns in the scene of their final confrontation cannot be denied, although I would read this as a desperate measure of self-defense, rather than a bloodthirsty attack. It is of importance to remember that Steve Burns has very blatantly stalked and shadowed Richards before this scene, which has naturally come to Stuart Richards' attention. Richards is also shown reading a newspaper that headlines the killings in the gay underground scene while noticing Burns' incessant stare. It is therefore possible that Richards links Steve Burns' stalking to the killings, thus believing Burns to be the serial killer following him. When confronted face to face with Burns, it appears as if Richards feels threatened and only tries to protect himself against his prowler by trying to stab him before his opponent anticipates his killing.

This leads us directly to the assumption expressed earlier that Steve Burns himself might be connected to some of the murders witnessed in the film. Burns was assigned for the investigation because he resembles the killer's victims and thus physically fits the killer's 'type' in men. As will become apparent, by adopting the victim's dress codes and socializing in the same circles as they did, Burns not only becomes a mirror image of the victims, but also of every gay man in the scene, including the killer, since they all look alike. This constant doubling of gay men, as Davidson notes,

> suggests the figure of the gay clone: the same-looking, simulacral gay man, a copy for which there is no original. If the clone was one of the primary modalities through which postliberation gay identity was performed, then this was an identity that pointed up identification's constitutive element of imitation. (2005: 47)

In a way, this can be understood as a "seriality and standardization" (2005:47) of the gay 'look' that occurred in the 1970s. In regards to the film this simulacral doubling of gay men symbolizes that anyone can become a victim or a victimizer at any time, leading to total paranoia. The hypermasculine gay clone also presents a conundrum. On the one hand, he oozes masculinity – a desirable characteristic society demands from men. On the other hand, he symbolizes queer desire, the inversion of masculinity in the public mindset as well as the subversion of the deployment of alliance, described in chapter 2.1.

The theory that Burns was possibly involved in a number of murders is moreover based on the fact that, in the course of the film, several parallels between Burns and the supposed killer, Stuart Richards, are created, equating one with the other. Both men are seen "weight lifting to keep in shape, staring at the other through windows, and dressed exactly alike in their highly eroticized, climactic confrontation" (Savran, 1998: 215), eventually becoming almost physically and behaviorally indistinguishable.

The parallels connecting both men go even deeper into their pasts and psyches. Just like the archetypical killer in slasher movies as well as Norman Bates in *Psycho*, Stuart Richards and, to some extent, Steve Burns, suffer from a trauma connected to unhealthy parental ties. As a clear reference to Norman's mother fixation Richards makes believe that his deceased father is still alive, talking to his friends about recent meetings with him. While Norman's psychosis is clearly

linked to his over-caring mother that still influences her son's life from beyond the grave, Stuart Richards' trauma can be ascribed to his absent father. From the letters Richards wrote to his father but failed to mail to him and from their imaginary conversation in the park, one gathers that Stuart yearns for the approval of his father, even exclaiming the wish that "just once you'd say something positive to me" (as quoted from Friedkin's *Cruising*).

In a way, the absent father is the equivalent of the possessive mother, meaning that instead of a surplus of female attention, Stuart Richards experienced a lack of masculinity in his life, which goes back to the Freudian explanation of homosexuality closely inspected in chapter 2.2. The same father issues are also reflected by Stuart's doppelganger Steve Burns. Nevertheless, this parallel is only suggested fleetingly, namely in the scene that first shows him lying in bed with his girlfriend Nancy (Karen Allen). Pleasant violin music plays during a conversation the couple is having about Steve's upcoming mission. However, as soon as Nancy casually mentions that Steve's father called, he appears to get tense, he deeply exhales and, most significantly, the joyous violin music is replaced by threatening, unnerving sounds. Absent-mindedly, Burns tells Nancy: "There's a lot about me that you don't know." When she inquires, "Such as?" he simply remains silent. Instead the scene dissolves into the next one, retaining the eerie music. While Steve Burns' relation to his father remains unexplored, these visual and musical cues nevertheless speak of a broken father-son relation.

Ultimately, the father issues that both Richards and Burns experience might represent the struggle of fitting into patriarchal society, as Wood observes:

> Somewhat explicitly but more by implication, the film's real villain is revealed as patriarchal domination, the "Law of the Father" that demands the rigid structuring of the subject and the repression of all conflicting or superfluous realities—the denial of the Other, both internal and external. (2003: 60)

The violent killings exerted by these men thus "ha[ve] to be blamed on the culture, not on the individual" (Wood, 2003: 56), i.e. a culture of homophobia that encourages the fruition of internalized homophobia and self-hatred through its insistence on compulsory heterosexuality. The real disease infiltrating the world of *Cruising* is thus "our refusal to recognize that the human psyche is a blend of masculine and feminine elements, our refusal to accept human sexuality as a continuum, our persistence in assigning to ourselves and others rigid sexual roles" (Hayle, 1980: 230).

Eventually, the film ends the way it began, namely with a man walking into a private nightclub in New York's Meatpacking District. Since the scene at the beginning of the film was followed by a murder, one might read this as an indication that the killer has indeed not been captured and that he is on the hunt again. It might also be an assertion that all the signs pointing towards Steve Burns' newfound passion for killing were indeed correct. The circular motion of the movie after all alerts us that evil is unkillable in a society that stirs violence with its rigid gender roles. If one killer has been captured, the next one will continue his game – just as the superhuman assassin in slasher movies, who rises over and over again. It also evokes the concept of the perpetuum mobile in the American modernist tradition, or rather the idea of ever-revolving bodies.

The murderers in *Dressed to Kill* as well as in *Cruising* reflect the psychotic killers in slasher films as far as they are all males in gender distress or in a crisis concerning their (hetero)sexuality. Similar to Norman Bates, Dr. Elliott is portrayed as a split personality, unable to reconcile his male and female side. While his male identity is the one of a warm and nurturing psychoanalyst, his female side, 'Bobbi', is an envious, murderous monster. This shows that femininity in a man is again represented as evil and undesirable. Here again we find the equation of queerness, violence, and psychosis, in the tradition of the psychotic monstrous queer first established in the 19th century (as previously explained in chapter 2.1). Bobbi is pushing Elliott to accept her sex reassignment surgery, but to no avail. One can presume that Dr. Elliott refuses to go through with the surgery due to the social implications it would bring.

As a psychiatrist Elliott has achieved a certain status in society that he/ she would lose after his/ her transition due to the raging transphobia of the times. It needs to be remembered that although the gay movement had gained a lot of visibility and tolerance after Stonewall, transgendered individuals were not included into their political agenda, as they supposedly only brought further confusion to the matters for which the groups were fighting (Skodbo, 2007: 25). The rising acceptability of the transgender community is in fact a very recent phenomenon, which was unthinkable in the late 1970s or early 1980s:

> Before the 2000s the terms transgender and transsexual were obscure references in most people's minds, owing to their relative absence from public discourses and limited attention from academics […] Things have come a long way in recent years –owing in part to the visibility of high-profile transgender figures

like Chaz Bono, Lavern [*sic*] Cox, Chelsea Manning, Lana Wachowski, and Caitlyn Jenner, as well as the new presence of transgender themes in popular TV series.

<div align="right">(Trend, 2016: 139)</div>

The Obama administration has furthermore attempted to push transgender issues to the foreground on various occasions, even addressing the transgender community in president Obama's historic State of the Union speech in 2015.

As a form of revenge, whenever Dr. Elliott becomes sexually aroused, Bobbi sees it as her mission to eliminate the cause of Elliott's erecting penis. The awakening of Bobbi happens the instant he becomes sexually stimulated and this shift is visualized each time. We can first witness this transformation when Kate offers to sleep with Dr. Elliott. He then pauses and looks into a mirror with an ominous expression on his face, the gesture that signifies his identity switch. This happens again when Liz pretends to want to have sex with him. It hence appears as if it is in a mirror that Dr. Elliott reaches out to his female shadow-self Bobbi, the flipside to his gentle male self. As has been previously suggested, mirrors can serve to create the doubling of the person regarding his reflection. In the present case, the mirror not only puts the spectator (Dr. Elliott) in face of himself to reveal a side of him that he can otherwise not recognize, but it also speaks of inverted narcissism – a form of self-identification closely linked to self-hatred, or rather internalized transphobia.

In fact, Bobbi is constantly associated with mirrors during the film. In the elevator scene, for instance, the camera focuses on a small circular mirror to show the reflection of the murder taking place. During Liz's final nightmare, Bobbi again first appears in a mirror before we see her slit Liz's throat. Interestingly, it was in a mirror that Lila Crane detected her probable queerness as well. At the same time, this also evokes scenes from *Cruising*, in which we can observe Steve Burns working out in front of a mirror or applying makeup before going out to gay clubs. Here as well, the mirror is used as a tool for transforming oneself. Burns namely uses the mirror to become the stereotypical gay clone. This leads to the conclusion that mirrors can bear the connotation of a closeted double life led by a double-faced person.

Not only is Bobbi vengeful but she is also deeply envious of hyperfeminine women and the opportunities they have to express their gendered desires and charms. Above all, "[t]hese fantasies of women's luxuriant power within and over social and sexual realms only fuel the

killer's misogynistic and self-hating rage" (Greven, 2013: 233). Kate, who arouses Dr. Elliott and immediately afterwards is able to cruise a man and live out a pleasurable sexual fantasy, thus perfectly falls into the pattern of Bobbi's wrath. Since Bobbi is unable to express her sexuality and gender freely, sexuality of any kind infuriates her.

Nonetheless, Bobbi utilizes her gender-nonconforming body to wreak havoc in *heterolandia*. Being a woman in a biological male body, Bobbi takes advantage of her "phallic power that the hyperfeminine Kate does not possess" (2013: 240) by symbolically killing her with a blade, an obvious phallic symbol. This underlines the fear of a queer individual living in the liminal space between genders, or more specifically, the misogynistic anxiety of a woman enjoying the prestige of the phallus.

The same equation of sexuality and violence/murder is presented in *Crusing.* However, since there are, as determined, several killers in the film, it is of importance to approach this discussion in two steps. First, I will consider the sexualized murder scenes. Following this, I will take a closer look at Steve Burns' sexuality seeing that he has possibly adapted the killer's identity.

Cruising takes place in the promiscuous S&M and cruising scenes of late 1970s New York City and thus presents a world tinged with sexual desire. Front and center to this world stand "the possibilities of the male body as a site of worship and a geography of distinct pleasures" (Greven, 2013: 188). The male body is presented as appealing and always ready to be consumed by other men. The gay male body moreover becomes attached with a plethora of signifiers deconstructing the idea of the "homosexual physique". As Greven argues, "[t]he film refuses conventional notions of gay masculinity by making the actor[s] strong and buff rather than pitiably weak-looking, as so many gay males in film have been depicted, particularly in this period" (2013: 197). There is also an element of parody present, seeing that the actors epitomize masculinity through their performance of gender, while engaging in all kinds of homoerotic acts (2013: 200).

This overturns the dominant understanding that masculinity and male homosexuality are incompatible, as homosexuality is widely perceived as the ultimate failure in terms of masculinity. Yet the sadomasochistic urges ever-present in the film also speak of the destructive tendencies directed towards a sexual partner. In a sense it is possible to wonder, with some plausibility, if this proclivity for destructiveness in the film stems from the misconception that

S&M practices are closely related to the internalized homophobia felt within the gay community. In this respect, sadomasochism is often criticized as "*the* privileged instrument for the stabilization of heterosexual patriarchy, the false consciousness that eroticizes power and powerlessness" (Savran, 1998: 217).

According to this, S&M perpetuates the submission of the feminine through the masculine. In a gay relationship this would mean that the sadistic part of a couple can only upkeep his masculinity if his masochistic counterpart is humiliated and therefore feminized. This, however, appears to be an utmost reductive form of sexual shaming, ignoring realities such as lesbian S&M practices as well as female domination as epitomized by the figure of the dominatrix. Besides, equating femininity with humiliation is regressive misogynistic thinking. It needs to be highlighted at this point that although sexual S&M plays nowadays find more acceptance, in the early 1980s the equation of S&M and LGBT people was highly damaging for the community's reputation.

Building upon these negative connotations associated with sadomasochism, in the movie the connection between S&M and violence goes as far as to suggest that "sexual violence and S/M are finally indistinguishable, that homicide is simply an extension of rough sex" (Savran, 1998: 217). The queer underground scene is hence not only extremely sexualized but also highly violent to the extent of murder. Most conspicuously, every murder is committed during a sexual act of homoerotic nature. In all three murders depicted in the movie, the killer stands behind his victim and stabs him in the back – a gesture clearly alluding to anal sex.

In order to further highlight this, Friedkin intercuts these stabbings with subliminal pornographic images of actual anal penetration, which cement the aforementioned connection between stabbing and sexually penetrating a male body. In turn, the subject of pornography is also repeatedly associated to the murders. In the St. James Hotel murder scene a series of pornographic magazines titled *Wrestling* are scattered all around the floor. The image of wrestling again evokes the conflation of glorifying violence and the objectified male body. Next, in the peep show scene a pornographic film is projected onto the wall. Porn in this context becomes a metacommentary on how a certain sense of pleasure is literally derived from the act of looking.

During the stabbing, blood splashes directly onto the projection, again creating an obvious association between sexuality and murder. Above all, this brutalized display of pornography can

be read as a self-reflexive critique regarding our sexualized and violent cinematic viewing habits. After all, it is the sex and the violence that make movies such as *Cruising* appealing to large audiences, regardless of their sexual orientation or identity. It is therefore safe to assume that a movie with queer content would not attract large segments of moviegoers if it were not for its graphic depiction violence and sex.

Similarly, Steve Burns also falls victim to the understanding of sexuality as a violent practice. Burns starts out as a seemingly heterosexual man enjoying an amorous relationship with his girlfriend Nancy. When his boss, Captain Edelson, inquires if he has ever engaged in sexual relations with other men, Burns decisively denies the implication. Soon, this self-assured heterosexuality starts to dwindle. The further he gets drawn into his mission and into the queer underground world, the more the defining categories between heterosexuality and homosexuality get blurred. Although Burns' arising homoerotic feelings are never explicitly expressed at any point in the movie, they are, however, suggested on various occasions. Midway through the narrative, Burns goes beyond his mission to solely observe the men surrounding him and begins to actively partake in the queer conglomeration of men by accepting an invitation to dance. This dance then turns into an energetic "initiation ritual": "His movements are uninhibited, forceful, sexual. Now he meets directly and unabashedly the eyes of those who observe him. Ostensibly the immersion is necessary so that he can do his job; but its [*sic*] totality goes beyond duty" (Hayle, 1980: 229).

It is also suggested that Burns accepts sexual invitations by other men. More precisely, "one scene, set in a bar, ends with him allowing a man to fondle his chest; another ends with him walking off with a man he meets in the Rambles in Central Park" (Davidson, 2005: 31). These sexual encounters, however, are never explicitly shown and only remain on a suggestive level. Burns' identity crisis becomes most apparent when considering his symbolic cries for help that reveal his uncertainty regarding his sexual orientation. To prove his heterosexuality (and the implicit sense of masculinity he receives from it) to himself, Burns returns to his apartment to have "rough sex with Nancy, the camera lingering on the leather wristband that is part of his cover" (Davidson, 2005: 31).

The camera's lingering thus visualizes Burns' true sexual desires that are now connected to the violence he experienced in the sex clubs and which he wishes to transfer to his own sexual relation with his girlfriend. In another scene, Nancy performs fellatio on him. We first hear the

harmonious violin music, a sort of leitmotif that represents their heterosexual relationship. Soon, however, the music is drowned out by sounds of the nightclub scenes. Burns then closes his eyes, as if to fully submerse into the homoerotic fantasy without having to be confronted with the actual heterosexual sex he is having.

Eventually Burns reaches a state of despair, a point at which he needs to express and voice his confusion about these new feelings he is facing, declaring "What I'm doing is affecting me," as well as, "Something's happening to me – stuff going down, I don't think I can deal with it" (as quoted from Friedkin's *Cruising*). To some extent, the changes Burns goes through are reminiscent of gothic monsters such as vampires or werewolves that are overcome by an unwanted transformation. I will return to these parallels when discussing Jesse in a *Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* who suffers a similar fate, namely that "[s]omething is trying to get inside [his] body" (as quoted from Sholder's film). It appears as if the gay ghetto is rubbing off on Burns, as if queerness was contagious – a fear evocative of that of the 'gay agenda', which claims that there is a queer conspiracy to overthrow heterosexuality.

Burns' sexual uncertainty coupled with his internalized homophobia eventually lead to his growing destructive tendencies. The killing of Burns' neighbor Ted Bailey gives more insight into this matter. After Ted's mutilated body is found, Captain Edelson finds out that Steve Burns was the victim's neighbor. As a reaction to this, Edelson utters a shocked "Jesus Christ!" – a clear indication that he connects Ted's death to the fact that he knew Burns, who in turn seemed increasingly confused and anxious (Wood, 2003: 55).

Burns' involvement in the killing of Ted might be linked to Burns' homosexual desires he felt towards Ted. This becomes evident in an earlier scene, in which Burns "has broken down the door of Ted's apartment to fight Ted's jealous boyfriend, who has goaded him with the accusation that Burns and Ted are involved" (Davidson, 2005: 31). Does Burns' repressed anger allude to the fact that Ted's boyfriend indeed touched a raw nerve by exposing his queer desires? Is Burns unable to cope with his homoerotic feelings for Ted and as a compensatory act needs to resort to violence? It is also possible that, to some extent, Ted's murder might have been an act of jealousy committed by Burns, who is unable to openly express his sexuality. After all, if we look at it from our present standpoint without any prejudice, Ted is constructed as a positive gay character that is allowed to embrace his homosexuality and live it out openly, as opposed to the repressed Steve Burns.

Ted's death thus builds a bridge to the killing of Kate Miller in *Dressed to Kill* in so far as ultimately the feminizing attributes of his gayness are punished, i.e. "vulnerability, gentleness, 'femininity' (all intolerable within the world of the film)" (Snyder, 1989: 112). This above all represents the fear of failing masculinity. Burns' sense of belonging to the hypermasculine primarily clashes with his fear of being feminized due to his queer desires. Again, this reveals Burns' difficulty to reconcile his apparent bisexual desires, just as Dr. Elliott struggles to accept his feminine side. Instead, both characters perceive homosexuality and heterosexuality (as well as masculinity and femininity) to be two isolated categories unable to be merged into a single sexual- and gender-fluid unity. The two characters are thus put into a figurative closet, their jealously not only preventing any type of freedom of gender expression but also turning into (self-)hatred stirred by a deep frustration.

When contrasting and comparing the murderers in *Cruising* and in *Dressed to Kill* to the psychokillers in slasher films, the subject of voyeurism (which is constantly exploited in the slasher through point-of-view shots of the killer) needs to be considered as well. In fact, the idea of scopophilia addressed in these films functions as an allegory of spectatorship: in *Cruising*, the entire cruising scene as well as the sex clubs with their diverse public sex acts, all serve the purpose of pleasing the gay male gaze.

In a very masochistic and contradictory manner, the movie namely attracted many gay men lured by its homoerotic potential, despite the fact that the film was widely criticized as being hurtful to the community. During the movie the viewer is not only put into the position of detective Burns observing the queer goings-on but constant subjective shots of the men checking Burns out also place us in the position of the ones cruising. This results in moments of even queering the heterosexual male viewer.

In other words, together with Steve Burns the viewer also goes through a transformation of queer nature throughout the course of the film, seeing that, through the camera work, he actively cruises and is cruised by many men. By breaking the boundaries of the diegetic world, in the final scene Burns makes us aware of our shared transformation through his gaze: "Burns's stare into the mirror and into the camera means that this sense of possible transformation potentially applies not only to the subject in the film (Burns) but also to the subject watching the film" (Davidson, 2005: 45). Taking into consideration that Burns is a potential killer, Burns' point-of-view also aligns the viewer with the killer, another trope reminiscent of slasher films.

In *Dressed to Kill* the voyeuristic gaze is very openly scrutinized and criticized. By emphasizing the gaze, Brian De Palma "underlines the fact that voyeurism is integral to the nature of movies" (Kael, 1984: 37). This is highlighted through the plethora of close ups and extreme close ups of eyes we find in the film. Furthermore, the plot is greatly based on spying, another form of employing the gaze. Amongst others, these spying scenes include the one in which a cab driver gazes at the sexually engaged Kate Miller and her lover on the back seat of his taxi, the scene in which Peter secretly takes pictures of Dr. Elliott's patients through his timed camera, or the scene in which Bobbi spies through Liz's window – a scene which mirrors the one in which Burns spies on Stuart Richards through his window in *Cruising*.

Simultaneously, all the characters' gazes are doubled by the viewer's gaze. Yet, the gaze of the audience goes beyond merely reflecting that of the characters, since audience members are able to witness every intimate moment in the film. Brian De Palma cleverly uses this insight to create a complex intersection of all these gazes. The movie begins with an erotic dream sequence, in which Kate's body is objectified for the viewer to indulge in her beauty. Kate in turn gazes at her husband in the hope of sexually stimulating him; too self-absorbed to even notice the desires of his wife, he only looks into a mirror to see his own reflection. The motif of the invisible desires of a woman is then repeated when Kate enters her son's room to remind him of their plan to visit the museum that same day. He, however, is too captivated by the world of his computers to even look at her. Kate needs to ask him to "put that down and look at [her]" (as quoted from De Palma's *Dressed to Kill*). Both scenes go hand in hand with Laura Mulvey's notion of the "active/male and passive/female" in film – the woman serving only as an object, or rather a "to-be-looked-at-ness" (1975: 19).

While Kate's beauty can be admired, her own desires remain unfulfilled. Just like a passive doll, she is thus used by her husband to reach orgasm in bed while she has to remain sexually unsatisfied. Her son's promise to spend the day with her at the Metropolitan Museum is not met. Moving on, when at the museum all by herself, De Palma focuses on Kate's wishful gaze while observing all the different couples and families around her that represent the happiness and bliss her life is lacking. The subsequent chase between her and her suitor is again based on the opposition between a man that actively sees and a woman unable to see.

Linda Williams explains that in this scene Kate's point-of-view shots allow the viewers to adopt Kate's field of vision "only to demonstrate her failure to see" (1992: 574). Once Kate

breaks out of the passivity her life has so far entailed and finally pleases herself by following the stranger's sexual invitation, tragedy strikes. Right after her sexual encounter, Kate meets a little girl in the elevator who refuses to stop staring at her. The stare of an innocent girl personifies the guilt, humiliation, and shaming that Kate feels after having had sex with a stranger and finding out that he has possibly infected her with a venereal disease.

Next, Bobbi appears onto the scene to bring Kate's final demise. During the slashing of Kate in the elevator, De Palma chooses an extreme close up of Kate's eye gazing directly into the camera while the killer slits her face. One might wonder if her confrontational stare breaking the fourth wall is an accusatory commentary on the thirst for blood of an audience that has grown callous to such high levels of violence as shown in this scene. As noted earlier, when Liz enters the narrative a transference from one character to the next occurs through visual cues. It needs to be stressed at this point that the transference is only possible due to the fact that the main protagonist is killed off and disappears midway through the plot, the same way as in *Psycho*.

Kate namely reaches out her hand to Liz, a clear cry for help. Next we see an extreme close up of Kate's eyes. In a reverse shot, Kate's look is met by Liz's stare in a similar extreme close up. In this way, De Palma creates a moment of female bonding (Greven, 2013: 238). It is now Liz's task to avenge Kate's murder and to solve the mystery surrounding her death. On a symbolic level Kate has granted Liz entrance into her life and family. Liz will not only avenge Kate's death but also, more importantly, bring redemption to the regressive way Kate as a woman has been portrayed in the first half of the movie. Although Liz is a professional prostitute, she is not as easily labeled as an object: this is related to the controlled manner in which she handles her sexuality.

Liz understands her sexual power and erotic potential as well as male desire, all of which she uses for her own benefit. Instead of a passive character, the viewer is now confronted with an active woman who helps to advance the investigation of Kate's murder and, with it, the entire plot development. In this way, Liz inverts Mulvey's concept of the inactive woman in film, an important element that clearly links Liz to the Final Girl.

Liz Blake resembles the Final Girl in manifold ways, especially in terms of her narrative function and regarding her character traits. In regard to the narrative similarities, reminiscent of the Final Girl, Liz is hunted by a psychotic killer in a chase sequence during which she becomes feminized. More specifically, in the movie this is the subway chase in which Liz is followed by

Bobbi as well as by a group of men that harass her. However, unlike what happens in most slashers, this chase does not end in the big confrontation between killer and the Final Girl that brings the killer's demise. Instead, Liz is saved by Peter who sprays Bobbi's face with a kind of mace he made at home and therefore reflects the male savior found in *gialli*.

Most importantly, "[t]he color and texture of this fluid cannot be overlooked; suggestive of semen and therefore of maleness" (Greven, 2013: 231). This greatly emphasizes the supposed non-phallic weakness of the feminized victim, by contrasting it to male heroism and virility. As opposed to most slasher films where the Final Girl acts on her own, in the further course of the movie Peter accompanies Liz's quest. Nonetheless, it is Liz that stands out as the true hero of the story. After all, it is her that beards the lion in his den by meeting up with Dr. Elliott in his counseling office. In this scene Liz once more mirrors Lila Crane's role when she rummages through Dr. Elliott's documents to find out more about Bobbi's identity. Like Lila Crane entering the Bates house, she adopts the investigating gaze that is traditionally withheld from women in film. By becoming the investigating woman, Liz is able to uncover the mystery behind the murderous Bobbi. It is namely through Liz's eyes that we witness the unmasking of Bobbi/ Dr. Elliott in the final confrontation.

Liz's gaze thus deconstructs the killer's invisibility obtained through the costume he/ she wears. Yet, unlike most Final Girls, it is not her that defeats her opponent, nor is it a male that eventually saves the day. Although Peter screams and taps on the window in order to warn Liz from the impending danger, Liz fails to understand what he is trying to communicate. Instead, a policewoman shoots the assailant in a last minute rescue, preventing him/her from stabbing Liz. Here again, the movie speaks of sisterhood: once more it is a woman that helps out another woman in distress. This is to say that this scene might be perceived as an equivalent to the scene in which Kate transfers her role to Liz, so that Liz can avenge her. In the world presented, men, on the other hand, are unable to do so since they are blind to women's fears and desires and use them for pleasure only.

Liz also reflects some character traits of the Final Girl that make her stand out as a similarly gender-bending heroine. To begin with, the main difference between Liz and a *regular* Final Girl is the fact that Final Girls are generally virginal characters while Liz is a prostitute earning her living by providing sexual services. More than only making ends meet, Liz sees her job as a vehicle to aim for higher financial goals, which links her significantly to the male sphere.

She invests much of her earned money into stocks and into her private art collection, a fact that she mentions on various occasions during the course of action. Indeed, in the scene in which she is first introduced to us, we see her talking to a client of hers about recommendations regarding the stock market while she is waiting for the elevator in which Kate Miller is being stabbed.

This reveals that Liz not only uses men for financial profit but also to extract valuable information. Liz is thus first presented as a business-oriented, cunning woman. Next, this dialogue is interrupted by the discovery of the mutilated Kate. As already expected from men in this film, Liz's client immediately runs, leaving Liz to manage the situation alone. With the help of cross-cutting – a succession of shots jumping between Liz waiting for the elevator and Kate's death inside the elevator – De Palma further highlights Liz's masculine traits by comparing and contrasting the two women.

In other words, in this montage sequence the dependent, silenced, and sexually-unfulfilled Kate is counterposed to the independent, confident, and sexually-empowered Liz. The elevator, with its confining framing power, symbolically represents Kate's restricted life and her constant feeling of entrapment. Thus, the montage sequence ends in a convergence of both paralleled actions, alerting the viewer that the repressed life Kate leads will end in her destruction, while the emancipated Liz survives by not entering the elevator – or symbolically the restricted life society demands from a woman. Instead, Liz has become an expert when it comes to adapting her gendered performance to different situations in which she finds herself. When interrogated by Detective Marino, for instance, she starts off playing an innocent girl.

However, as soon as Marino reveals that he knows about her profession, she instantly grabs a cigarette – a phallic symbol representing her gender-bending potential– lights it up and switches into the role of the self-confident, empowered businesswoman. This gender shifting is later on epitomized in a scene in which Liz handles two telephone calls simultaneously, each representing a different social interaction. On one phone Liz is speaking to her employer, Norma, sweet-talking her into making an arrangement with a client for her. On the second phone Liz discusses business with her broker, adopting a cold voice, and handling the call in a very straightforward manner. It is indeed quite significant that she can switch from one gendered behavior to the next within seconds.

Liz has mastered the artistry of gender performance and uses it to make it in a world ruled by patriarchy. In this scene Liz's potential regarding her switching between genders is

furthermore highlighted through the use of the split screen. While Liz's telephone call takes place in the right hand side of the split screen, on the left we see Dr. Elliott listening to a hateful message Bobbi left on his answering machine. He then turns on his television to watch *The Phil Donahue Show*, which Liz is also watching.

Most importantly, on the show a transgendered woman, Nancy Hart, is interviewed, explaining that she used to be a "macho man" (it is the actual expression used in the film), which again stresses the ways in which gender can be performed and molded. It is also a comment on societal expectations regarding the hypermasculine behavior a biologically born male is demanded to perform, leaving no space for the flourishing of the gender form with which he/she truly identifies. Through the split screen Liz is consequently equated with two other gender queer characters - Dr. Elliott/ Bobbi and Nancy Hart.

Yet, as opposed to Liz and Nancy, Dr. Elliott/Bobbi is unable to combine the masculine and the feminine aspects within himself/herself; a fate speaking of great frustration reminiscent of the one felt by Kate Miller, who also felt trapped by the confinements of gender expectations. During the split screen sequence, Liz also places herself in front of a three-piece mirror. By tripling her image, the mirrors reflect on the idea of the fragmentation of her identity by showing that neither identity nor gender are stable or can be pinned down in any way, making her the queer hero of the movie. Nevertheless, unlike Dr. Elliott, she has the potential to choose which gender to inhabit. It is namely in front of the mirror that Liz applies her makeup, an act symbolizing her self-chosen transformation into a feminized self. This way the mirror is again linked to queerness.

Lastly, the victims, another integral part of the slasher, also become of importance in both movies discussed in this chapter. While in the two movies there are fewer killings than in *regular* slasher films and the victims are not teenagers, the adult victims nevertheless also transgress moral boundaries of a puritanical society every bit as the young adults in slasher films. Kate disobeys moral restrictions when she engages in extramarital sex, while the victims in *Cruising* do so by engaging in what is widely regarded as perverse sexual practices.

Similar to the slasher genre, inherent in the murders there exists a strong critique of authority. In *Dressed to Kill* the authoritarian figures are replaced by clear patriarchs and it is Kate in particular that falls victim to patriarchy. The first father figure that appears in the movie is Kate's husband Mike. As has been previously mentioned, during Kate's sexual fantasy, he

completely disregards Kate's obvious yearning for affection and sexual release. The dream sequence ends with a stranger appearing in the shower behind Kate, covering her mouth, raping her.

This gesture establishes the subject of the silencing and the careless abuse of women that will be repeatedly addressed throughout the film. Instead of playing the role of the protector, Mike merely continues shaving. In the very next scene, the warnings of the dream sequence turn reality when Mike has actual, unsatisfactory intercourse with Kate to the background noise of a radio weather forecast ironically speaking about fireworks that Kate is not feeling. Moving forward, Kate is once more betrayed by a man when she finds out that she has contracted a venereal disease from her one-night stand.

The letter she finds in his desk proves that he knows all about his health issues. Nevertheless, he fails to warn his sexual partner (Kate) about the risk she is about to take when sleeping with him. His indifference towards her "shows that she continues to be victimized by the varieties of male arrogance and indifference to women's well-being." This scene, however, takes on even more symbolic importance when taking into consideration that the medical results Kate finds in her lover's drawer lie right next to a magazine headlining "Ted Kennedy's challenge to Jimmy Carter for the Democratic presidential nomination." To this end, Greven further reasons that "[w]hatever the specific import of this cover, in political terms, it alerts us to impending waves of change that affect even this post-coital scene presumably distant from changes in the national and political life" (Greven, 2013: 215-216). What he means by this has to do with the changes from 1970s liberalism to a rising conservatism already felt at the time of the movie's production.

More precisely, "[w]ith uncanny precision, *Dressed to Kill* anticipates the sexual panic and moral condemnations—largely directed towards gays—of the imminent AIDS era." The coupling of the news report with the venereal disease then further underlines this message since it "anticipates a new culture of morality and condemnation about matters of sex […] The possibility that Kate has contracted it suggests her fall into a culture of repressiveness and judgment about sexuality" (Greven, 2013: 216).

Kate's ultimate betrayal by a man she trusted and confided in – i.e. her psychiatrist who is supposed to help her to mental stability – is then epitomized by her murder. Even the well-adapted, gender-fluid Liz is not fully immune to the trap of patriarchal dominance and betrayal.

In her case, she is used by the police force, represented by Detective Marino, who irresponsibly sends Liz into dangerous situations to help him solve the murder case while knowing that she is not involved in the murder in any way (Greven, 2013: 227). Another police officer appears in the subway chase scene. Here Liz calls out the inefficiency of the police by stating, "Where the fuck are you guys when somebody needs you?" (the exact words used in the film). Indeed, the officer then disappears right at the moment that Liz's tormentors reappear and she finds herself on her own again.

In *Cruising* authoritarian figures are ridiculed and portrayed as corrupt and evil. Although the film is often derided for depicting the queer community as violent, we need to bear in mind that before any violence in the queer community is shown it introduces male heterosexual violence employed by the police force. Stephen Snyder connects this omnipresent violence that transgresses sexual orientation to the compulsory hypermasculinity in American society:

> [T]he heavy-leather gay community depicted in the film can be seen as an extension of the aggressive macho-oriented society of the heterosexual world, typified by the police, which tends to suppress femininity in favour of masculine aggressiveness. The result in either world is a displacement of affection by aggression. (1989: 103)

Hence violence is omnipresent in the movie, transcending sexual orientation. The movie opens with the finding of a severed arm in a river, which is then brought to a forensic doctor for analysis. The doctor explains that the arm clearly points to a homicide, yet the police refuse to open up a murder investigation. Instead the arm is stored in the forensic facilities. This scene thus introduces the topic of authoritarian corruption that is then further explored in the next scene, in which we see two police officers driving in a patrol car. One policeman, DiSimone (Joe Spinell), rambles on about his wife leaving him and how he is going to "get that bitch." He then goes on to explain how the city has changed and degradingly comments on the gay men he sees roaming the streets. When two transvestite prostitutes cross his way, he stops and, after a short dialogue, forces one of them to perform oral sex on him.

In the same manner as women are abused in *Dressed to Kill*, authority figures discriminate against and harass homosexual men, thus failing in their task to protect civilians. In the further course of the movie the same police officer "turns up twice in the context of the gay

subculture, cruising Burns once in a bar (where he is closely juxtaposed with Stuart Richards) and once in Central Park" (Wood, 2003: 27). This further establishes the bridge between gay underground life and the police force. The ultimate clash between both worlds happens during so-called 'Precinct Night', a themed party in a gay club where guests dress up as policemen.

This scene "so flagrantly reveals (long before *Gender Trouble*) not only the necessarily performative nature of identities (sexual, gendered, and otherwise) but also the intense homoeroticism that is sublimated in what passes for normative male homosociality" (Savran, 1998: 216). In other words, although greatly denied and fended off in heterosexual culture, homoeroticism is omnipresent. Furthermore, the idea of precinct night exposes S&M to be a possible inherent constituent of cultural hierarchies in the US. The same idea is again returned to in another scene in which an innocent suspect, Skip, is brutally abused by policemen during his interrogation, as Wood comments:

> Finally, the grotesque scene in which both Burns and the innocent suspect are beaten up at police headquarters by an immense black policeman dressed only in a cow-boy hat and jockstrap has only the vaguest narrative plausibility, and seems to be there primarily to underline the connection between the two worlds.
>
> (Wood, 2003: 57)

In this manner, police forces are thus just an extension of the sadomasochistic power rituals going on in everyday life. Besides, the police brutality witnessed throughout the film underlines the idea explored earlier that violence is omnipresent in the American framework. Not only is it found in every stratum of society, it is even institutionalized, thus permeating and corrupting American law enforcement.

In conclusion, although *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill* have, to some extent, rightly been criticized for being misogynistic, homo-, and transphobic, one needs to look beyond the superficial events in both films and detect the feminist nuances and the subtle critique of a patriarchal system suffocating women and queers in the films. The films explicitly use queer killers to show how compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal authority employ restrictions on those perceived as *Others*, which eventually leads to self-hatred and violence against fellow human beings. Again, the monstrous thus lurks amongst us; it is our society that encourages us to turn into violent persons.

The discussion of these two hybrid films has shown that the slasher genre did not suddenly emerge out of nowhere but that it organically evolved by adapting tropes found in a variety of movies from different eras and genres. This is best seen in the aspects *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill* adopt from Hitchcock's *Psycho* as well as from the *giallo* genre as a whole, while simultaneously containing distinctive features inherent in the then still-evolving slasher subgenre (although still not designated as such in 1980).

5) Camp Nightmares

As I have previously mentioned, *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill* came out right before the advent of the big slasher boom that started in the year 1980 and that already subsided a year later due to market saturation. Slasher aficionados, however, did not have to wait for long since Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) would initiate a second slasher film craze only three years later (Nowell, 2011: 249). Nonetheless, between 1981 and 1984 individual slasher films were produced, seeing that the subgenre presented an inexpensive film form, which was easy to exploit due to its simplistic generic story structure. It is in this interim period that Robert Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), a low budget film, was released.

Sleepaway Camp is of utmost interest to the present study since it is a movie that goes beyond the slasher's undercurrent queer potential and presents us with literal queer characters. Much inspired by the narrative structure and summer camp setting popularized by *Friday the 13th*, the movie draws us into the story of Angela (Felissa Rose), who was born a biological male originally named Peter, and who has been forcefully raised as a girl by her eccentric aunt Martha (Desiree Gould), after her father and sister died in a boating accident. Although Angela's personal gender identity has been forced on her and thus remains ambiguous, to simplify matters I will use the pronoun 'her' in the following when referring to the transgender girl.

Eight years after the tragic accident, Angela and her cousin Ricky (Jonathan Tiersten) are sent to camp Arawak, a summer camp nearby the lake where her family was killed. As soon as Angela arrives, she is placed in the position of the outsider for not interacting with or talking to the other kids, and is for this reason bullied throughout the remaining narrative.

Nevertheless, Angela is able to bond with a fellow camper, Paul (Christopher Collet), with whom she gets emotionally involved. Early on, a mysterious prowler appears, executing every person that bullies Angela one after the other. While throughout the film Angela is suggested to be the Final Girl of the movie, in a twist ending it is revealed that she is indeed the killer. It is only in the aftermath of the movie that Angela's/ Peter's gender-nonconforming identity and backstory are fully disclosed.

Another 1980s slasher movie that plays with queerness in such an open way is Jack Sholder's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985), the first sequel of the *Nightmare* movies. In Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), the originator of the

Nightmare series, the protagonist Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) and her group of teenage friends are haunted by killer Freddy Krueger in their nightmares. Freddy is a villain that rises from the dead to take revenge on the children of his murderers:

> In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, an incorrectly signed court affidavit exonerates child molester Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) from the murder of over twenty children that he has committed. The enraged parents of these victims burn Krueger to death and conceal his existence. Ten years later, Krueger returns, and though he still wears his red-and-green sweater and filthy fedora, he now possesses the ability to victimize children in their dreams.
>
> (Kingsley, 2013: 146)

As a means to escape their deaths, the victims try to stay awake as long as possible, lest they give Freddy a chance to kill them. One after the other, they are unable to fight off sleep and are brutally slaughtered in most creative nightmare sequences. Solely the Final Girl Nancy survives and fights Freddy, only to realize that the psychokiller continues living, in a final twist. The sequel, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, takes place five years after the happenings of the first *Nightmare* film. A new family – consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Walsh (Clu Gulager, Hope Lange) and their children, namely teenager Jesse (Mark Patton) and his little sister Angela (Christie Clark) – move into the house Nancy used to live in. Jesse immediately takes up the same role as the once victimized Nancy and begins having nightmares about Freddy's resurgence, waking up each morning drenched in sweat and screaming.

During the course of action Freddy slowly takes hold of Jesse's body, using him as an avatar to murder those around him. As will be further discussed in this chapter, Freddy arises at the time of Jesse's pubescent (homo)sexual awakening. Consequently he becomes the embodiment of the monstrous way Jesse perceives his own homosexuality, conditioned by a homophobic society. Two schoolmates he befriends, Lisa Webber (Christie Clark) and Ron Grady (Robert Rusler), each representing a love interest of a different gender, furthermore highlight Jesse's sexual confusion. Being torn between one and the other, Jesse gets lost in a love triangle. While his homosexual love interest Grady is killed, Lisa survives as the Final Girl of this story. She saves Jesse from Freddy's control (and thus from his own homoerotic desire) with her love, only to discover that Freddy – or Jesse's sexuality – is unkillable, in yet another final twist.

Sleepaway Camp and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* are clearly connected because of their obvious treatment of queer content. Interestingly enough, both lay emphasis on teen killers that are overcome by their queer sexuality, which in turn bestows them with monstrous signifiers. At first glance, the teenage protagonists seem to kill *because* they are sexual deviants. This being said, the movies also attempt to explain that outside factors such as discrimination lead to the killing rage in these teenagers.

The movies thus engage in the blurring of the boundaries between killer and victim, following the trend already perceptible in *Dressed to Kill* and *Cruising*. Namely, Angela as well as Jesse are victims because they do not fit into a patriarchal, heteronormative society. Ultimately, they are turned into victimizers because it is the only possible way to cope with the pressure exerted on them.

Again, in accord with Clover's five slasher-defining tropes, I will now first engage with the trope of the killer. Yet, as stated before, it needs to be considered that in both movies discussed in this chapter, the role of the killer and the victim are merged in postmodern fashion, transgressing traditional boundaries. Hence, in both films it is important to discuss the status of the victim turned victimizer.

After her father's death, Angela (still as Peter) is adopted by her aunt Martha, who feels that having a second son in the family "simply would not do […] A little girl would be so much nicer" (as quoted from *Sleepaway Camp*). Because of Martha's perverted objectification of family life, Peter is subsequently raised as Angela. Due to the fact that the transition to another gender was not something Peter voiced on his own initiative, the endeavor to discuss how far Angela personally identifies with her transgendered identity becomes quite problematic, one might say even unanswerable. One can nevertheless take a look at what her gender transgression means to the people surrounding her, and therefore how the movie "offers an example of an extreme response to the type of abuse many transgender people are forced to endure on an almost daily basis" (Ryan, 2009: 132).

When Angela is first introduced as a teenager, we see her in the security of her family home. Nevertheless, she does not speak to her aunt and even looks down when she is addressed. Angela thus at first appears to be a shy girl, one might assume due to the trauma she suffered when losing her family in the fatal accident. However, when taking into account the remainder of the narrative, her silence might rather reflect on the way her gender expression as a boy has been

silenced by her aunt. Indeed, Angela will upkeep this silence until halfway through the movie when she finds a friend and companion in Paul whom she feels romantically connected to.

Having broken the code of medical ethics, which Martha as a doctor is supposed to follow, she then explains that she took the liberty to fill out Angela's physical exam herself, instead of consulting another doctor (as is the norm). She furthermore alerts the girl that this is supposed to be kept a secret from anyone at camp since "they wouldn't approve of that at all" (as quoted from the Hiltzik's film).

Not only is aunt Martha forcing her nephew/ niece to switch gender but simultaneously compels her into a closeted life. This leads to the expression of much pressure on the behalf of Angela, who needs to cautiously consider her every move so as not to be outed. At summer camp, a place of supposed joy and relaxation, she hence stays on constant lookout. As a protective measure, she distances herself from her fellows, a move that ostracizes the girl even more.

Once Angela arrives at Camp Arawak, she is immediately excluded by the other campers. As has been noted in chapter 3.1, in the 1980s queer characters were commonly depicted as loners, living isolated existences outside the public sphere due to their undesirability. Angela with her reserved ways perfectly fits into this model. On camp, the especially hyperfeminine Judy will turn into her principal tormentor. The great contrast between the two girls is immediately emphasized in the first scene in which they interact.

While Angela unpacks boyish polo shirts at the shared cabin, Judy empties numerous makeup supplies from her bag. Although both girls wear the same camp attire, Judy stands out with her hip-length wavy hair and curvaceous body. In contrast, Angela is flat-chested, with a boyish figure. Interestingly, it is Angela's incessant staring that catches Judy's attention. As far as the demands placed by society on the female gender go, this act could be interpreted as Angela's admiration of a biological woman, representing what she is supposed to become. Yet, this gesture only infuriates Judy, who teams up with junior counselor Meg to tease Angela for the remainder of the story.

Angela attracts further negative attention at camp because she does not speak or eat with the others, thus receiving special treatment in her choice of food. Moreover, Angela refuses to engage in any sportive or swimming activity, preferring to sit and watch, a choice she probably makes lest she attracts notice to her biologically male body. Her non-conformist behavior is

quickly noticed by her peers and misunderstood for arrogance or as a mental disturbance. She is bullied and called a "nut cake," "looney-tunes," or "fucked up." At one point these insults get completely out of hand, when camp counselor Meg gets so infuriated with Angela that she physically attacks her, shakes her aggressively, and threatens her with the words: "Goddammit, answer me, Angela!" (as quoted from the film). Later, Meg's aversion towards Angela takes her to the point of grabbing the girl and throwing her into the lake, knowing that Angela is afraid of water. To top this off, a group of small children throw sand at the flustered victim.

Technically, Angela is very non-confrontational; she is a girl that rather prefers to keep to the sidelines. Yet, the summer camp serves as a microcosm of society as such, copying its hierarchies and demands. Hence, because of the fact that Angela does not fit in, others feel the need to discipline her in order to turn her into an active, well-adjusted member of patriarchal society with its rigid gender norms. This *us* vs. *them* mentality in the end helps to control and condition the Other and to keep any deviant forms of being at bay. It goes hand in hand with the idea of interpellation discussed in chapter 2.1, a process of continuous re-confirmation of an individual's role in society to the end that it is turned into a naturalized self-evidence. All in all, it is fair to say that Angela is bullied because she "fails the test of heterosexual, gender-normativity and is [therefore] publicly condemned" (Ryan, 2009: 211).

What is also brought into focus when Angela refuses to participate in group activities is her fear of revealing her queer body. In order not to be exposed as gender-nonconforming, the transgender girl carefully avoids every situation that could lay bare her male sex. To escape the predicament she would be placed in, Angela needs to take measures to protect herself from her (transphobic) peers: "The young teen has to be quite meticulous to keep the charade alive. She plans her showers when none of the other girls are around and refuses to swim in the lake to ensure no one notices just how flat her chest is or that there is a bulge in her pants" (Gardner, 2012: 98).

Her queer body thus furthermore confines her into a corporeal closet. Comparatively, all other kids at camp do not feel the need to hide their bodies. On the contrary, most boys and girls at summer camp wear very short shorts and tank tops that accentuate their male and female figures. A group of boys completely confident in their bodies even goes skinny-dipping. As a matter of fact, this very scene also engages with the thin line between homosocial and homosexual bonding. Jumping naked into a lake at night with friends can be perceived as part of

an initiation rite for young teenagers to prove the importance of virility, male solidarity, and membership.

At the same time, due to the movie's blatant queer subtext, this scene might also appeal to the homosexual male gaze, turning these bodies into bodies of queer desire. In the end, the exposure of gender-conforming bodies greatly contrast against Angela's yet-underdeveloped, boyish physique and her insecurities regarding her body. In this way, the queerness of her body is further heightened. During the course of action Judy points this out, by unintentionally outing Angela as queer: "Hey Angela, how come you never take showers when the rest of us do? You queer or something? Oh, I know what it is. You haven't reached puberty yet. I bet you don't even have your period." She furthermore adds, "She's a real carpenter's dream: flat as a board and needs a screw" (as quoted from Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp*). While Judy comments on Angela's underdeveloped body, Angela most probably understands this comment as a sign that Judy is coming closer to her sexual truth.

Since Western society lays ample emphasis on genitals as the sole descriptors for "the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy" (Stryker, 2006: 3), the revelation of Angela's penis would override the perception of Angela as belonging to the female gender (notwithstanding the fact that we are dealing with an imposed sexual identification). More precisely, this stems from the fact that "'sex' is a mash-up, a story we mix about *how* the body means, which parts matter most, and how they register in our consciousness or field of vision. 'Sex' is purpose-built to serve *as* a foundation, and occupies a space excavated for it by an epistemological construction project" (2006: 9).

The revelation of Angela's penis thus implies a number of negative results that could put her in a precarious situation. Firstly, from the moment of exposure on, Angela would be perceived as a man by her peers since "the possession of a penis by a male and a vagina by a female are essential insignia. Appropriate feelings, activities, membership obligations, and the like are attributed to persons who possess penises and vaginas" (Garfinkel, 2006: 62).

Consequently, not only would she be ascribed certain male signifiers due to her sex but she would also be perceived as a second-class version of the male sex henceforth. This once more alludes to the common practice of degradation of femininity. A man 'choosing' to be a woman thus chooses to let go of the phallus and thus of his patriarchal power in order to become a 'powerless' woman (as the widespread misconception in Western society goes). As a result,

Angela's gender-fluid body could not be accepted as such, but a classification needed to be found, since "wherever there are cases of males with vaginas and females with penises there are persons who, though they may be difficult to classify, must nevertheless be in principle classifiable and must be counted as members of one camp or the other" (2006: 64).

The film is very much aware of the devastating consequences Angela's unveiling would cause and delays her full exposure to exploit it as the climax of the movie. The scene in which Angela's gender-fluid body is eventually revealed thus not only becomes the twist of the film but is also misused for intense shock value. Just like in *Psycho* and *Dressed to Kill*, the revelation of the gender-nonconforming body is exploited in order to dehumanize the transgender individual. In the scene of her 'unmasking', Angela namely "stands up covered in blood, her hair and eyes wild, making a hissing noise, with her bloody knife at the ready." The camera then dollies out to fully expose her naked body, showing her penis. The impact of this image is further enhanced by the reaction of the two counselors that witness Angela's revelation: "Susie screams and covers her eyes, but Ronnie's gaze keeps alternating between Angela's face and her penis. It is clear from his gaze that he is just as terrified of the fact that Angela has a penis" (Miller, 2012: 155).

Eventually, Ronnie gives the only explanation he can find when seeing Angela's queer body, namely that "she is a boy" (as quoted from the film). This statement correlates with what I discussed above, namely that in our binary gender system, gender-fluidity is not accepted, but needs to be rationalized to one constrictive form of gender. The penis with its all-encompassing power in Western culture, thus takes away every female signifier on Angela's body and – in the eyes of the gender-conforming characters in the movie as well as the audience witnessing the spectacle of her gender-monstrosity – immediately reduces her to a *male identity*. However, she cannot be fully accepted as a boy, but is rather regarded a deviation, a perversion of the masculine, "precisely because to no longer be clearly male or female renders one as subhuman: monstrous and animalistic" (Ryan, 2009: 218). The monstrosity in Angela's transgender body is wrongly supposed to represent is highlighted through her animalistic body posture and the growling noise she makes.

With gaping mouth and wide-open eyes, Angela looks like a rabid beast. Her body posture, the sounds she emits, the dramatic music, as well as the witnessing characters' reactions to her naked body, all heighten the shock the audience feels when seeing the revelation, dictating us to perceive her gender-nonconformity as undesirable. Being situated in the liminal space

between two genders, Angela's body becomes the abject, a spectacle of horror, comparable to the bodies of monsters in horror movies, that need to live in the shadows since their bodies are too gruesome and repulsive to be seen. After all, in this context, her body "functions as a mask, like those the other monsters wear" (McDougald, 2009: 19). Furthermore, the knife Angela is holding, the decapitated head that falls off her lap – like a queer (in all possible senses of the word) Salome or Judith – and her gender-queer body conflate into the idea that Angela is murderous *because* she is queer.

It is also of interest to consider the reasons the movie gives regarding Angela's queer 'origins'. In the film there are several cues that clearly support the stance that queerness is not inherent but rather a result of a variety of circumstances and wrongdoings in one's childhood coming together. In particular two major traumatic events are broached in the movie that supposedly initiated Angela's descent into queer realms. The first past event that deeply influenced Angela's sexuality was the night when Angela (still Paul back then) and her deceased sister witnessed their father lying in bed with his male lover, caressing each other's hair and skin gently, looking into each other's eyes.

While this scene of homosexual romance is portrayed very sympathetically, the negative effects the movie wrongly claims it to have on the children's sexuality are then inappropriately emphasized. In the next scene the two children sit in bed, facing each other. While the boy (Angela) is pointing at his sister the camera encircles the two. With each cut, not only the camera gets closer to the kids but also the children move closer and closer together. The boy pointing at the girl, and the camera work which increases the closeness of the two, elicit the idea of the merging of the two genders. This scene clearly hints towards the widely popularized misconception that 'wrong' parenting can cause a child to 'turn' into a sexual deviant. The mother's/ woman's substitution by a same-sex partner is incorrectly exposed as causing a confusion regarding normative gender roles in children.

As a matter of fact, discourses attacking children with 'two fathers' or 'two mothers' became commonplace in the 1980s and might have inspired this very scene. It is also of utmost importance that Angela remembers this incident the moment that Paul fondles her. This specifically reveals that she parallels intimacy to the sexual relation her father was having with another man. Seeing that the movie limits Angela to one gender in its final scene, and thus portrays her as a boy in female disguise, the paralleling of the two scenes described above might

serve the purpose of showing that her father's overt display of homosexuality influenced the sexuality of his children.

Notwithstanding the fact that the movie gives no direct cues regarding Angela's personal gender identification, the message that is conveyed is that just like her father, the penis-carrying Angela kissing a boy equals two boys kissing – one of them, Paul, however, being fooled into engaging in this queer action. It follows that if you are exposed to homosexuality as a child, you might become queer later in life. While Angela's father is made responsible for Angela's 'same-sex' desires, her aunt Martha is the person that adds the final touch to Angela's queer monstrosity by giving her a non-conforming body.

The protagonist of *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*, Jesse, as a supposed closeted homosexual, goes through equally unpleasant moments of having to dim his sexual expression. Similar to Angela in *Sleepaway Camp,* Jesse is a teenage outcast. Naturally, this can be attributed to his queerness and his nonconformity to societal gendered and sexual standards. Since Jesse's queerness is never voiced openly throughout the movie but is nonetheless deliberately used on a metaphorical level, it is necessary to first engage with the movie's queer potential.

In the documentary *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy* (2010), scriptwriter David Chaskin reveals that Jesse was intentionally constructed as a gay teenager: "I started thinking about guys being unsure of their sexuality and I thought, 'Well, that's pretty scary'." A conjunction of circumstances helped to elevate the queer potential of the movie beyond the queer undertones in the script. Having a gay production designer on the team who was aware of the movie's queer subtext helped to spice up the queer nuances even further. As explained in the documentary, he namely implemented subtle cues suggesting Jesse's homosexuality, such as a sign on his bedroom door reading "No Chicks" as well as the "Aftate Jock Itch" spray (a rectal joke, seeing that jockstraps are derriere-accentuating) or a game of "probe" found in the *closet*, alluding to the anal sex toy.

Above all, Mark Patton (Jesse) is a gay actor who brought his own note of queerness to the movie, as he confirms: "And I think that's what I was doing in *Nightmare on Elm Street* is I was revealing who I really was, and I think that came clearly through the screen." Yet, the rest of the production team, including director Jack Sholder did not seem to notice the flagrant queer connotations of the film. Sholder explains that he "simply did not have the self-awareness to realize that any of this might be interpreted as gay […] [He] also had not the slightest idea that

one of [his] lead actors was gay" (as transcribed from *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy*).

When taking a closer look at the plot, it becomes apparent that Jesse's character development can be paralleled to a teenager detecting his first homoerotic desires amidst a general atmosphere of homophobia. *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* immediately introduces the idea of Jesse's outsider status in a very exaggerated form. The movie namely opens with a dream sequence that depicts an everyday ride home from school in a yellow schoolbus. While all the other children in the bus are happily chatting, Jesse sits in the back all by himself with a very disturbed look on his face.

In the homophobic manner in which LGBT individuals were characterized in the 1980s, he is portrayed as the gay loner unable to interact with the other kids that sit together in gender-mixed pairs, flirting, laughing. His sickly pale skin and his greasy hair speak of uncleanliness and disease – thus directly linking him to the widely-spread image of the AIDS-infected homosexual of the 1980s. One by one, the children get out at their respective bus stops until there is only Jesse and a couple of girls left. Interestingly, the two girls represent the only same-sex couple sitting next to each other in the bus and could therefore be deemed a lesbian pair.

We then hear one of the two girls whispering behind Jesse's back: "I don't know, he's right behind us," the second girls replies "No way!" This dialogue from the movie is reminiscent of the fear and paranoia queer individuals feel in regards to being publicly outed or others commenting on their sexual orientation. All of a sudden, the bus accelerates. It leaves the premises of suburban utopia and drives off into an infertile, deserted landscape. Soon, the desert sand breaks open all around the school bus, leaving the bus hanging on a rock about to fall into a fiery abyss. The three queer characters have ended in hell – the place that many radical religious groups of the 1980s (and still today) preached the homosexual community would end in. To top this nightmare, the bus driver turns out to be Freddy Krueger, who lifts his bladed glove to slash the three kids the moment that Jesse awakes screaming.

Jesse's queer scream is then shown to disrupt the family bliss of his parents and his sister, Angela, happily having breakfast. Angela turns to his mother wondering "why can't Jesse wake up like everybody else?", a comment that again clearly emphasizes the Otherness that Jesse represents in comparison to "everybody else" surrounding him.

Over the course of action Freddy is slowly introduced into Jesse's dream world. At first a

vague, menacing shadow peaking through the family's kitchen window, Freddy soon assumes form and confronts Jesse with his grotesque body. The first time Jesse finds himself face to face with Freddy, the monstrous killer gently brushes a strand of hair from Jesse's face and explains his evil plan to unite with the teenage boy since "[Jesse has] got the body – I've got the brain" (as quoted from Sholder's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*). The subtextual sexual allusion of this dialogue is most obvious. Jesse then wakes up again and loudly screams "No!" His outcry speaks of the revelation his queer dream brought him, namely that he has homoerotic feelings (represented by Freddy) that he is in denial about.

As a matter of fact, continuously over the film Jesse will wake up drenched in sweat, which, as Benshoff argues, "suggests the imagery of AIDS-related night sweats" (Benshoff, 1997: 246). Since Jesse represses his feelings of homosexual nature, his unconsciousness makes them surface in his sleep as nightmares. In fact, throughout the *Nightmare* series we can find allusions to repressed sexuality living behind immaculate suburban white picket fence houses. Yet, Krueger only appears to teenagers, or, more specifically, "Krueger's reemergence coincides with the emergence of the teenage characters' sexuality" (Kingsley, 2013: 146).

As a teenager Jesse finds himself at a crossroad between childhood and adulthood in which his (homo)sexual feelings awaken for the first time. *Sleepaway Camp*'s Angela is in the same boat. Since puberty is accompanied by hormonal and bodily changes, her masculine physical features evolve and complicate to keep up her feminine exterior. Her imposed sexual identity thus clashes with biological characteristics. For the protagonists of both movies puberty symbolizes a sexual turning point that will bring on bodily as well as personality-related changes.

Freddy also functions as Jesse's doppelganger, a motif used in Gothic literature as "the external double who commits crimes and indulges the passions that their counterpart is too respectable to enact" (Kingsley, 2013: 147). As a matter of fact, a similar use of the doppelganger has already been discussed in Friedkin's *Cruising*. Transferring this concept to *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*, the atrocious passions that the respectable side of Jesse is too afraid to showcase are his homoerotic desires as well as his murderous instincts. They are thus carried out by his monstrous doppelganger Freddy Krueger. Jesse's disappearance from screen whenever a murder is committed by Freddy reinforces this line of reasoning: "In the male Gothic, the *doppelganger* typically cannot occupy the same space as its masculine host: Dr. Jekyll is forced to suppress the evidence of Mr. Hyde's murders, and Victor Frankenstein always arrives too late to halt his

creature's crimes" (2013: 148-9).

As has been suggested earlier, Jesse also goes through bodily changes when turning into Freddy Krueger. The transformation to his queer monstrous self mirrors the way Jesse perceives himself as the queer abject. The ugliness he feels his homosexuality to be is thus mirrored by the monstrous body of the killer. Simultaneously, Jesse's bodily transformation can be paralleled to the way AIDS patients were dehumanized by the disease in the early years of the crisis. This parallel is indeed viable since homosexual males were widely equated with AIDS patients in the 1980s. As explained in chapter 3.1, the disfigurement resulting from the disease brought upon "aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny" (Sontag, 1989: 41).

Jesse is therefore not only publicly condemned because of his sexual orientation but also physically judged as the diseased alien Other. The revulsion his Jesse-as-Freddy self is supposed to evoke is conveyed by the special effects used whenever Freddy appears on screen. We see Freddy for instance opening up his skull in order to reveal his brain to Jesse. The pool scene towards the end of the movie gives even more insight into this matter. It is here that Freddy confronts a crowd of people that run away from him as soon as the killer is spotted. His visual is namely immediately connected to the undesirable, threatening Other, and therefore reminiscent of the way AIDS patients were wrongfully sidelined by society due to their weakening, sick bodies.

Freddy epitomizes the AIDS-abject: the characters are afraid to even get close to him in fear of getting contaminated. Freddy then begins to merciless kill one party guest after another. Interestingly, only men are hunted and killed by him while all female guests are spared. This again can be paralleled to the general misconception that HIV/ AIDS only affected gay white men. Freddy then exclaims, "You are all my children now" (as quoted from the film), and like this announces the heritage he will leave as the diseased queer predator: suffering, decay, death.

The takeover of Jesse's body by Freddy also evokes the physical metamorphosis another classical horror creature goes through, namely the werewolf. Where in the classic story there was a night with a full moon, in the case of the present movie sexual arousal will bring upon corporeal changes. In both cases the ones afflicted by the transformation go through deep pain caused by the bodily modifications that give way to an alternative, horrifying physical appearance. Beside these physical alterations, both victims also experience fundamental identity changes and end up as ravenous, dangerous beasts with an instinct to hurt or kill other beings.

Taking this idea even further, as a matter of fact, the werewolf could be used as an allegory for the AIDS-infected individual – not only due to the bodily change that parallels the physical changes AIDS patients went through, but also because he is able to infect others with his bite: "The wolf, essentially always part of a pack, infects through the bite. The mouth […] – more correctly the jaw or snout, fanged to infect, not to kill or eat – accesses the molecules of the 'victim'" (MacCormack, 2009: 143). The diseased queer similarly belongs to a pack of outsiders and in the public eye is still falsely regarded as a danger because of his 'contagious' body. Moreover, it is with his mouth that the werewolf infects others. This orifice gains the same sexual connotation as the bite of a vampire, and hence again evokes the idea of a sexual act that is infectious and brings doom to the self and to others.

Returning to Jesse's quest through the horrors of exploring sexuality, the scene in which Lisa finds Nancy's old diary in Jesse's closet (the closet here being also the figurative closet in which Jesse needs to hide his homosexual feelings) gives further insight into the parallels between sexuality and violence – a topic that has already been greatly discussed in the context of *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill*. Lisa namely starts reading Nancy's diary in a "sultry, provocative voice" (Degraffenreid, 2011: 956).

In this diary entry Nancy describes how she spies on Glen, who lives across the street, while he gets ready to go to bed: "His body is slim and smooth and I know I shouldn't watch him but that part of me that wants him forces me to. That's when I weaken. That's when I wanna go to him." Jesse then takes the diary and goes on reading another entry: "He comes to me at night. Horrible, ugly, dirty, under the sheets with me. Tearing at my nightgown with his steel claws" (as quoted from the film). Recognizing the claws from his own dreams, Jesse becomes visibly anxious. Indeed, the language used in this entry is very reminiscent of that used by rape victims. It furthermore builds the counterpoint to the first diary entry, which was about the pleasures of sexuality. The phallic claws speak of danger and of death, since Nancy finishes with the words "He wants to kill me." It is this violent side of sexuality that Jesse will experience; i.e. the dangerous and lethal one he represents as the clichéd image of the sexually active gay man. Harry Benshoff adds:

> It is also significant that Lisa reads the more "normal" part (desire and guilt over lusting after her boyfriend) while Jesse reads the truly monstrous part about Freddy. The fact that Jesse's reading places him in the role of the girl

further feminizes him and gives a clue to his real disturbance: homoerotic feelings which are displaced onto Freddy's murderous rampages. (1997: 248)

The remainder of the movie involves "Freddy pop[ping] out of Jesse at [every] moment of (homo)sexual cognizance. As the embodiment of Jesse's internalized homophobia, Freddy keeps Jesse from indulging in homosexual acts, even if it means killing the prospective partner" (Benshoff, 1997: 248). One of these "prospective partners" is Jesse's sadistic physical education teacher, coach Schneider (the only character that is openly characterized as gay in the entire movie). He namely punishes Jesse and his friend Grady repeatedly by forcing them to do pushups after class. It is during one of these punishments that Grady reveals to Jesse: "The guy gets his rocks off like this. Hangs around queer S&M joints downtown. He likes pretty boys like you" (as quoted from the film).

Indeed one night, overcome by Freddy (or rather by his same-sex desire) Jesse seeks out the indicated bar, located in a shabby alleyway. Here, the film resorts to the pre-Stonewall image of queer bars that need to stay hidden from mainstream due to their deprivation and are mostly little dark places where those shunned by mainstream society can meet up. When the viewer enters the bar with Jesse, very much like in *Cruising*, the camera pans through the establishment for the audience to gaze at the queer clientele.

The question why the teenage Jesse would leave his home on a rainy night to visit a gay bar is easily answered: because the teenager knew he could find someone to please his desires there. His wish is soon fulfilled when the soaking wet Jesse encounters his coach in leather gear. Together the two of them return to the school's gym "where Jesse (in some form of bizarre homo-horror movie foreplay) runs laps while the coach watches" (Benshoff, 1997: 248). The coach then disappears into the equipment room to get some rope, presumably as a tool for bondage play. All of a sudden, all sorts of balls take on a life of their own and start shooting at him. A pair of ropes magically attack him, grab him by the wrists and drag him to the showers where they chain the coach to the shower heads. Schneider's clothes are then ripped off by an invisible force. Stark naked he is spanked until he bleeds. Meanwhile this scene is intercut with Jesse, at first taking a shower calmly, then standing there observing the events.

Seemingly out of nowhere Freddy takes the center stage, approaches the coach and slices his back. To dramatize this death scene, the showers gush out blood and drench the entire shower room in red. All in all, the scene "titillates the audience with its homosexual foreplay, but instead

of reaching a sexual orgasm, the screen is showered with a bloody ejaculate" (Benshoff, 1997: 248).

This scene is thus very reminiscent of the peepshow murder in *Cruising*, in which blood was spilled onto a screen showing a pornographic film in order to suggest that (homo)eroticism can never be rid of violence: one must always imply the other. This shower stabbing – another reference to *Psycho*, as we have seen in many ways the originator of the slasher genre – is then disclosed to have been committed by Jesse, who stands in the showers "now drenched in blood, screaming at the body and the claw-glove that *he* is now wearing." Benshoff points out that this "*might* be read as a metaphoric homosexual panic attack, in which Jesse, having been aroused by the possibility of a sexual encounter with his coach, murders him rather than admit to his homosexual feelings" (Benshoff, 1997: 248).

Jesse's desire for other men becomes even more apparent when analyzing his close relation with friend Grady. The two teenage boys first interact at a baseball game, during which Jesse is hit by a ball and falls down. Grady then symbolically comes to Jesse's rescue. More precisely, he approaches Jesse and slaps him gently on the cheek, a gesture that almost evokes a tender caress. Later during the game Grady tackles Jesse to the floor, grabs his shorts and pulls them down, revealing Jesse's jockstrap and his bare buttocks. Clover explains that the pulling down of shorts are "oblique sexual gestures, the one threatening sodomy or damage to the genitals or both" (2015: 4). Indeed the situation turns to a rape-like fight. Jesse lying down with his behind revealed, while Grady in his short shorts forces him onto the floor is very evocative of violent, non-consensual sex. Thus once again, the homoerotic subtext used in this scene further highlights the falsely popularized notion of the brutality inherent in same-sex desire the movie seems to emphasize. Just as in *Cruising*, homosexual sex needs to be connected to violence, to dominance and humiliation.

Despite their quarrel, Jesse and Grady become good friends – one might claim even more than friends. We namely see the two newfound 'buddies' in a couple of scenes talking in a locker room after physical education, the locker room being "a homosocial environment through which homosexual men can go beyond friendship and experience sexual relationships" (Morriss-Roberts, 2013: 177). In the locker room the two teenage boys comment on the sadistic coach Schneider, joking that he has got a "stick up his ass" (the actual expression used in the movie). Not only does this refer to the teacher's sternness but furthermore it is a pun of homoerotic intent.

In fact, this is one of many anal sex analogies in the script, arguably intended by the scriptwriter. The space of the locker room enhances the importance of the teenagers' comments. According to LaCaruba, homosocial bonds in locker rooms are often established "through the exclusion of women and homosexual men, and an ideological emphasis on men's difference from, and superiority to, them" (2014: 14). By joking about the coach's same-sex desires, the boys find a way of bonding without having to express their affection for one another.

Having established an atmosphere of desire and affection between the male characters, a scene halfway through the film then highlights the love-interest between the boys. During lunch hour, Jesse and Grady sit in the school's lunchroom when Grady asks Jesse out to the movies. As soon as Lisa and a female friend of hers arrive Grady backs down. The two girls greet him nicely, yet he refuses to reply and when asked if he will come to Lisa's party, Grady harshly declines the invitation and uses a sarcastic excuse not to go. When Jesse next addresses him harshly, Grady gets up annoyed and leaves. The undercurrent dynamics between the two speak of a tension that goes beyond mere homosocial friendship.

Then there is Lisa, the heterosexual counterpart to Grady. She represents the heterosexual potential Jesse should aspire to embrace as a heteronormative citizen. During the movie the two begin hanging out and then slowly turn into a couple. Lisa represents an amorous possibility that Jesse's family clearly welcomes. When Jesse first mentions Lisa's name at home, his otherwise absent father inquires interestedly, "Who is Lisa?" (as quoted from Sholder's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*), while Jesse's mother simply smiles proudly. Lisa after all embodies Foucault's concept of the *deployment of alliance*, the possibility of reproduction and Jesse's integration into patriarchal, heteronormative society. Lisa also becomes Jesse's confidant in regards to his dreams.

Yet, whenever he tells her about Freddy – the metaphorical embodiment of his homoerotic feelings – Lisa finds a way to talk Jesse out of believing that he is real. She thus tries to make him understand that his dreams are not happening to him but that he is "picking up some psychic signals" (as quoted from the film). Arguably, as his potential girlfriend, Lisa refuses to believe in his same-sex attraction, preferring to live a lie instead.

The further Jesse gets drawn into Freddy's nightmares, the more he distances himself from Lisa. Lisa notices this, exclaiming "I wish you would talk to me. You know, we can figure it out. We can figure it out together." Jesse observing that she is unable to empathize with his

struggle responds coldly: "There is nothing to figure out" (as quoted from the film). At Lisa's pool party he thus sits all by himself while all other heterosexual party guests – including Lisa's parents – enjoy themselves, flirt, and engage in kissing.

All of this greatly contrasts the loneliness he feels as a closeted homosexual in public. Lisa then follows Jesse into a cabana, where they lead an ambivalent dialogue. Completely distraught, Jesse tells her: "Listen, I'm gonna leave. I'm not into this. I'm sorry," as well as, "Will you just leave me alone? […] How can you help me? What are you gonna do for me? Look, I feel like I'm losing my mind" (as quoted from Hiltzik's film). Eventually, Lisa leans forward and they kiss. The movie then cuts to the other teenagers kissing and petting. Like this the two actions are paralleled in order to show that Jesse is now part of the heteroconformist world. Jesse then slowly unbuttons Lisa's shirt and kisses her between her breasts. The moment she closes her eyes in enjoyment, his tongue turns into a long grey wart-coated tentacle, visualizing the displeasure he feels when engaging with the opposite sex. When Lisa opens her eyes again, the tongue has magically disappeared and instead Jesse is holding his hand in front of his mouth. With this clear gesture of shock, he leaves her to meet up with Grady instead.

The transition between the two scenes is most interesting. Although there is a shot of a few seconds showing the teenagers at the party that separates one scene from the other, the cut nevertheless has almost the quality of a jump cut: we first see Jesse lying on top of Lisa and in the next moment Jesse jumping on top of Grady, who is sleeping in his bed. This transition thus underlines Jesse's decision to follow his true desire. Jesse covers the mouth of the sleeping Grady to prevent him from screaming. Jesse's jump and the silencing of his opponent again evoke an attack or a rape. This would lead to the claim that Jesse is unable to confront his desired love interest in a gentle way because he so despises his own homosexual inclinations. To further emphasize the homoeroticism of this scene Grady is shown topless, while Jesse wears an open shirt. Jesse then explains that he needs to stay with Grady for the night: "Tonight in the cabana with Lisa it started to happen again […] I'm scared Grady, something is trying to get inside my body." Freddy – or Jesse's queerness – is hence described as an external factor trying to invade or to penetrate his body. Jesse is unable to recognize that Freddy is a part of him he so strongly represses. Grady, confused by his late night visitor, very bluntly calls a spade a spade: "Yeah, she's female, she's waiting for you in the cabana. And you wanna sleep with me," directly hinting towards his knowledge of Jesse's ulterior motive to visit his bedroom at night. To some

extent, this scene is reminiscent of the scene in *Bride of Frankenstein*, in which Dr. Pretorius visits Henry Frankenstein in his bedroom at night to lure him into the abyss of his queer world. Harry Benshoff furthermore draws attention to Grady's advice to "just go home and take a bottle of sleeping pills." We namely need to consider that "[i]n a society where the suicide rate for gay and lesbian teenagers is approximately three times what it is for straight teens, that line takes on an especially cruel and irresponsible resonance" (1997: 249). Nonetheless, Jesse stays with him. As soon as Grady falls asleep Jesse awakens to find that it is starting to happen again.

Blades grow out of Jesse's fingers – arguably a metaphor for the erecting penis –, his body rips open, his skin and flesh come apart, until Freddy's head bursts out of Jesse's stomach. Freddy grabs Grady by the neck, lifts him up, chokes him and then slices him up with his phallic blades and "promptly impales Grady on the door, suggesting homosexual rape" (Degraffenreid, 2011: 960). Once more, homoeroticism is claimed to be violent. Instead of semen, blood is ejaculated again. As noted in chapter 3.1, during the AIDS panic of the 1980s, sex, and especially same-sex sexual practices, were equated with death since a treatment for the then still lethal disease was not yet developed. The transmission of blood and other bodily fluids therefore bore deadly connotations in this context.

In a reverse shot, Jesse next appears spilled with blood, wearing Freddy's glove. He then realizes that it was indeed him that killed his friend. It could be argued that during each rape/ murder Jesse escapes into a fantasy world, in which Freddy (his queer self) acts out his passion for him. In accord with the doppelganger motif discussed earlier, once the killing is completed, he returns to his 'regular' self with the simple awareness of what just happened. It is therefore when Jesse looks into a mirror at the end of this scene, that he sees Freddy instead of his reflection: Freddy is an integral part of Jesse, namely his queer flipside. This circumstance once more establishes a connection to all mirror scenes we have so far seen in *Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill*, as well as in *Cruising*, where mirrors actually contained almost always the queer pendant to a closeted individual. It is also a variation on the *evil* image in the picture in Wilde's *Dorian Gray*.

Torn between his desire for men and his rationality (the need to be heterosexual in a heteronormative society), Jesse runs to and fro from Lisa to Grady and back to Lisa again throughout the movie. He thus returns to the pool party to tell Lisa about the last murder that happened. Splattered with blood, he confronts her with the latest happenings but still she does not want to believe him: "No, no, Jesse. This is not happening. It's got to be everything you've taken

in: Schneider, the diary, the glove. Only it's all mixed up." Infuriated by her blindness, Jesse exclaims: "Christ, what do I have to do to make you understand me?" Lisa then resorts to the diary to demonstrate that "[Freddy] is evil itself" (as quoted from the film).

This action conjures the image of consulting and quoting the Bible whenever homophobic religious groups attempt to prove homosexuality to be a sin and to show that one's homosexual tendencies are not natural but rather a 'sinful weakness'. Lisa suddenly realizes that if Freddy is unreal, Jesse "can fight it." On a metaphorical level she thus claims that homosexuality is a choice one can willingly combat. Lisa then takes an even tougher stance by explaining: "You created him, you can destroy him." As a result, to prove her wrong Freddy takes hold of Jesse's body and reveals his existence to her for the first time. It could be argued that this revelation equates Jesse's coming out, i.e. if one takes Freddy to be Jesse's homosexual desire. Jesse-as-Freddy then announces proudly: "There is no Jesse! I am Jesse now!" The 'transformation' to a queer self is thus complete. In a Final Girl escape scene, Lisa eventually grabs a knife to defend herself against the prowler and becomes the phallicized girl.

This slasher convention is quickly overturned when Lisa attempts to stab Freddy, since the penetrating knife only makes the killer laugh. One could conclude that as a queer monster Jesse-as-Freddy cannot be defeated by a masculinized opponent. Instead, Lisa needs to retreat to the role of the feminized/ female lover in order to (temporarily) destroy Freddy, or rather Jesse's homoerotic desires. More precisely, this happens during the finale in the boiler room. Lisa enters the old power plant where Freddy used to kill the children he kidnapped. One could read the fiery and hot plant, constructed out of phallic tubes, chains, and scaffoldings, as the core of Jesse's deepest repressed homoerotic passions that Lisa hopes to eradicate. An extreme long shot is used as an establishing shot, which shows how minuscule Lisa's powers are in this domain. The girl thus appears feeble against male same-sex desire. Eventually, Lisa finds Freddy who tries to kill her.

Regressing to her role as Jesse's female lover, she faces the monstrous queer by countering "I love you," at which point Freddy steps back and slowly begins to bleed. Lisa goes on to repeatedly confess her love to Jesse and assuring him that Freddy is "losing his grip" (the exact words used in Sholder's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*). Finally, Lisa kisses Freddy; the heterosexual kiss resulting in the villain burning, then melting, and finally exploding. Crying, Lisa then observes how like a Phoenix out of the ashes, a newborn, supposedly heterosexual

Jesse emerges. Reunited the couple hugs to show that 'evil' within Jesse has finally been destroyed.

Much in accord with postmodern horror film tradition the final scene of the movie then inverts this supposed happy end. This scene namely begins with a school bus driving down a suburban alley and is therefore analogous to the opening scene of the movie. Just like in *Cruising* or *Dressed to Kill*, the movie ends the way it began to show that evil has indeed not been eradicated but will live on forever. We then see Jesse leaving his parent's house to finally go back to school. He appears to be bonding with his mother again, a misleading indicator, demonstrating that we are indeed dealing with a closed and happy ending. Physically and psychologically, Jesse furthermore seems to be happy and healthy in contrast to his unhealthy look at the beginning of the film.

When he enters the school bus, he no longer is an outsider: the other children smile at him and greet him. Being in a heterosexual relationship, Jesse finally fits into what society expects him to be. Everyone around him is now accepting since he no longer represents the queer Other. To further highlight the relief felt in regards to his new (hetero)conformist self, Jesse exclaims "I can't believe it's actually all over." Lisa preferring to repress any thought of Freddy's queer nightmarish episodes replies: "Let's not talk about it," thus silencing Jesse's past desire. The bus suddenly starts to accelerate, something that Jesse alone seems to notice. The moment that Lisa's female friend tries to soothe him with the words "It's okay. It's all over," Freddy's hand bursts out of her chest and we see the bus driving back into the wasteland of queer terror again. Queerness once more could not be eliminated but is shown as outliving any attempt to conquer it.

Naturally, Clover's slasher trope of the 'victims' in *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* is not only limited to the ostracized killers but we also find a variety of murder-victims in both movies. In *Sleepaway Camp*, these victims again blur the line between the victimized and the victimizer. Namely, every individual that falls victim to Angela's wrath has at some point in the movie hurt or bullied her and is thus punished for his/ her actions: "Artie nearly molested her, Kenny made fun of her, Meg threw her in the lake, Judy kissed her boyfriend, the four young kids laughed and threw sand at her, Mel nearly killed her cousin, Billy hit her with a water balloon, and Paul kissed Judy and told her Angela was a prude" (Gardner, 2012: 24). Similar to the victims discussed in previous movies, this speaks of power plays and hierarchies: the queer victim turns victimizer in order to express his/ her rage and frustrations due to the fact

that a heteronormative two-gender system does not allow any possibilities of expression for those considered as Others.

Similarly, Jesse defends himself against his arising homoerotic feelings by killing those who sexually attract him and thus parallels Bobbi's motive for killing in *Dressed to Kill*. Yet, both *Sleepaway Camp* and *Nightmare on Elm Street 2* concentrate on the victimized killers rather than the murder victims. Indeed, this is very much in accord with slasher traditions since the subgenre as such is known to use its victims as disposable bait existing only as means to orchestrate creative death scenes.

Bearing in mind that when the first slasher cycle ended by 1981 audiences were already very well versed in regards to the traditional slasher narrative structure and tropes, new twists had to be explored in order to equip the subgenre with new vitality. Fred Walton's *April Fools Day* (1986) for instance offers a surprise ending, in which it is revealed that the murders throughout the movie were simply staged. *Sleepaway Camp* toys with a similar idea of audience deception by destabilizing the trope of the Final Girl. In other words, throughout the course of action Angela's character is built up to be perceived as a Final Girl. This is due to the fact that Final Girls are mostly the protagonists of slasher movies and thus one of the few round characters the audience can identify with. Angela's victimization by her peers further helps the audience to empathize with her.

Then again, Angela embodies several character traits of the Final Girl: she is easily distinguished from the masses of the other kids by always being watchful and careful of any impending danger. Above all, she is virginal and does not engage in the hormonal explorations of her peers. As far as regular slasher expectations go, the audience is thus made to feel that Angela will survive the unknown killer's attacks. The film then tries to deceive us even further in a scene, in which Angela is observed through an unknown point-of-view shot while waiting for Paul at night. Here, the film uses this characteristic shot that is commonly known to be associated to the movie's killer to make the spectators believe that Angela is about to be attacked. It is then, however, revealed that the observer was indeed Paul who meant to play a prank on Angela.

Moreover, in this same scene, Angela tells Paul that she is afraid of the killer everyone seems to be talking about. For the viewer, the previous point-of-view shot coupled with Angela's declaration of fear can easily be read as proof of her innocence. Despite all these cues, at the end of the movie the supposed Final Girl is revealed to be the killer. This has deep implications for

the way the movie ends. While most slashers end on a somber note with the survival of the killer, the Final Girl nonetheless usually serves as a beacon of light representing hope. The blurring of traditional boundaries and the lack of the Final Girl in *Sleepaway Camp* take away any hope at the end of the movie. In fact, since the movie ends in the exact moment that the killer prevails over the victim, the audience leaves this film with an intense sense of terror, only mitigated by the strange feeling of having perhaps dealt with a caricature of the subgenre.

In *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* we also find an updated version of the Final Girl. Instead of the protagonist, just as in *Psycho* a secondary character takes on this role since the monster takes center stage in this film. Just as Angela, Lisa incorporates the basic character traits of a Final Girl. While her teenage peers are very sexually upfront, she and Jesse remain rather timid when it comes to engaging in intimacy. Like the traditional Final Girl she is furthermore smart, practical, and rational by trying to find answers for the irrationality Freddy Krueger's existence represents. More precisely, in order to defeat her enemy Lisa needs to study him "by researching his origins [and] reading Nancy's diary and newspaper reports" (Trencansky, 2001: 65).

Reminiscent of Lila Crane's role in *Psycho*, with all this knowledge gained Lisa is able to demystify the killer. It is then that Freddy finally reveals himself to her. Indeed, she is the first female character to catch a glimpse at the psychokiller. Accordingly, the Final Girl has once again adopted the gaze. Empowered by the gaze, she is able to descend even deeper into Freddy's domain and thus propels the action forward. Lisa turns the slasher conventions even more upside down since instead of fighting for her own survival, she takes on the role of the savior; the one that saves the feminized male from the clutches of queerness to integrate him back into heterosexuality. As has been shown, both *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* deconstruct the role of the Final Girl, allowing for a novel story twist and slasher ending. In this sense, we could look at both movies as a kind of parodic reflection on the slasher subgenre, or more precisely somewhat camp-induced auto-reflexive movies.

Examining the trope of the terrible place in *Sleepaway Camp* is again a rather ambiguous endeavor. The campsite as such could be considered the terrible place of the movie, seeing that it is a space confined by nature and isolated from sizeable localities. It is on camp or in its close surroundings that the murders happen and that the mutilated corpses are found one by one.

Therefore, it is of interest to take a closer look at the deeper meanings of the summer

camp setting. Camps have ever since been "promoted [as sites where] physical health, emotional development, and spiritual growth" are encouraged. Yet, even before *Sleepaway Camp*, horror movies such as *Friday the 13th* portrayed the setting of summer camps as the opposite, turning them into "places of physical peril and severe emotional trauma. Moral lessons were taught alongside survival skills by crazed madmen who would administer cruel punishments for any infraction" (Grunzke, 2015: 163). In fact, summer camps are recurrently used in this genre because they provide an ideal basis for horror stories:

> It allowed filmmakers to gather a large group of teenage victims and sequester them from both civilization and the aid of adults. Wooded areas provided the killer with ample places to hide and jump out at unsuspecting youth. The campfire already had a long and deep association with scary stories, and it was a rich tradition from which filmmakers could borrow motifs. Moreover, Americans' relationship with the wilderness was long and complicated and filled with anxiety. (2015: 163)

In the American mindset, nature – or wilderness – has highly culturally significant connotations. Indeed, ever since the first settlers arrived to the New World, wilderness has been perceived as "threatening" to civilization, as it had to be "actively civilized before it could be used […] Its violence could destroy [civilization] utterly" (Robertson, 1980: 48-9). Hence, a certain need to conquer the 'wild' was felt in order to use and profit from the land. The myth of the need for civilizing and taming the land was born with its implication that "[i]f civilization was to prevail, it was by the destruction of wilderness. If wilderness survived, then it had destroyed and defeated civilization" (1980: 50). To some extent, we can find a similar clash between the wild and the civilized in the camp setting.

Furthermore, in western culture nature and femininity are often equated. Social anthropologist Henrietta Moore has questioned the constructed nature-female relation, revealing that it is merely an artificial construct bearing no natural basis. Moore firstly relates the devaluation of nature and women to the fact that in western societies there is a common distinction between culture as a male sphere and the natural world as a female sphere. According to Moore this misbelief was founded on women's physiology and specialized reproductive functions that make women appear closer to nature (Moore, 1994: 15).

This means that while men find their creative power within the sustenance of culture,

women's creativity is believed to be naturally fulfilled by giving childbirth. Likewise, women's social roles have been falsely identified as related to nature, since reproduction allegedly binds women to functions further away from culture. While women fulfill intra- and inter-familial relations, such as childcare and family building, men are active in the political and public domain of social life (1994: 15-16). Naturally, these assumptions are only cultural constructs, which have been continuously reinforced by social activities and are not inherent in the biological or social nature of sexes.

Bearing in mind the above, in the context of *Sleepaway Camp*, the cruel nature surrounding the camp could be mirrored by Angela's female attributes. It is indeed very common in the horror genre that "[s]pace and the queer monstrous are intricately and inextricably bound up in one another" due to the fact that "spaces produce the monstrous, and the monster operates as an extension of that queered space in a metonymy of spatiality and monstrousness" (McDougald, 2009: 16-17).

Since nature is wild and unforgiving, the femininity in Angela becomes monstrous as well. Here, a connection to the murderous Bobbi in *Dressed to Kill* (or even to Norman Bates in *Psycho*) can be established, seeing that Angela and Bobbi are claimed to be slashing maniacs because both are biologically born males that have transgressed their gender boundaries. Their feminine sides thus turn them into killers. Taking the nature and femininity equation even further, Angela could be perceived as the embodiment of an individual overcome by the wild ready to conquer the supposedly civilized. This theory becomes particularly tangible in the scene of the exposure of her male sex, in which she is portrayed as a wild beast, ready to attack. The animalistic killer looking for its prey in the woods thus creates a form of symbiosis with its surroundings by keeping away civilization.

As in many *A Nightmare on Elm Street* movies that followed the series' first sequel, Freddy's victims are often taken into a monstrous dream version of the house on Elm Street that Jesse and Nancy lived in. Indeed, the family home as well as the suburban dream space could be described as the actual terrible place in this movie:

> In the first movie, the house on Elm Street is simply the setting of the action. In fact, as a place, it is almost inconsequential to the action and the narrative. However, by the sequel, and throughout the rest of the series, the house becomes the container, the frame, for the narrative. It is the house itself that

contains the story. In many ways, the Elm Street house takes on many of the qualities of a haunted house; it is haunted by Krueger as well as becoming a focal point for the evil. The shots of the house, as well as the focus on the door frame and windows of the house, reflect this. (Shimabukuro, 2015: 60)

As becomes apparent from this quote, the monstrosity of the house is underlined visually. While at daytime the house looks like a picture-perfect suburban dream, each night before Jesse wakes up to find himself haunted by Freddy's claws, there is an uncanny establishing shot of his family home. We see the house in the dark, filmed from a low angle, to make it appear bigger in size and thus more terrifying. These shots are accompanied by eerie non-diegetic music that heightens the effect of unease for the viewer. It is plausible to assert, therefore, that this dark version of the house symbolizes the emergence of the repressed that is only possible to surface in the unconscious liminal state between sleeping and waking. What is repressed here is (homo)sexuality silenced by the institution of the family, as well as the puritanical sexual politics of the 1980s. Since Freddy after all can be interpreted as the embodiment of Jesse's homosexuality, in turn "the house becomes the physical embodiment of Krueger in the real world; the house is Krueger and vice versa. He is able to manipulate what happens in the house, using it as an extension of his power in the dream world" (Shimabukuro, 2015: 60-61). After all, Jesse's "overpowering sexual urges" are explored throughout the movie over and over on a subliminal level:

> The morning after his first night in Nancy/Freddy's old haunt, Jesse awakens, drenched in sweat, clad only in a pair of tight, clinging underwear. The camera shot holds his groin just off center, directing the audience's attention to Jesse's genitalia, then jump-cuts to two eggs sizzling in a skillet for the morning's breakfast. The testicular allusion alone conveys a sense of Jesse's latent pubescent sexual agony; later that night he will also perform a dance which culminates in the release of a white-corked pop-gun from his crotch. These scenes of coital mimesis serve to underscore the emergence of Jesse's biological anxieties. (Degraffenreid, 2011: 958-959)

In the vein of "[g]othic storytelling [which] commonly represents […] desire through architecture" (Kingsley, 2013: 147), the basement of the house might furthermore be understood as representing the hidden recesses of the mind with all its repressed urges:

> Nancy and Jesse discover phallic and sexual power—Freddy's glove—in the basement of the Elm Street house; it is hidden, appropriately enough, inside the furnace. And, regardless of phallic implication, both Final Girl and Final Boy will eventually try on the glove, literally or symbolically.
>
> (Degraffenreid, 2011: 961)

For all these reasons it is therefore assumable that the family's repressed household and the puritanical ways of treating sexuality in the 1980s are the true originators of the terror Jesse feels. The patriarchal family home, a supposed shelter, turns into a prison, a confinement, a terrible place. Just as in *Sleepaway Camp* place and monster are thus intricately linked.

At the same time, Jesse as a queer character also faces the dread of a patriarchal heteronormative system prone to exclude alterity. Just as in *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill* patriarchal authority again emerges as a troubling force able to constrict lives in a damaging way. In fact, any type of adult authority figure in the *Nightmare* series is depicted as dangerous to the teenagers' wellbeing: "parents, step-parents, and teachers are always portrayed as psychologically oppressive or physically abusive" (Degraffenreid, 2011: 961).

Furthermore, these figures of authority neglect the responsibility they carry by "dismissing the nocturnal struggles of their teens as arising from hormonal imbalance or sleep deprivation" (2011: 965). Freddy ascending in the midst of this parental negligence might thus also be interpreted as "a physical manifestation of the teen's reaction to family politics" (2001: 962).

In *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*, in particular Jesse's father takes on the role of the abusive patriarch. The very first thing we hear Mr. Walsh tell Jesse (after the teenager wakes up screaming), is an ill-tempered demand that he wants the room unpacked that same night. As Tony Williams argues, when Jesse complains about the pressing heat in the house, regardless of "a 99 degree heat-wave and Mrs. Walsh's […] concerns about her son's health, Walsh refuses to switch on the air conditioning" (1996: 230). The fatherly neglect continues when Jesse faces Freddy for the first time. In this scene Jesse screams for his father's help, without success. Freddy then comments on the paternal absence by jokingly adding, "Daddy can't help you now." A similar unsuccessful cry for fatherly help happens again when Grady is attacked by Freddy at a later point in the narrative. Again, the teenager's screams are in vain: his father is simply unable to help his dying son. Even when a cage bird attacks Mr. Walsh and afterwards magically bursts

into flames – a fury presumably orchestrated by Freddy Krueger – the father accuses his son: "You set this whole thing up, didn't you? […] What did you use, firecrackers?" (a dialogue quoted from the film).

Instead of trying to figure out what is weighing on his son's mind, Mr. Walsh jumps to premature conclusions and begins to accuse Jesse of taking drugs. In contrast, the concerned Mrs. Walsh implores the teenager to talk to her so that she can help him. She even suggests that Jesse should see a psychiatrist as a last resort. Again, the stoic Mr. Walsh dismisses this idea immediately: "No, he's not in trouble. What that boy needs is a good goddamn kick in the butt […] I'll tell you what he needs. He needs a methadone clinic" (as quoted from Sholder's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2*).

More than just disregarding Jesse's wishes and concerns, as the dictatorial family patriarch, Mr. Walsh furthermore endangers the entire family by refusing to come clear in regards to the backstory of the Elm Street house he just purchased. During breakfast Jesse confronts his father, who, as it turns out, was aware of the circumstances that Nancy "lost her mind and her mother killed herself" in the house they now reside in. Jesse's sister becomes increasingly agitated, telling her parents that she is afraid. Instead of communicating with his children in order to soothe their fears, the father prefers to silence the anxieties of his children: "I don't wanna hear one more word about it. There's absolutely nothing, I mean nothing, wrong with this house."

Most significantly, an unplugged toaster starts burning that same moment to prove him wrong. Still, he will go on refusing the unexplainable events happening in the house. The slow demise of the family bonds is visually underlined by a bunch of flowers in a jar on the kitchen table that begins to die away and finally rot over the course of the entire film. Most of the Walsh family's interaction indeed happens in the kitchen, the flowers thus always indicate the state of the family's downfall.

Another authority figure that abuses his position of power is coach Schneider. This character namely uses his pedagogic function to live out his own sadomasochistic desires by punishing his students after gym class with extra pushups. The supposed educator is moreover portrayed as a pedophile, taking into account that he takes Jesse back to the gym after meeting him at a gay bar. Once again we find that coach Schneider's 'perversion' is based on the common misconception that queerness and pedophilia are linked and thus Schneider is a pedophile *because* he is homosexual and *because* he is interested in the kinky world of S&M.

This is to say that clichéd generalizations are unified to a conglomeration of 'perversions' that claim that if someone is homosexual, he has a variety of other, indecent sexual interests that are in fact in no way related to one's homosexual orientation. Due to his pedophilic tendencies, to a certain extent, coach Schneider also parallels Freddy Krueger, who was murdered for being a child molester himself. Seeing that Freddy represents Jesse's homoerotic desire, another link between the homosexual Schneider and the sadistic psychokiller can be established.

Sleepaway Camp features the topic of pedophilia as well. By introducing the camp's chef Artie as well as the camp director Mel, the movie features two men who try to sexually engage with their protégés. When arriving at camp, we see a crowd of children jumping out of school buses and running towards the camp site, screaming. Although the children are screaming out of joy, this image nonetheless evokes the one of victims running for their lives – and especially of the group of children fleeing from the attacking birds in Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963). The children running out of control are furthermore captured by Artie's lustful gaze. He then very unashamedly comments to his kitchen staff: "Look at all that young, fresh chicken. Where I come from we call them baldies. Makes your mouth water, don't it?" (the actual expression used in *Sleepaway Camp*). One of Artie's assistants simply laughs at this remark, choosing to stay in denial in regards to the severity of such a comment. Indeed at a later point in the narrative, Artie lures Angela into the storage room where he approaches her and unzips his pants. When Ricky storms in and prevents the sexual assault from happening, Artie immediately takes advantage of his power position and threatens the two children to remain silent about the matter.

In a similar way, camp director Mel also arranges a date with underage camp counselor Meg. All in all, the exploitation of teenage naïveté by "adults impressing their sexuality upon the young" (Grunzke, 2015: 161) seems endless in the movie: the pedophilic staff at Camp Arawak, aunt Martha's wish to mold the sexual identity of her adoptive child, and Angela's father, whose sexual orientation is falsely portrayed as having 'misshapen' Angela's sexual desire, which goes beyond mere queer representations.

The neglect of the children at camp goes even further and is presented in the very first scene at camp, when the overburdened camp director Mel tries to gain control of the crowd of running children unsuccessfully. Mel's unorganized administrative function in this scene "sets the stage for the rest of the film, showing how very little the kids are actually supervised" (Gardner, 2012: 9). His negligence is further shown when the pleased Mel observes a group of

boys fighting, and then again when he watches camp counselor Meg throw the terrified Angela into the lake without trying to interfere.

Indeed, his only interest appears to be the monetary aspect of the camp, while the safety of the children becomes secondary. After each murder he namely tries to put a veil over the tragedy and to downplay the situation. Mel even offers hush money to the staff so that no harm will be brought to the camp's reputation. Since the murders keep repeating themselves, Mel searches a scapegoat for the camps (and with it his personal) demise and finds him in Angela's innocent cousin Ricky. The anger he feels towards him is soon turned into a rage that finds its pinnacle when Mel beats Ricky up so harshly that he believes to have killed the youngster.

As can be seen, figures of authority in the two slasher films at hand parallel those found in *Dressed to Kill* as well as *Cruising*. In all four movies authority is corrupt, violent, untrustworthy and a danger to the American citizen. Yet, since we are dealing with teenagers and children and thus with characters that are moldable personality-wise, these supposed adult role models imprint their aggressive and abusive ways onto the youngsters. This is mainly perceptible when bearing in mind the excessive verbal and physical aggression springing from the children. Particularly the campers in *Sleepaway Camp* are very inclined to verbal violence, especially the use of homophobic slurs at any given time.

Finally, the slasher trope of the weapons of death also becomes of importance in the discussion of the present movies. *Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* once again plays with the idea of blades as phallic objects ready to penetrate their victims in a sexual manner. Bearing in mind the queer subtext of the film, Freddy's clawed glove thus conjures the image of male same-sex rape, as has been previously proposed.

In *Sleepaway Camp* the weapons Angela uses to defeat her bullies gain special significance since they parallel Angela's slow breaking away of her feminine 'façade' that reaches its climax when her penis is shown in the movie's finale. In other words, her way of killing her tormentors turns more and more phallic the closer we get to her genital revelation. When closely analyzing the first two murders in *Sleepaway Camp*, one detects that they are both linked to water. Artie is attacked with boiling water, while the second victim, Kenny, is drowned in the lake. Taking into consideration that in Freudian terms liquid matter is linked to the feminine, one could argue that Angela is still reverting to her feminine defenses – as opposed to the phallic weapons usually used in slasher movies. Yet, the second murder already bears

subliminal phallic connotations: when Kenny's corpse is found the next morning, a snake wiggles out of the victim's mouth, evoking imagery of oral penetration. This detail already foreshadows Angela's queer rage that the movie links to her suppressed penile sexuality.

Next Angela attacks a fellow camper by throwing a bee nest into a toilet cabin. Since male bees account for a relatively small percentage in a beehive, bees are also generally associated to the feminine. Eventually, the shift to phallic weapons occurs when Angela starts to attack her female tormentors. In another parody of *Psycho*, one of Angela's greatest adversaries, Meg, is stabbed to death with a knife in a shower. From here on, Angela only resorts to phallic weapons. Meg's murder is followed by the gruesome killing of Judy, who is penetrated with her own hot curling iron. In this scene the connotations of rape cannot become more evident. The sexual manner in which Angela kills her adversary can be interpreted as a punishment for sexual activity that is based on the killer's own psychosexual distress. Judy is namely one of the female campers that is very vocal about her sexuality. Right before Angela arrived at her bunk to slaughter the girl, Judy was indeed enjoying time with another male camper. The equation of sex and death is thus also found in this movie. The remaining murders, regardless of the sex of the victim, remain phallic murders: a group of young children is killed with an axe, camp manager Mel dies from an arrow shot, and eventually Paul is decapitated by Angela's knife. Angela has found her way back to her phallic origins, which is then highlighted by the full exposure of her penis.

Lastly, while the topic of voyeurism is not excessively broached in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* (the only noteworthy instances being the recurring half-naked male bodies shown to please the viewer's homosexual male gaze), the gaze in *Sleepaway Camp* gains special significance. For example, throughout the film Angela prefers to watch her peers instead of interacting with them – or rather to intensely gaze at the children around her. Firstly, in this way she mirrors the traditional slasher killer's voyeuristic gaze at his/ her victims.

However, since Angela's identity as the killer needs to be held a secret until the end of the movie, the typical point-of-view shot of the killer is not used here. Secondly, her transgender gaze has even more problematic implications. As earlier suggested, the movie incorrectly assumes Angela to be a boy in female disguise due to the revelation of her penis. As the incorrect misconception regarding transgender individuals goes, it could therefore be claimed that she is indeed a man disguised to observe females without being revealed as man. This reasoning

immediately brings to mind the debates concerning the right of transgender individuals to access public bathrooms that are held in the United States at the moment.

It is also of importance to note that in both movies the murder scenes as such become an exhibition to be gazed at. *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* uses a number of special effects to create the utmost imaginative death scenes, such as the killing of coach Schneider earlier discussed. In *Sleepaway Camp*, on the other hand, the murders are not explicitly shown. Instead, their aftermaths (i.e. the mutilated corpses) are presented in great detail each time. Thus, rather than the eroticized body to be gazed at, the disfigured body becomes the spectacle of this movie. The victims therefore turn into the ones to-be-looked-at and are thus feminized, in Mulvey's sense of the gaze.

Strangely enough, the title *Sleepaway Camp* also indicates an important aspect found in both films that I have not yet addressed, namely the element of 'camp', which in the case of the indicated movie is used clearly with a possible double meaning. In a nutshell one can describe camp as "the playful reworking of straight cultural artifacts through a queer lens." Accordingly, "camp is something that a spectator can do: a viewer can 'camp up' a film, a room, or even a persona. Being or acting camp was a way of identifying oneself as a homosexual man, by drawing on the stereotypical traits of the pansy" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 68-69). Yet, *de facto* camp did not first surface in gay subcultures of the 20th century but its origins can be traced back to late-17th- and early-18th-century Europe,

> because of that period's extraordinary feeling for artifice, for surface, for symmetry; its taste for the picturesque and the thrilling, its elegant conventions for representing instant feeling and the total presence of character – the epigram of the rhymed couplet (in words), the flourish (in gesture and music) […] But in the 19th century, what had been distributed throughout all of high culture now becomes a special taste; it takes on overtones of the acute, the esoteric, the perverse […], emerging full-blown with the Art Nouveau movement in the visual and decorative arts, and finding its conscious ideologists in such "wits" as Wilde and Firbank. (Sontag, 2009: 280-281)

Although camp is historically speaking not specifically connected to queerness, it has been appropriated by gay communities with the emergence of cinema. More specifically, Benshoff and Griffin describe that the camp sensibility became particularly popular in "urban gay

male communities during the classical Hollywood era [and that it] was a highly idiosyncratic approach to appreciating not only films but also music, theater, art, architecture, fashion, and (straight) culture in general" (2006: 68-69).

As a result, silent movie and classical Hollywood stars developed into camp icons "because they too exuded a 'bigger than life' quality that seemed to suggest the performative nature of gender" (2006: 69). This reveals that camp is to some extent, and at least since the first decades of the 20th century, linked to gender performativity, a subject matter I have closely discussed in chapter 2.1 in the context of drag (drag once again being an art form clearly embracing camp).

Indeed, camp and role-playing are intricately rooted in so-called 'gay sensibilities', because of the fact that role-play has been a necessary form of survival – or at least an attempt of living an unburdened life – for the LGBT community. Larry P. Gross gives further insight into this matter by explaining: "Passing for straight involves play-acting, pretending to be something one is not, either by projecting untruths or withholding truths about ourselves that would lead others to the (correct) conclusion about our sexuality." After all, "the knowledge that social and gender roles are ultimately no more than performances, arbitrary guises into which skilled players can step at will" (Gross, 2001: 18) comes full circle with the performativity inherent in camp.

Camp, however, should not be reduced to performativity as it also encompasses other, aesthetic sensibilities:

> Like its attraction to bad acting, camp taste also gravitates toward any element of Hollywood cinema that is heavily stylized and artificial. Outlandish sets and costumes or wildly excessive story twists are all camp, precisely because one can simultaneously appreciate and mock them with delighted disbelief. On a basic level, the decision to focus on a film's costumes or sets also means refusing to give much importance to its inevitable heterosexual courtship.
>
> (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 70)

As becomes apparent from this quote, camp is also greatly related to a lack of taste or sophistication. Indeed, "the camp sensibility has mocked and opposed high culture aesthetics. Critics have considered camp as a kind of 'counter-taste' that vies brashly truisms about good taste to establish the validity and special worth of that which appears to be vulgar." What truly captivates the camp-aficionado in the end are "images that self-consciously demonstrate

exaggeration, stylization, and tackiness, such as pop art or a John Waters film, […] or the phony special effects of a Japanese horror movie" (Klinger, 1994: 134).

Eventually a shift in terms of the perception of camp as a primarily queer sensibility and a re-appropriation of camp by the non-queer masses happened when Susan Sontag popularized the concept in her 1964 essay "Notes on Camp." More precisely, Sontag greatly minimized the fundamental queer importance of camp, while also defining it as a highly "disengaged, depoliticized–or at least apolitical" (Sontag, 2009: 277) sensibility that is based on style over content.

Further factors increased the widespread popularity of camp, opening it up to mass culture. Namely, from the 1950s onwards a certain "'democratizing' of culture" was at bay that led to a "general lowering of cultural standards" (Klinger, 1994: 137). With the rising accessibility to media texts, camp as well was rapidly popularized: "The postwar explosion in media recycling thus encouraged a campy perspective on classic Hollywood films by creating an audience schooled in convention and primed by parodies to discover the inherent artifice of the more 'naive' products of the film industry." Similarly to the queer subcultural camp potential, "mass camp sensibility entered mainstream culture ready to adore the mediocre, laugh at the overconventionalized, and critique archaic sex roles" (1994: 139). In spite of this, mass camp completely overlooked the queer basis that led to the modern re-emergence of camp.

In reaction to the popularization of camp, many queer theorists have turned against Sontag's definition, condemning her disregard for its probable queer roots. Queer theorist Moe Meyer for instance talks of an appropriation of a queer praxis (camp) by what she calls "un-queer" realms. In his understanding "what emerges from Sontag's essay is the birth of the camp trace, or residual camp, a strategy of un-queer appropriation of queer praxis whose purpose […] is the enfusement of the un-queer with the queer aura" (1994: 5). Yet, it needs to be taken into account that the concept of camp did not emerge in queer realms in the first place, as described above. Therefore, one can acknowledge that, to some extent, Sontag's and Meyer's differing perceptions are correct. While recognizing that camp does not have an entirely queer background, I will nonetheless adhere to the queer theorist's point of view, seeing that the queer appropriation of the concept is more useful to the purpose of my analysis.

To fight the loss of the queer origins of Camp, Meyer reappropriates the word with a capital C and thus separates it from 'popular(ized)' or 'mass' camp:

> Camp is political; Camp is solely a queer (and/or sometimes gay and lesbian) discourse; and Camp embodies a specifically queer cultural critique. Additionally, because Camp is defined as a solely queer discourse, all un-queer activities that have been previously accepted as 'camp,' such as Pop culture expressions, have been redefined as examples of the appropriation of queer praxis. Because un-queer appropriations interpret Camp within the context of compulsory reproductive heterosexuality, they no longer qualify as Camp as it is defined here. In other words, the un-queer do not have access to the discourse of Camp, only to derivatives constructed through the act of appropriation.
>
> (Meyer, 1994: 1)

While Meyer chooses to distinguish between the (historically incorrect) original *queer* form of Camp versus its popularized *non-queer* derivative, he nonetheless accepts the radical subversive powers integral in both forms of camp (or Camp), as Benshoff comments: "While this would seemingly essentialize the notion of camp (only queers can produce 'true' camp), I agree with Meyer that such Pop camp nonetheless retains its subversive potential" (Benshoff, 1997: 199).

The subversive power of camp broached by Benshoff also needs to be addressed in this context since it also deconstructs Sontag's notion of camp as a purely apolitical and superficial sensibility. Firstly, camp can be approached as a form of gay community building, especially in times of heightened marginalization seeing that "camp created a subject position from which urban gay men could revise a text's original meanings, and thus it strongly figured in the creation of a sense of shared community. Its nuanced complexity needed to be acquired and then taught to others" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 69). Furthermore, camp bears the power of queer resistance, since it

> supplies an opportunity to express distance from and disdain for mainstream culture. Exchanged in private settings, camp helps forge in-group solidarity, repairing some of the damage inflicted by the majority and preparing us for further onslaughts. Used as a secret code in public settings, it can also be a way to identify and communicate with other 'club members' under the unknowing eyes of the straight world—itself an act of subversive solidarity. Politically, it can also be a form of public defiance, a flamboyant expression of sexual variation that dares to show its face. Finally, camp is the quintessential gay

strategy for undermining the hegemony of mainstream media images. The sting can be taken out of oppressive characterizations and the hot-air balloons of conventional morality can be burst with the weapon of irony. Most importantly, by encouraging viewers or readers to evaluate mainstream culture as outsiders, as spectators living beyond its perimeter, a camp sensibility creates a sense of detachment from the dominant ideology. (Gross, 2001: 18-19)

In regards to the filmic medium, (mass) camp sensibilities are found in a variety of genre forms, particularly in "[m]usicals, horror films, and cartoons [due to the fact that they] all flaunt their lack of realism and their disdain for the 'normal'" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 71). One can especially distill great amounts of camp in horror films – as can be perfectly illustrated by taking into account the two slashers discussed in this chapter.

The campy elements in *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* can be approached in two steps: first the performative aspects and subsequently the aesthetic elements that bestow the films with an aura of camp need to be considered. In regards to the campy performances in both movies, what immediately strikes the eye is the hyperbolic acting found throughout these films. More precisely, the over-the-top performances are used, in this particular case, to highlight the gender segregation evoked by traditional gender roles. The characters are thus constructed into two separate gendered camps, meaning that most male characters are presented in a hypermasculine light, whereas almost all female characters act in utmost hyperfeminine ways. Through the exaggerated form of playing with gender roles, the artificiality of gender can be greatly stressed and even rendered ludicrous.

Furthermore, all characters rely on well-known archetypes, such as for instance the 'mean girls,' the 'dumb jocks,' or the 'masochistic gym teacher'. Likewise the queer protagonists are depicted in highly stereotypical manner, as has been already discussed at length in this chapter. Jesse in particular is turned into a 'scream queen' to heighten the supposed effeminacy of a gay man. This leads to the conclusion that even the supposedly 'rounded' characters in the movies turn out to be two-dimensional when compared to complex characters such as Steve Burns in *Cruising* or Liz Blake in *Dressed to Kill*. Despite that, it needs to be remembered that camp obtains its power from these one-sided and clichéd portrayals, and thus considering the all-around campy aspects of the films, these are legitimate and required representations.

When turning to the camp aesthetics in these movies, one detects that they permeate the entire cosmos of both films. What immediately strikes one's attention is the low-budget

production of the two movies, which decidedly decreases their quality. Simultaneously the aesthetic artificiality elicited by the poor production helps to distance the audience from the immersion into the diegetic world.

As a matter of fact, because of this very reason many "B and exploitation films [are an] especially fertile ground for camp viewing" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006: 71). Furthermore, the over-the-top special effects and killing scenes in these films bear an aura of camp, as their excessiveness oftentimes borders on absurdity and is thus frequently accompanied by laughter from large parts of the audience. The heightened gruesomeness of these films is also often described as being of low taste since it very deliberately goes against what mainstream media considers 'acceptable' images. Likewise, the script and dialogues also lack creativity and are greatly based on clichés and vulgarity. To top this off, the dramatic story twist, especially in *Sleepaway Camp* when Angela's male genitals are revealed, further underlines camp's affinity for what is considered 'bad' taste.

All in all, these slasher films can thus be best described as campy self-mockeries, since, in very postmodern fashion, they are aware of their status as low-art and build upon this consciousness. As a matter of fact, these movies need to rely on camp since the slasher genre had already come to a dead-end by the conclusion of its first cycle. In other words, as is often the case with movie cycles that reach market saturation, certain genre tropes and conventions can only be recycled up to a certain point until they become completely transparent to a viewer. As a last resource, camp and parody are commonly used in order to give new vitality to a genre whose conventions are all too well known to its audience.

Awareness should be given to the fact that in comparison to all other movies discussed in this study, the quality of *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* is relatively 'low.' In other words, their status as 'inferior' films stems from the movies' overall 'poor' quality resulting from a low budget, low-grade production, and scripts that are very straightforward and lack originality. I also acknowledge that these movies are indeed exploitation films that cater to adolescent audiences, or more precisely to "a demographic that was commonly defined as 12-29-year-olds of both sexes, with a core of 15-25-year-olds" (Nowell, 2011: 33). Content- and production-wise, they thus cannot live up to *Cruising* or *Dressed to Kill*, as they are not as richly layered and lack the complexity of their high-budget precursors.

I have nonetheless also demonstrated that there are important similarities between all four

movies, especially in regards to their thematic motifs, which can be ascribed to the fact that they all represent certain stages in the development of the slasher subgenre. Moreover, these movies are of utmost relevance to this study due to the queerness inherent in camp; hence presenting a form of parody that is not found in either Hitchock's, De Palma's, or Friedkin's films.

Therefore camp should certainly not be disregarded as it bears immense value, especially because of its queer subversive power, also found in the two movies discussed in this chapter. Most significantly, both films explore images that mainstream culture is either too afraid of or not allowed to show. Like this "deliberate Pop camp is also the mechanism which forces supposedly straight viewers to question many of the genre's central tenets regarding gender and sexuality" (Benshoff, 1997: 200). In this way the entire spectrum of audience members, regardless of sexual orientation or sexual/ gender identity, watching these slasher films is, to some extent, queered.

(In)Conclusive Conclusion with(out) a Happy Ending?

The purpose of this study was to research into the problem of the widespread association of queerness and monstrosity, a prejudiced equation that has been exploited to a great extent in the cinematic horror genre. Focusing on a specific subgeneric horror film form, the slasher, homophobic and transphobic concerns regarding queer individuals within the 1980s American socio-political landscape revealed to have had an enormous impact on these films.

Throughout this research I have shown that the concept of queer monstrosity found in slasher movies stems from a long lineage of linking the horrific to sexual 'deviance'. In chapter 1, I have therefore demonstrated that this association was born in the late 19th century and borrowed many signifiers from the gothic literary tradition. Furthermore, I have proven that many *fin-de-siècle* stereotypes have infiltrated Hollywood filmmaking early on, some of them surviving to this day. In order to illustrate this claim, two movies by gay director James Whale, *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), have been featured as case studies revealing how gothic-influenced queer signifiers, such as the effeminate queer aristocrat or the idea of 'pathological reproduction', were adopted in early horror cinema.

Bearing in mind that the focal point of this thesis is a postmodern horror genre, the study proceeds to explore Hitchcock's *Psycho*, a movie that is deemed to have brought upon a profound rupture in regards to the formula for horror moviemaking. For the purpose of designating these changes, I chose to distinguish between two paradigms, classical horror vs. postmodern horror. This differentiation was of utmost relevance for the following chapters, since it proved that the bleak slasher film was only able to blossom by reflecting a postmodern world, in which traditional, supposedly stable boundaries have been eradicated and pastiche coexisted with terror.

Moreover, while arguing that *Psycho* can be regarded as the originator of the slasher subgenre, I also demonstrated that the film introduced a new, blatant way of conflating queer individuals with psychosis, violence, and murder. A close analysis of the movie followed, in which the queer stereotypes unveiled in chapter 1 were mirrored again. Simultaneously, a number of new signifiers ascribed to LGBT individuals were presented, especially a variety of clichés arising from Freud-inspired psychoanalysis of the Cold War era. This discussion of *Psycho* was of paramount relevance for the further course of this research since many aspects found in the movie, most significantly its queer connotations, have been reverted to over and over again when

discussing the slasher film.

Next, the comparison of Hitchock's film with Gus Van Sant's remake highlights the importance of actors' performances in film and the power it bears to imbibe a movie with a queer aura. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how easily certain clichés regarding queerness can be disentangled if minor details in a movie are reversed or changed – such as the idea that a psychotic mother-obsession is not necessarily linked to queerness since Norman Bates' stereotypical queer personality traits are removed in Van Sant's film but he nonetheless remains incestuously close to his mother. I have also suggested that two major events of cinematic and socio-political nature – i.e. the abolition of the Motion Picture Production Code and the rise of the gay liberation movement – opened up the possibilities for unconcealed representations of queer content on screen.

Nonetheless, as has been argued, no change in regards to the pejorative depictions of queerness in film were happening, since the exploitation merely became more deliberate and open. This is indeed of significance to realize as the ways of handling queer subject matters in the 1970s would form the basis for an even deeper celluloid demonization of the LGBT community in the 1980s. One can thus conclude that while the 1970s are often proclaimed a haven for gay liberation due to the great political achievements made, from a film historic standpoint, this claim needs to be put into perspective since only very few LGBT-*positive* movies were indeed produced during this decade.

Returning to a more theoretical discussion, chapter 3 next introduced the context of the homophobic 1980s, in which the slasher genre was able to flourish. Therefore, general concerns regarding the conservative political backlash in the United States, the emerging AIDS crisis, as well as reactions to the disease were considered – an amalgam of events that eventually resulted in a heightened discrimination of the LGBT community throughout the indicated decade.

Simultaneously, the reactionary developing trend of returning to performative hypermasculine sensibilities in order to differentiate oneself from the supposed 'fragile' and 'diseased' queer were as well looked into. These body politics further stressed that performativity, gender, and sexual orientation have been and still are widely incorrectly connected, forming dubious signifiers for what is considered 'queer perversion.'

Having identified the socio-political context of the 1980s as a poisonous ground for queer filmmaking in chapter 3.1, in the next subchapter the slasher genre as such has been examined

carefully, not only for its genre-specific features but moreover for its deep queer potential. Indeed, the queerness permeating slasher films – best seen in the figure of the Final Girl as well as in the killer's psychosexual fury – has been exposed to be deeply engrained into the subgenre, with a ferocity able to even queer the movies' audiences. All in all, the slasher thus consists of fundamental queer elements, which turn it into a subgenre of queer interest, even in cases in which no obvious queer features are exploited in its narrative.

With this in mind, two horror movies released in the year 1980, i.e. Brian de Palma's *Dressed to Kill* and William Friedkin's *Cruising*, have been closely analyzed for a variety of genre-specific elements. I began my analysis by describing that although these two movies cannot be acknowledged as pictures fully representing the slasher subgenre since they are placed in-between *giallo* and slasher films, both movies are nonetheless of importance to this study. This is due to the fact that on the basis of these two films I was able to demonstrate how other generic influences, such as the *giallo*, helped to form the then still evolving slasher subgenre, while also proving that many slasher tropes were already found in film forms preceding its emergence.

For this purpose I began to examine the movies' similarities and differences when compared to formulaic slasher films. Indeed, all of Carol Clover's tropes except for the terrible place were in some variant form detectable in these films (if only retrospectively), proving that they are indeed connected to the subgenre that would evolve rapidly later that very same year.

Most importantly, I revealed that in *Cruising* as well as in *Dressed to Kill* queerness serves as a form of deranged sexual fury, which is in turn embodied by the psychokiller – another factor linking it to queer portrayals in the slasher subgenre. Notwithstanding, I refused to label these films as utterly homophobic or transphobic works. Instead, I claimed that the open portrayal of queerness permeating both pictures has proven to be of great complexity: while at first glance the films indeed seem to accede to homophobic and transphobic stereotypes, when looking beyond these superficial layers, I found that at their core they undeniably attempt to explain the reasons for the criminal activities committed by the queer characters, an idea I will revert to in this conclusion later on.

Lastly, two full-fledged slasher films, i.e. Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* and Sholder's *Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, have been analyzed in detail in order to substantiate the theoretical claims expressed in the previous chapters. Similar to the movies discussed in chapter 4, these two films have been first examined in accord with Clover's five

slasher-defining tropes. Throughout this examination, I have proven that only a few years into the slasher boom, films already bore some alterations to the regular slasher formula, particularly perceptible in the misleading of audiences by twisting slasher conventions. On the basis of both films I was also able to reveal that camp, a more complex concept than we usually tend to consider, is an intrinsic part of the queer theoretical landscape. In contrast to the proto-slashers of chapter 4, these films furthermore centered on queer teenagers and thus told nightmarish coming of age stories about the exploration of an arising queer sexuality.

In this respect, issues such as bullying and the efforts to keep up a closeted life are acknowledged here. Furthermore, in the same vein as *Cruising* and *Dressed to Kill*, *Sleepaway Camp* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2* exploited stereotypical depictions of queerness to generate shock value by once again playing with pejorative stereotypes. Nonetheless, all four movies also bore a second, subtextual layer, subverting their prejudiced portrayals of queer individuals. All four case studies have namely demonstrated that the slasher is not a one dimensional subgenre merely condemning queerness, but instead prefers to take a rather ambiguous posture. Underneath the clichéd depictions reasons for the violence exerted by these queer individuals are provided. After all, they suffer tremendously in a society that violently refuses any personal outlet for those deemed nonconformists. As all of these movies have shown, in turn the only form of expressing one's frustration and feeling about this entrapment is again the use of violence, in effect, paradoxically turning the marginalized and violated queer into a violator. The cycle of violence is thus shown to be never-ending.

As I have demonstrated, this is also closely linked to a certain mistrust in authority, a tendency inherited from the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. In these particular movies authority is not only interchangeable with patriarchal dominance but the rampant critique goes further by showing that patriarchy is closely connected to compulsory heteronormativity and the two-gender system described by Judith Butler that leaves no room for sexual and gender expressions for nonconforming individuals. The American patriarchal system thus exerts pressure concerning sexualized and gendered norms on individuals that they are ultimately unable to fight and thus begin to internalize. My reasoning thus goes that indeed internalized homophobia or transphobia in all four movies discussed could also be blamed for the violence observable.

This critique of an oppressive system prone to silencing and marginalizing Otherness also goes hand in hand with my discussion of the subversive power negative depictions of queerness

in film can assume. Certainly, monstrous representations were generally not positively approved by LGBT individuals in the 1980s, especially if combined with the linking of queerness and murderous psychosis, as is the case in all slasher films analyzed in this thesis. I have also tried to prove that some elements, such as the character of the Final Girl with her gender-bending potential indeed present an identity that exudes queer empowerment. Moreover, from today's standpoint, being able to base myself on the critical field of queer theory, the queer monster can be perceived as a subversive power that overthrows patriarchal norms and thus makes us question 'normalcy.' Queer monsters or villains furthermore might be perceived as empowering seeing that they give agency to a minority that is often stripped of any power under heterosexist oppression. These subversive aspects should be acknowledged, since they ultimately enable us to indeed rewrite film history retrospectively in a more queer-embracing light.

Ultimately, the subversive queer potential of slasher films also greatly reflects on the ideas of instability of postmodern horror explained in chapter 2. Namely, traditional genre as well as gender boundaries are completely disrupted in these movies, frail victims turn into powerful victimizers, no good or evil can consequently assuredly be distinguished. As has been shown in detail, even the role of the audience is queered and thus the traditional heterosexist male gaze is put into question. As is the case in *Cruising*, not even narrative security can be guaranteed since an unreliable narrator can be used to further confuse matters, leaving the movie with no solid conclusion. All in all, a world that was once considered 'familiar' due to the oppression of the *Other* unravels into an uncanny queer realm where all gender and sexual expressions find a voice, pulling heterosexist America into a reign of queer *monstrosity*.

As the further course of LGBT history shows, only a few years after the discussed movies were released, queer theory and with it new perspectives of looking at film would emerge. Coupled with AIDS activism that became prominent towards the second half of the 1980s, an outlook was formed to oppose the silencing and the abuse LGBT individuals suffered on an everyday level in American life, as Benshoff and Griffin underline:

> Radical AIDS activism thus reversed the previous decade's balkanization of queer communities by bringing divergent groups together in a shared struggle—one that was literally about life and death. Together, such activist groups fought for increased and better health care for people with AIDS, and they helped to lay the groundwork for future civil rights struggles. Through

their media collectives, they also changed the way that America looked at AIDS
and contributed to a renaissance in queer video and filmmaking. (2006: 211)

These achievements were further backed by the New Queer Cinema movement mentioned in chapter 2.1 that offered new possibilities of reimagining traditional narratives regarding queerness in film, including a radical appropriation of the conflation of queerness and monstrosity. For instance, "Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991) works a black-and-white B horror movie pastiche into its triptych of stories, again suggesting that this is one culturally encrypted space in which homosexuals are regularly figured" (Benshoff, 1997: 288). Similarly, Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992) takes as its inspiration the true case of two homosexual murderers that kidnapped and killed a boy in the 1920s and constructs a twisted love story around the movie's 'heroes'.

In terms of cinema production, the year 1991 complicated matters further for a future of continuous pejorative exploitation of queer individuals as monsters in horror cinema. The year started with the release of Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* that was widely criticized among newly empowered LGBT groups for the use of yet another queer psychokiller. Similar to the way *Cruising* had been boycotted almost twenty years earlier, "fires were further fueled when GLAAD/SF [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation/San Francisco] obtained copies of the script of the film *Basic Instinct* [Paul Verhoeven, 1992], due to be shot in San Francisco that spring." While the protesters were unable to halt the makings of the movies, both incidents "did have an impact on the news media, which devoted an unprecedented amount of attention to the questions raised about the portrayals of lesbian women and gay men in movies and television" (Gross, 2001: 148-149).

It also needs to be noted that many lesbian viewers at the time defended the movie, such as heterodox feminist film critic Camille Paglia, who approached a re-reading of the movie as an important queer document in her commentary on the film's DVD. As a result, all of a sudden "it seemed that good scripts were being found, and by some of the very people who had been in the queer spotlight: *Silence of the Lambs* director Jonathan Demme announced plans for *Philadelphia* [1993] and HBO agreed to produce *And the Band Played On* [Spottiswoode, 1993]" (2001: 150).

Philadelphia represented a turning point for many in regards to cinematic approaches to queerness, seeing that it was the first high-budget Hollywood production that addressed AIDS, 12 years into the crisis:

The film was presented and largely received as a landmark of progress in Hollywood's approach to AIDS and gay people, and there is no question that it did bring the realities of AIDS home to many who had not yet gotten the message (Tom Hanks's Oscar-winning performance as the gay lawyer also helped diminish the fear of "gay roles"). Still, as an account of the realities of AIDS, or gay life, it was mired in the same-old same-old. (Gross, 147: 2001)

What Gross is referring to in his comment is the way that AIDS-affected gay men in *Philadelphia* are once again presented out of the context of the LGBT community. In other words, the achievements of AIDS activism, and the mutual, organized support within the marginalized community are probably disregarded. Instead what is shown is a white, middle-class lawyer taken into the mercy of heterosexual characters, a return to Sirkian melodrama. Nevertheless, due to its sympathetic mainstream portrayal of gay men and the easy identification with the main character, the movie made an impact by helping to reduce future demonization of LGBT individuals in film and television. While a few isolated cases of equipping queerness with monstrous signifiers survived, as for instance in *The Crying Game* (Jordan, 1992) or *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (Jordan, 1994), these portrayals remained scarce in comparison to the previous decade. Instead LGBT individuals slowly invaded mainstream media with Oscar-winning films such as *Boys Don't Cry* (Peirce, 1999) or *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005).

The situation in regards to queer representations in film and television has changed so drastically in recent years to the point that the use of LGBT characters has been inverted. In other words, films and series today can refer to a whole array of queer experiences without needing to resort to one-sided clichés. As a result, monstrous queerness can be repurposed in a new light, without being misused as means to generate shock value. This is to say that nowadays, in times of greater LGBT acceptance and representation, the possibility exists to include queer monstrosity in a way that does not ostracize the LGBT community as such but shows that monstrous individuals reside within the queer community as much as they do in the heterosexual community. Prime examples for this change of paradigms are movies such as *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (La Bruce, 2008), *Cthulhu* (Gildark, 2007), or *Jack & Diane* (Gray, 2012).

In regards to the slasher film, future research might confirm that the above-described trends also adhere to this subgenre. Indeed, the third slasher cycle that began with Wes Craven's

Scream in 1996 was composed of utmost postmodern films that bore a great sensitivity and self-awareness concerning their generic origins and characteristics. One can thus assume that the profound queer appeal of the subgenre is also present in slasher movies that were released from the mid 1990s onwards. Indeed, in recent years a few slasher films of queer interest have been produced, deliberately appealing to an LGBT audience, such as *Hellbent* (Etheredge, 2004) or *You're Killing Me* (Hansen, 2015), again revealing today's possibilities of queer representations, despite still remaining a scarcity.

While times and the awareness regarding queerness in movies have changed, the history of the representation of queerness in American cinema has still to be reassessed to fully understand a few strange and outstanding phenomena. I refer for example to the totally unexpected gay romantic comedy *Making Love* (1982) made by Arthur Hiller (the director of the (in)famous film *Love Story* (1970)) that was released during the most somber years of AIDS and Reagan. Eventually, no final conclusion can be drawn: film history and genre theory are in constant motion and so are the ideological and technological basis for filmmaking, both as an art form and/or as an industry.

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    Compass International Pictures, 1978. DVD.

Hellbent. Dir. Paul Etheredge. Perf. Dylan Fergus, Bryan Kirkwood, Hank Harris.
    MJR Films, 2004. DVD.

Hell Night. Dir. Tom DeSimone. Perf. Linda Blair, Vincent Van Patten, Peter Barton.
    BLT Productions, 1981. DVD.

Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer. Dir. John McNaughton. Perf. Michael Rooker.
    Maljack Productions, 1986. DVD.

Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles. Dir. Neil Jordan. Perf. Tom Cruise,
    Brad Pitt, Christian Slater, and Kirsten Dunst. Geffen Pictures, 1994. DVD.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Dir. Don Siegel. Perf. Kevin McCarthy, Dana Wynter, Larry
    Gates. Walter Wanger Productions, 1956. DVD.

Jack & Diane. Dir. Bradley Rust Gray. Perf. Riley Keough, Juno Temple, Kylie Minogue.
    Deerjen Films, 2012. DVD.

Killer's Kiss. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Frank Silvera, Irene Kane, Jamie Smith.
    Minotaur Productions, 1955. DVD.

King Kong. Dir. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. Perf. Fay Wray, Robert
    Armstrong, and Bruce Cabot. RKO Radio Pictures, 1933. DVD.

Love Story. Dir. Arthur Hiller. Perf. Ali MacGraw, Ryan O'Neal, John Marley. Paramount

Pictures, 1970. DVD.

Making Love. Dir. Arthur Hiller. Perf. Michael Ontkean, Kate Jackson, Harry Hamlin. Twentieth
Century Fox, 1982. DVD.

The Man with the Golden Arm. Dir. Otto Preminger. Perf. Frank Sinatra, Eleanor Parker, and
Kim Novak. Carlyle Productions, 1955. DVD.

Manslaughter. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Leatrice Joy, Thomas Meighan, and Lois Wilson.
Paramount Pictures, 1922. DVD.

The Moon Is Blue. Dir. Otto Preminger. Perf. William Holden, David Niven, and
Maggie McNamara. Carlyle Productions, 1953. DVD.

Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy. Dir. Daniel Farrands and Andrew Kasch. Perf.
Heather Langenkamp, Wes Craven, Robert Englund. 1428 Films, 2010. DVD.

A Nightmare on Elm Street. Dir. Wes Craven. Perf. Heather Langenkamp, Johnny Depp, and
Robert Englund. New Line Cinema, 1984. DVD.

A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge. Dir. Jack Sholder. Perf. Robert
Englund, Mark Patton, and Kim Myers. New Line Cinema, 1985. DVD.

Night of the Living Dead. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Duane Jones, Judith O'Dea, Marilyn
Eastman, and Karl Hardman. An Image Ten Production, 1968. DVD.

The Omen. Dir. Richard Donner. Perf. Gregory Peck, Lee Remick, Harvey Stephens.
Twentieth Century Fox, 1976. DVD.

Ossessione. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Perf. Massimo Girotti, Clara Calamai, Juan De Landa, and
Chia Cristani. Industrie Cinematografiche Italiane, 1943. DVD.

Otto; Or, Up with Dead People. Dir. Bruce La Bruce. Perf. Jey Crisfar, Marcel Schlutt,
Nicholas Fox Ricciardi. Jürgen Brüning Filmproduktion, 2008. DVD.

Parting Glances. Dir. Bill Sherwood. Perf. John Bolger, Richard Ganoung, and Steve
Buscemi. Rondo Productions, 1986. DVD.

Peeping Tom. Dir. Michael Powell. Perf. Karlheinz Böhm, Anna Massey, and Moira Shearer.
Michael Powell, 1960. DVD.

Philadelphia. Dir. Jonathan Demme. Perf. Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Antonio
Banderas, and Joanne Woodward. TriStar Pictures, 1993. DVD.

Poison. Dir. Todd Haynes. Perf. Edith Meeks, Larry Maxwell, Susan Norman. Bronze Eye
Productions, 1991. DVD.

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Perf. Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh, and Vera Miles.
     Shamley Productions, 1960. DVD.

Psycho. Dir. Gus Van Sant. Perf. Vince Vaughn, Anne Heche, and Julianne Moore. Universal
     Pictures, 1998. DVD.

'Psycho' Path. Dir. D-J. Perf. Carlos Barbosa, Steve Bartek, Rosemary Brandenburg.
     Universal Studios Home Video, 1999. DVD.

Rambo. Dir. Ted Kotcheff. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Brian Dennehy, and Richard Crenna.
     Elcajo Productions, 1982. DVD.

Rocky. Dir. John G. Avildsen. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, and Burt Young.
     United Artists, 1976. DVD.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Dir. Jim Sharman. Perf. Tim Curry, Susan Sarandon, and
     Barry Bostwick. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1975. DVD.

Scream. Dir. Wes Craven. Perf. Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, David Arquette. Dimension
     Films, 1996. DVD.

The Silence of the Lambs. Dir. Jonathan Demme. Perf. Jodie Foster, Anthony Hopkins, and
     Lawrence A. Bonney. Orion Pictures Corp., 1991. DVD.

Sisters. Dir. Brian De Palma. Perf. Margot Kidder, Jennifer Salt, and Charles Durning.
     American International Pictures, 1973. DVD.

Sleepaway Camp. Dir. Robert Hiltzik. Perf. Melissa Rose and Jonathan Tiersten.
     American Eagle, 1983. DVD.

Stonewall Uprising. Dir. Kate David and David Heilbroner. PBS American
     Experience, 2010. DVD.

Student Bodies. Dir. Mickey Rose and Michael Ritchie. Perf. Kristen Riter, Matthew
     Goldsby, and Jerry Belson. Paramount Pictures, 1981. DVD.

Swoon. Dir. Tom Kalin. Perf. Craig Chester, Daniel Schlachet, and Valda Z. Drabla. New
     Line Features, 1992. DVD.

The Terminator. Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, and
     Michael Biehn. Hemdale, 1984. DVD.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Dir. Tobe Hooper. Perf. Marilyn Burns, Edwin Neal, and
     Allen Danziger. Vortex, 1974. DVD.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2. Dir. Tobe Hooper. Perf. Dennis Hopper, Caroline Williams,

Jim Siedow. Cannon Films, 1986. DVD.

Them! Dir. Gordon Douglas. Perf. James Whitmore, Edmund Gwenn, Joan Weldon.

Warner Bros. Pictures, 1954. DVD.

The Year of Living Dangerously. Dir. Peter Weir. Perf. Mel Gibson, Sigourney Weaver, Linda

Hunt. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1982. DVD.

You're Killing Me. Dir. Jim Hansen. Perf. Shaughn Buchholz, James Cerne, Mindy Cohn.

Wolfe Video, 2015. DVD.