

**BECOMING THE WIG:
MIS/IDENTIFICATIONS AND CITATIONALITY IN
QUEER ROCK MUSICALS**

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ABSTRACT

SAMANTHA MICHELE RILEY: *Becoming the Wig: Mis/Identifications and Citationality in Queer Rock Musicals*
(Under the direction of Dr. Alice Kuzniar)

Performative citationality operates as a fetish in the queer musicals of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and *Stadt der verlorenen Seelen*. One watches queer musicals, as well as performs alongside queer characters through audience participation, to satisfy a desire to overstep limits of the performance of gender and sexuality, and essentially, our identity, in a sublime way. This desire must be blocked or disavowed, however, in order for one to return to heteronormality, which is done here through the mechanism of citationality. Viewers latch onto citations to disavow the queering that is taking place. This queering is manifested out of the excess that is exhumed from the sublime encounter with the queer performance of the film through aid of the queered citations. At the same time the film queers those viewers watching it, if only momentarily. Still, viewers maintain that they love the musical just for the music.

*I dedicate this work to all the Hedwigs, Frankensteins, Rosas,
and Otherwise in the world,
as well as to All those who love them Unconditionally!
May all your inches be Happy!*

*And for you, and the legacy of the potato clouds, and the bunny,
Cancun, the 4 walls, Piñon Coffee, night sledding and trust, the pig of
happiness, the pengutin, M1 and TV campfires, stolen champagne,
and family, Zoë, Kuh, PG, for now and FOREVER, and of course,
thank you for the rain!*

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Introduction:

Hedwig, the transvestite, transwoman, homosexual, transgendered queer human takes the microphone. Hedwig, all in make-up wearing her now infamous blond '80s punk-rock wig and trailer-trash costume begins to sing, to perform. Colorful handmade cartoons flash across the screen in the background - a sideshow of slides thrown on the wall of the kitschy restaurant where Hedwig's band is performing tonight on tour. "Hedheads," Hedwig's followers, both performers in the movie and *real* audience members, nod to the music, singing with their sonorous siren in unison. The clientele watches, not mocking, but instead simply listening intently. They latch onto Hedwig's words, and begin to subsume the ever familiar themes. Soon, they too will transition and become part of the choir.

Hedwig begins to tell a creation story, a queer creation story. "Before the origin of love." The camera slowly zooms in, taking us into the story from which we can hardly escape, nor want to. The restaurant clientele, the band, and we, the movie audience, all begin to gyrate rhythmically to the music, letting the text envelop us, and ultimately, become us; or rather, we are in the act of becoming part of the performance, if only temporarily.

And there were three sexes then,
One that looked like two men glued up back to back,
Called the children of the sun.
And similar in shape and girth
were the children of the earth.
They looked like two girls rolled up in one.
And the children of the moon,
Were like a fork shoved on a spoon,
They were part sun, part earth,
part daughter, part son.
The origin of love.



Gazing into Hedwig's glittering turquoise and sunflower painted eyes, watching the script fall from her surreal red-stained lips, we encounter a queer origin of love. "A sad story" that seems so familiar, we feel we've always already known the text before we heard it for the first time. The familiarity we sense is tied directly to the citationality of the text. In other words, the text is familiar because we are already familiar with the citations in Hedwig's creation story. Hedwig's song cites most prominently Plato's creation story; but in fact, the text is packed with cultural references. We uncover allusions to the Vikings, Thor and his hammer, Greek and Roman mythology, Zeus and his lightning bolt, Indian mythologies, Osiris and the gods of the Nile, and the 7 plagues. Hedwig also alludes to Christianity and the "price we paid," Adam and Eve and the tree of knowledge, and Noah's ark and the flood. Antithetically, she also references the theory of evolution and the dinosaurs, biology of the human body, our belly buttons, physical symmetry, and therewith even possibly modern physics, and superstring theories of multi-dimensionality. Finally, in an attempt to personalize this song, and thereby tie the citationality of the text to herself, Hedwig alludes to the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. Hansel, Hedwig's cartoon childhood ego, crayons a foreboding, yet ever-familiar message left-handed across the screen in red. Is it blood? "Deny me and be doomed." An ominous looming eye watches from the sidelines. Who is the Big brother? Religion? Heteronormativity? "And if we don't behave...we'll be hopping around on one foot, looking through one eye." Historically constructed ideas of love, sex, gender, sexuality, religion, and punishment clutter her words, this discourse performed through the words and body of a gender-ambiguous, genderqueer body, this atypical messenger, our Hedwig.

Last time I saw you we just split in two.
You was looking at me, I was looking at you.
You had a way so familiar, I could not recognize.
Cause you had blood on your face; I had blood in my eyes.
But I could swear by your expression that the pain down in
your soul was the same down in mine.
That's the pain that cuts a straight line down through the
heart, we call it love.
We wrapped our arms round each other, try to shove
ourselves back together.
We was making love, making love.
That's the origin of love.



In John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, queer gender and desire are performed in word and song, as well as in non-linguistic texts, including the gender-bending costumes and queer bodies of the characters. Still there is another element that plays perhaps an even more essential and unconscious role in the transmission of genderqueer identity in the film—gender and desire are reiterated through the pastiche of citational references. For instance, in the song “The Origin of Love,” we find a pastiche of historical, cultural, and religious citations and references, which the film queers.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch is popularly celebrated on-film and even more on-stage in its off-Broadway performances. The show has gained notable cult status enjoying a significant following of active by-performers, which raises the question: why do audiences of all kinds, homosexual, queer, and even heterosexual, flock to watch this genderqueer musical? What does *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* do to its spectators to make them perform with the text, and in so doing take on roles of queer gender and desire?

We the audience, like the actors, love to perform in *Hedwig*, but why? We sing along in choral chant to songs which are familiar because we know the citations and references. Can a connection between our desire to see and perform with *Hedwig* and the film's citationality be established? What does this performance gives us; what does it satisfy in us?

How do we access this performance specifically through citations? How do we personalize our performance through our individual relationship to these citations? What is also remarkable about the audience participation is the ability for audience members to take on such invested roles in the performance during the film, while at its conclusion they seem to dismiss and discard their roles just as easily and elusively. They will not be or at least claim not to be captured by the performance. Or do audience members leave part of themselves at the theater door? Do they take something with them after the performance is over? We believe perhaps that we are able to maintain a safe distance and difference between our gender and sexuality in performance, on one hand, and that which we maintain is our “true” gender and sexuality off-stage, on the other. Why do we feel safe in the performance, and feel so sure we can leave it behind? Can we leave it behind? What would happen if we couldn’t? Is there something we’ve disavowed when we view and perform with Hedwig?

Hedwig and the Angry Inch is not the only genderqueer musical of its kind. British Jim Sharman’s *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) was and is still today even more popular than *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), although *Hedwig* is gaining popularity every day. *Rocky Horror* is perhaps the forerunner of all genderqueer, midnight musicals. It is the longest running musical of all time, and has never been removed from the theater since its debut in the ‘70s. Performing along with *Dr. Frankfurter*, the film’s cross-dressing, genderqueer star dancing and singing with his crew inside Dracula’s castle-turned-spaceship, audiences have latched onto the clichés and citations which overwhelm the script. As with *Hedwig*, audience members reproduce the lyrical citations of the text and thereby transition into performers themselves. The audience participates, they dress in drag, they throw rice at the wedding scene, and do god knows what else beneath the cinema seats on the popcorn-

crusted ground in the act of reciting, replaying, and re-performing the performance. The audience is compelled, in an almost trance-like state, to be part of this performance; the performance is so easy. The citationality makes it easy, and, at the same time, somehow it absolutely fulfills a need. In this moment they are performing these alternate, celluloid identities; they are expressing alternate notions of queer desire, gender, and sexuality and becoming perhaps those identities at the same time. But how does this differ from performing their own notions of gender and sexuality? What is vacated or destroyed after the costume is removed? Is there something disavowed in the relationship between the watching of the performance on screen, and the performance of gender and sexuality we enact each day? What can we say about this transition and relationship politically?

Finally, we encounter a similar kind of midnight genderqueer musical in German film director Rosa von Praunheim's *Stadt der verlorenen Seelen* (1985). Set in the clichéd-named "Burgerqueen" in Berlin, the film presents yet again a multiplicity and fluidity of genders and desires, performances, deconstructions and constructions of gender and sexuality. We find transgendered and genderqueer persons, bisexuals, transsexuals, and transvestite characters. Like the other two musicals, *Stadt* promotes a discussion of genderqueerness, sex and desire through historical, cultural, mythical, literary, and religious incantations, instantiations, and reiterable citations woven into the film. And like the other films, *Stadt* was relived and reiterated through its own citationality in being performed not only on the screen, but also live on the stage and through the audience participation during its screening/performance.

In this paper, I would like to ask of these films the following questions:

How do the audience members as performers encode their gendered and sexed selves? How do these constructed identities both align with and contradict their own perceived notions of their identity? How does the language of these texts, rather than simply confirm to some a priori notion of gender and desire, instead actually perform them into being? How does citationality create and reiterate existing norms, as well as a habitus, and yet challenge, gender-bend, gender-fuck, and ultimately destroy and vacate those notions of gender and desire, all at the same time? Finally, which of these three films most successfully achieves this challenge?

In order to answer these questions, I will examine the pastiche of citations in each of these films within the framework of theories of performativity and citationality. Furthermore, I'd like to look at the theory of camp as a way to further deconstruct these ideas. Ultimately, I hope to expand the discourse on the performativity, citationality, and iterability of gender and desire in language. I want to show how citations reiterate stereotypical heteronormative notions of gender and desire, while simultaneously, in contradiction, through this reiteration vacate any solid meaning in those notions.

This contradiction can be explained in so far as within the constraints of heteronormativity there exists a safe limit between our performativity of gender, such as in a theater performance, and our notion of the performance of our own *true* gender. Under an arguably false pretense, audience members believe they are free to take on the roles of (theater) performers; and in the case of these queer musicals, they can safely explore genderqueer notions of gender and desire without repercussion, without (as Judith Butler would say) *undoing* their *own* gender¹. Performativity satisfies our desire to overstep limits of the performance of gender and sexuality, and essentially, our identity in a sublime way.

¹ See Butler *Undoing Gender* (2004).

But in truth, under the guise of safety, audience members allow themselves to be unbound, overcome, and undone by these *imaginary* kinds of performances without actually consciously acknowledging the vacating effect the performance has on them.

The dynamic of this oscillation can be described in terms of “the sublime.” On the one hand, there is a desire for excess or submission to an overpowering experience of the sublime. Barbara Claire Freeman writes explicitly about a *feminine sublime*, which I believe applies most specifically to this experience when watching and participating with queer musicals. She defines the term *feminine sublime* in her work *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction* (1997) as follows:

Here the sublime is no longer a rhetorical mode or style of writing, but an encounter with the other in which the self, simultaneously disabled and empowered, testifies to what exceeds it. At issue is not only the attempt to represent excess, which by definition breaks totality and cannot be bound, but the desire for excess itself; not just the description of, but the wish for, sublimity. (16)

The *excess* represents here those performances that do not reiterate our notion of a *true*, *original*, or *solid* self, but instead disable this notion, while creating new and different notions of self. The musical as a genre has already long been called a “privileged genre of excess” (see Farmer 79 in *Queer Cinema*).

On the other hand, there is also the notion operative in the sublime that this excess needs to be blocked or disavowed. In encountering the *other*, we experience what Neil Hertz refers to as *blockage*¹. When we disengage with our *self* and experience the *other* or new different forms of self, the new situation creates anxiety, leading us to block out the sublime. One can also invoke the Freudian term of “disavowal” here, or *Verleugnung* which refers to utterances which affirm and in the same gesture deny a desire. In our case, one disavows an unconscious desire to undo one’s gender and sexual identity, and at the same time

¹ See Hertz *The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime* (1978).

consciously affirms this desire by participating in such *perverse pleasures* (*perverse* being set here in opposition to the *norm*) as watching and performing with queer musicals. The desire to watch such performances and participate through audience participation is a sublime desire, but one that is also blocked or disavowed in order to return to normality.

We can also tie the terminology of the *feminine sublime*, *blockage*, and *excess* directly to the Freudian notion of the *fetish*, and in particular for this work, the *fetish* from a postmodern perspective. In particular, we can look at how audience members supplement their performances with props and costumes, which function here as fetish items. Here, I look to such theorists as Amanda Fernbach¹ and Valerie Steele², who have written books on the fetish in pop-culture. Like most modern scholars, Fernbach and Steele return to contend with Freud's theory as a starting point in writing their own fetish theories; that go beyond his arguably misogynistic theory.

The Freudian Fetish

In 1927, mid-career, Freud wrote his treatise³ on *sexual fetishism*, used to describe a stage of infantile sexual development, in which boys (and notably not girls) create a fetish as a way to cope with the castration complex, more properly known as the Oedipus complex. In this theory, all male children fear being castrated by their mother, and killed by their father. The fetish, for Freud, might be any object which could cover up the mother's lack of a penis, including linen and furs.

¹ See Fernbach *Fantasies of Fetishism: From Decadence to the Post-Human* (2002).

² See Steele *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* (1996).

³ See Freud "Fetishism" (1927).

More specifically, according to Freud, the creation of a fetish is a way for a male child to reject,¹ and thereby acknowledge the castration of the mother, and at the same time to safeguard himself against his own emasculation and homosexuality. This theory ties in directly to the castration complex, the fear of losing one's penis, which plays a fundamental role in Freud's theory on infantile sexual development. Many scholars and feminists call Freud's mono-sexual theory sexist, as it only applies to men. Also, his theory has a distinctively misogynistic orientation, as exemplified in the follow excerpt from his essay on "Fetishism":

Probably no male human being is spared the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of the female genitals. We, cannot explain why it is that some [men] become homosexual in consequence of this experience, others ward it off by creating a fetish, and the great majority overcome it. (206)

"To put it plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego—we know why" (205). To deny the mother's castration is a way to resolve the castration/Oedipus complex. The constitution of the fetish gives rise to a specific structuring of the psychic apparatus (splitting of the ego), and its consequence, namely, a special mode of relationship between man, his reality and his sexuality.² From this theory children can identify the difference between the sexes, whereby "for both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the *phallus*." ("The Infantile Genital Organization" 142). Simply put, children possessing a penis are male, and those lacking one are female.

¹ I will not discuss the possibility of the female fetish in this paper. Freud did not believe in a female fetish, except in the form of "fetish envy." For a good discussion on this topic, please see Garber *Fetish Envy* (1990).

² See Marucco "The Oedipus Complex, Castration And The Fetish" (1997).

But according to Freud, we are not interested in the genitals, but instead “in the attractiveness of other parts of the body,” and more specifically, parts of other bodies, making healthy human sexuality by definition “fetishistic” (Geyskens 11). In fact, male children need to construct their heteronormal sexuality to overcome/repress their disgust of their own infantile sexuality. That is the disgust of the castrated mother, and that which is associated with the repression of their own sexual drives. They overcome this disgust through “sexual overvaluation” of their love object, the woman (Geyskens 16). Simply put, the pleasure of a woman’s beauty must be greater than a man’s disgust for her genitals. If a man is unable to find beauty in a woman, he will create a fetish as his love object. If his fetish is an aesthetically pleasing inanimate object or a pleasurable activity, his fetish will be deemed sexually perverse, although still socially normal.

Freud defines abnormal sexuality, surprisingly, more in relation to normal sexuality, as a continuum between the two, in which “the extraordinarily wide dissemination of the perversions forces us to suppose that the disposition to perversions is itself of no great rarity but must form a part of what passes as the normal constitution” (“Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” 171). When a boy develops abnormally sexually, he is unable to build a fetish/sexuality in place of his fear of his mother’s lack. He will then choose the wrong sexual partner, as in another man as the homosexual does, or choose to become the castrated object itself, as a transsexual man does when he becomes a woman, or even choose an anesthetically pleasing fetish object, such as a “dirty” foot-fetish (155).

Many modern psychologists refute much of Freud’s theory on sexuality and the fetish, especially as it applies to queer sexualities. For example, French psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel writes: “If the fetish were none other than a substitute for the mother’s

penis, the subject being unable to bear the sight of the ‘castrated’ female genitals which arouses in him the fear of castration, this fear should be non-existent for a man whose sexual partner is another man” (80). Valerie Steele expands on Chasseguet-Smirgel’s argument by illustrating that “there are homosexual as well as heterosexual fetishists. [In fact, some] men also wear the fetish themselves while engaged in auto-erotic activities” (17-8).

The choosing of a fetish object is for Freud a metonymical process, in which the fetish object is supposedly the last object, the last impression the subject beholds before the “uncanny and traumatic” unveiling of the castrated female member. This is, for Freud, “the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic;” and “[the] privileged point of reference” in psychoanalysis (“Fetishism” 201; Boothby 273). For Freud, the most common fetishes are those objects worn by women. In “Fetishism” Freud writes:

Thus the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish—or a part of it—to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the women’s genitals from below, from her legs up; fur and velvet—as has long been suspected—are a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair... pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallize the moment of undressing [...]. (201)

This would explain, according to Richard Boothby, why most fetish objects are not phallic in nature, as the male chooses his object “in a lateral movement across the field of the perceptual tableau of the maternal body” (77).

For this paper, I turn to pop-culture scholars Fernbach and Steele and their view of the fetish as an extension of one’s gender and sexuality. Here, one uses a fetish to mentally and sexually stimulate oneself or others. For them, a fetish could be an inanimate, or even animate object, such as whips, chains, leather, furs, and animals; a game of role-play, such as S&M or transvestitism; a scenario, such as the playing out of a sexual fantasy, voyeurism, exhibitionism, or humiliation; and ways in which one treats one’s body and that of others,

such as worshipping women's feet or the lack of an appendage, and mortification of the body. Steele, speaking as a fashion historian, suggests that the modern fetish is simply a commodity in today's world in which "'perversity' sells everything from films and fashions to chocolates and leather briefcases" (9). The fetish in this instance, as costumes or props, acts to further solidify this illusion that we can maintain this safe distance between our so-called *imaginary* and *real* self.

In applying a more modern Freudian fetish theory to this paper, I want to show that when we watch queer musicals, we desire in a sublime way, consciously or not, misidentification. We use the props and costumes to enhance our performance, all of which function as a fetish to help us strengthen the illusion that we can somehow maintain and separate our *real* self from those we perceive as *imaginary* and more exciting. In fact, we will only participate in such performances if we can successfully disavow their potentially transforming effects, and somehow believe we may return to a solid sense of our *real* self. In essence, we "become the wig." Like Hedwig, "[We] put on some make-up, turn on the tape deck, and put the wig back on [our] head[s]," "suddenly [we're] this punk rock star of stage and screen," "until [we] wake up and turn back to [ourselves]." When we wear the wig, when we perform *Hedwig*, we become Hedwig in that moment. We are and are not Hedwig. We are individually and temporarily Hedwig and ourselves. We are becoming unstable genderqueer constructions, which we believe we can tear off and toss away after leaving the movie theater. Afterwards, we try to convince ourselves that we are free of that performance, but, in truth, we only perhaps partly return to our own possibly more accepted, yet equally unstable and ever-changing, notions of gender and sexuality.

A Brief History of the Development of the Term Citationality

Before I begin my analysis of queer musicals, I want to briefly outline the history of the development of the term citationality as it applies to my thesis. Literary scholars have developed most extensively within the last 60 years the theory that the performance of our identity is directly linked with the iterability and citationality of that performance. The birth of this concept can be placed most solidly into the hands of British philosopher J.L. Austin. Of course, one finds threads of this argumentation with earlier philosophers, for instance Friedrich Nietzsche, who claimed in his work “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873), that “there are no facts, only interpretations” (*The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)). Also, Ludwig Wittgenstein in his work *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) developed his own theory of “ordinary language philosophy” which posits that words hold meaning solely in their every day, as opposed to more theoretical and/or abstract philosophical usages. There are rules to making statements or speech acts, which can either be followed or not, which therein determines their success or failure. For Austin, speech acts are mostly performative, in that saying something entails doing something. When we speak we alter our reality and that of others. Austin’s original detailed exposition of Speech Act theory can be found in a posthumously published set of lectures entitled *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Austin argues here against the at-that-time dominant theory that speech acts perform as validity statements; in other words, the idea that each speech act states a fact, which is essentially true or false. In contrast, Austin wants to show how validity or truth-evaluable statements/speech acts are just one possible type of speech act. He was specifically invested in one dominant type of speech act he called by various names, including “performative utterances” and “speech acts,” and later “illocutionary acts.” Speech Act theory claims that when we speak

our statements function largely as instruments to perform an action. Perhaps one can best sum up Austin's Speech Act Theory with the following statement: "Furthermore, if a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something" (see Austin in *Norton* 1432). He does not see this type of statement as having validity, but instead sets statements up along the lines of a different dichotomy. Speech acts can be either felicitous (happy) or infelicitous (unhappy), a claim which seems to be loaded still, like validity, with a kind of essentialist meaning, however subjective. He also, like Wittgenstein, talks of the success and failure of speech acts. In later lectures Austin goes more in-depth into developing his Speech Act theory, including contemplating the breakdown of speech acts into different kinds of acts, including the *locutionary act* – a meaningful utterance; *illocutionary act* - a meaningful utterance with a conventional force which realizes a conventional effect; and the *perlocutionary act* – a meaningful utterance with a convention force which realizes a non-conventional effect.

One of Austin's students, American scholar John Rogers Searle, further developed Austin's Speech Act theory, and in particular, his definition and function of illocutionary acts. In his book *Speech Acts* (1969), Searle speaks of an *illocutionary force* and the *propositional content* as being key properties of speech acts. The illocutionary force describes the mode in which statements are made (questions, statements, commands, etc.), while the propositional content is simply the content of that statement.

In 1972 French philosopher Jacques Derrida presented a paper at a conference on communication in which he responded to Searle's take or rather critique of Austin's Speech Act theory. Derrida's paper, which was later published as an essay in his book *Limited Inc.* (1972), speaks not only of the function of speech acts, but also of the iterability, that is the

citatoriality, of speech acts. He describes speech acts specifically through the terms of the title of one essay included, entitled “Signature, Event, Context¹.” He uses the term *context* to describe how writing is constituted (contra speech) by an absolute absence, as opposed to a possible presence or non-presence. This absence means that in order to make meaning we repeat utterances through the act of citatoriality. These utterances are not made just once and thereby create a sustainable reality, but instead must be repeated and cited again and again in order to maintain reality. Simply put, one performs reality through repeated speech acts.

Along the same lines, Derrida writes about a speech act’s *event*, which describes how each and every speech act is performative, not just the ones Austin calls performative. Finally, the term *signature* challenges the idea of a source of the utterance, i.e. the speaker of an utterance (or the author of a text), and how this term always exceeds the horizon of semantics, of meaning. In other words, like a signature, signs and statements in language must be iterable, repeatable, and thereby privy to all speakers through the process of citatoriality. Our reality is constituted through the citatoriality of the performance of our identities.

The constitution of identities through performative citatoriality was taken up most specifically in the 1990s by American feminist Judith Butler. Butler has written several essays and books that have addressed the theory of performative citatoriality, and most definitively, how it applies to gender and sexuality. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) Butler problematizes gender and sexuality as did Foucault in *A History of Sexuality* (1978). In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) Butler applies Austin’s Speech Act theory to political and legal discourses, including in particular issues of censorship, hate speech, and ultimately the regulation of gender and sexuality

¹ See *Limited Inc.* 1-24.

through heteronormative discourses. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler extends Eve Sedgwick's notion of queer performativity by referring back to J.L. Austin's speech act theory. Sedgwick, an American theorist and feminist, explores questions of sexual identity from Austin through Foucault in her book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003). She looks at the tension between the performance and representation of speech acts. Butler takes Sedgwick's idea of performativity and uses it to deconstruct heteronormative discourses of sexuality and gender. She begins here her discussion of gender performance and performativity, and how bodies are created and defined through performance. Here again Butler talks about gender being not an essence, but instead a performative controlled by dominant structures of power and knowledge.

Butler's ideas on performative citationality tie in directly to my critique of queer musicals. However, to further extend this theory, I want to also touch briefly on the idea of postmodern pastiche, and in particular how Fredric Johnson used and defined this term in his essay entitled *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* (1983). In this essay Johnson tries to show how pastiche is one of the most significant features of postmodernism. *Pastiche*, as Johnson defines it:

is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language; but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor [...] a kind of blank irony [...]. (see Johnson in *Norton* 1963).

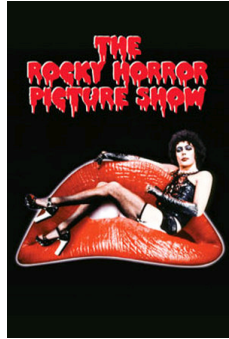
Pastiche is made through repetition; and I believe it is this kind of repetition that is essential to the way I understand the citational performativity of queer gender and desire in genderqueer musicals like *Hedwig*. The blank irony, or even the silences that are left out of the joke that would be parody, is in fact the nexus of our gender identity and desire. There is

also a superficial and transitory nature to pastiche and parody, and this nature becomes evident when one watches and/or performs genderqueerness. There is no essential gender or desire, as there is no stable meaning; the sign is absent according to Derrida, and yet in performing with queer musicals, our identities become us, and seem meaningful subjectively to us in the heat of the performance. Still, these kinds of postmodern identifications are really nothing more than failed attempts to satisfy a queer desire to see genderqueerness performed.

The topic of gender performativity in combination with the musical has been explored already most prominently by such scholarly authors such as Judith Ann Peraino in *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (2006), Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (1992), Stacy Ellen Wolf in *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (2002), and D.A. Miller in *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (1998). The first two in particular examine *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* together. No scholar, however, has yet to do what I intend to do in this paper. That is, no scholar has yet to explore the issue of gender performativity in queer rock musicals, in combination with citationality. No one has looked at the three films *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and *Die Stadt der verlorenen Seelen* in combination. In this paper, I will analyze citationality on two levels. First, I will look at citationality found within *Rocky Horror*, *Hedwig*, and *Stadt*. I will identify instances of citations, reveal their intertextuality, and show how the film queers these citations. For instance, I will look at *Rocky Horror* and show how cultural objects and artifacts are depicted in a queer way. For example, one finds multiple instances of Greek statues in Dr. Frank N Furter's castle oftentimes made up with red lipstick and painted fingernails. Second, I will show how the audience interacts with

these citations through playful mimicry, oftentimes with the aid of scripts, props, and costumes. I hope to show that spectators have a perverse desire to interact with these citations in a way to celebrate the queering that is taking place on- and off-screen. Finally, I want to illuminate the fact that there is a disavowal taking place here, whereby the citations also work as a safety mechanism, in a way reestablishing heteronormativity by the end of the performance. For instance, fans of *Rocky Horror* often use scripts to supplement their audience participation. However, these scripts are oftentimes full of many homophobic slurs, helping the audience in a way disavow the queering that is taking place. The spectator is thereby led to believe that they enjoy such queer rock musicals as *Rocky Horror*, not for its queerness, but instead for the songs, the cultural citations, the costumes, the humor, etc. In reality, at this moment, the spectator is experiencing a sublime encounter with the queer Other, during which time their own notions of gender and sexuality are momentarily disabled. In a way, the spectator is in fact queering her or his self. This queering occurs, however, only fleetingly and in the safe space of the movie theater or the living room.

Chapter 1: Maintaining Limits: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*



The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975) is a staple of American culture. No other film has been shown more often in the US than *Rocky Horror*. Since the film's premiere in 1975, *Rocky Horror* has been screened essentially without interruption up to present day in movie theaters in Europe, and even more notably and successfully in the US. *Rocky Horror* is famously known for its cult status as a midnight musical, enjoying a large international mainstream following; some fans claim to have seen the film more than 1000 times. Distributed by 20th Century Fox, *Rocky Horror* was the first movie from a major film studio to go into the midnight-movie market. By 1978 fans began gathering at *Rocky Horror* conventions, parties, weddings, reunions, and en masse in theaters around the US. Its popularity also demanded a follow-up film made in 1981, *Shock Treatment*, which included many of the original cast members. *Shock Treatment* was not, however, received with the same popularity as its predecessor. *Rocky Horror* creator Richard O'Brien also wrote two sequels which were never filmed including *Rocky Horror Shows His Heels* and *Revenge of*

the Old Queen; although rumor has it he is currently working on yet another sequel entitled *Rocky Horror: The Second Coming*, which supposedly includes elements from these two previous unpublished screenplays. Today *Rocky Horror* is available in a US and British version with alternate endings. One may purchase *Rocky Horror* on DVD, along with various trading cards, action figures, original and alternative soundtracks, costumes and props, games, and much more. In 2005 *Rocky Horror* was inducted into the Library of Congress's National Film Registry, an elite collection of only 475 films. The popularity of *Rocky Horror* also includes a fan website, which is apparently one of the largest websites (<http://www.rockyhorror.com/>) dedicated to a cult movie in the world.

Rocky Horror is not just a movie, but also an experience and a performance. Starting with the film's first midnight showing at the Waverly Theater (present-day IFC Center) in New York City's gay neighborhood in Greenwich Village in 1976, a phenomenon of audience participation has emerged. Within a few years of its premiere, screenings of *Rocky Horror* were accompanied by a full cast of audience members, who dressed up in drag and acted out the roles of the movie characters in front of the movie screen. Additionally, seated members of the audience also dressed up and participated in the show. Performing the role of the chorus, those seated would chant song lyrics, as well as yell out loud in unison a kind of memorized and rehearsed commentary at the screen and front-stage audience performers. Armed with "burlesque props," they would also reenact scenes from the movie, for example, throwing rice at the wedding scenes, partaking in the *Time Warp* dance, as well as spinning party favors at the appropriate moments along with the actors in the film (Peraino 234).

Notably, like many musical comedies, such as *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, the movie *Rocky Horror* was preceded by a stage production entitled *The Rocky Horror Show*, an idea

conceived and developed by British actor and writer Richard O'Brien in collaboration with Australian theater director Jim Sharman. The show, like the film, also enjoyed an initial long-run in the 70s of 2,960 performances, and was later revived in the mid 80s, and is still performed regularly in the UK today.

Rocky Horror began as a pet project of Richard O'Brien. Jim Sharman and O'Brien met on the set of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which Sharman was directing. O'Brien quit the show after only one performance after refusing to tap-dance in the role of Herod. Thereafter, O'Brien began writing a rock musical, an idea which grew out of his own performance on-stage in *Superstar* and *Hair*, in combination with his own interest in the pop-culture of B-grade science fiction and horror flicks. *Rocky Horror* debuted at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London on June 16, 1973. The stage production also appeared in Los Angeles in 1974, a production which included most of the members of the original cast. Additionally, there was a Broadway production in NY in 1975 and later in 2001-2002, as well as an Australian production in the 70s through the 90s.

In 1975 the stage production was adapted for the screen, directed by Jim Sharman and produced by Michael White. The film version differed slightly from the stage productions, but did maintain many of the cast- and crew-members from the original London Kings Road production, including Tim Curry in the role of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, creator Richard O'Brien as Riff-Raff, Little Nell as Columbia, and Patricia Quinn as Magenta. Working under a meager budget by Hollywood standards of \$1.2 Million, Sharman and crew were able to cut budgetary corners concerning filming, location, costumes, and props. For example, the first 20 minutes of the movie were to be shot in black and white and in Academy ratio (1.37:1) in a parody of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), with a transition into full color, widescreen (1.33:1)

with the appearance of Dr. Frank-N-Furter. This possibly was never realized due to budgetary constraints; the film was shot in a narrower 1.85:1 aspect ratio. Many costumes used originally in the London stage production were used in the movie. *Rocky Horror* was able to use sets, props, and costumes from other movies, including most often those used by Hammer Horror Productions. Hammer Horror produced some of its best science fiction and horror movies in the 50s, such as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *Dracula* (1958), and *The Mummy* (1959).



Rocky Horror was shot in a castle known popularly as the Hammer House, due to the number of Hammer Horror films having been shot there. The tank and dummy from Hammer Horror's production of *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958) starring Peter Cushing, was also used in the "Creation" scene in *Rocky Horror*. Additionally, sets and props were also taken from other British horror films and television shows. Ironically, or rather serendipitously, these cut corners added greatly to the film's cult status. It also increased the amount of citations in the film, and thereby as well the degree to which audience members could engage with the film through its citationality.

The Plot of Rocky Horror

The queer and subversive nature of *Rocky Horror* cannot be denied. In *Rocky Horror*, a young white, upper middle-class, newly engaged couple, Janet and Brad, approach an old

castle seeking shelter and aid after having been stranded in a rainstorm. They are led into the castle by shallow-faced, vampire-like, Eastern European-looking figures, who are clearly playing the role of maid and butler. Making perverse sexual references and advances, the couple lead Brad and Janet right into the middle of a great hall, where a cult of party-goers are gathered for the “Annual Transylvanian Convention,” as it is so announced on a banner posted above them. The MC for the event, Dr. Frank-N-Furter, appears and corners the pair, dressed in drag, including make-up, panty-hose, a corset, and high heels. The couple are thereafter stripped of their clothes down to their underwear and made to partake in the convention’s main event, the unveiling of Frank’s “Creation.” In a scene parallel to that in Mary Shelley’s classic *Frankenstein* (1818), as well as to those in movie versions of *Frankenstein*, including more famously John Whale’s 1931 version, Frank reveals the secret to life and his creation of a man. As Rocky emerges from the tank as a sexy, tanned and muscular Caucasian, blond male, Frank’s self-congratulatory jubilations make it more than clear that his new “Creation” was meant to be his gay male partner, or rather bride-to-be. The party is interrupted by Eddie, Frank’s overweight, seedy ex-lover, whom Frank subsequently kills off with a pick-ax in the name of “mercy killing.” After the end of the party, Brad and Janet are led to separate bedrooms, where Frank shows up in drag and seduces each sexually successfully. Janet, bemoaning her loss of virginity before marriage, decides to seek out Brad, only to find that Brad too has slept with Frank. She then discovers Rocky cowering in his queer rainbow colored tank. She first rushes to him as if to a baby, but then, in an act of revenge or perhaps even in response to her unleashed desire, she seduces Rocky as Frank did her.

But then, an unannounced visitor arrives at the castle. Dr. Everett Scott, Brad's old high school science teacher, and Eddie's uncle, shows up looking for Eddie. Frank invites them all to dinner, where it is revealed that dinner is, in fact, Eddie, and his bodily remains are located under the table itself. Finally, Frank turns most of the group into statues using his outer-space technology and sets the cast members upon a stage, each in drag, for a cabaret-style floor show. Riff Raff and Magenta, his fellow alien gang from the planet of Transsexual in the galaxy of Transylvania, interrupt the show and kill off Frank, Rocky, and the rest of the aliens. The earthlings, Brad, Janet, and Dr. Scott, are released and watch as the castle takes off into space.

Deviant Desires in Rocky Horror

Throughout the film, we are visited from time to time by a narrator, a criminologist and expert to the case which is documented in police files as "the Denton Affair." The criminologist relates the story of Brad and Janet, "healthy kids," "normal kids" who however unfortunately undertook a "strange journey" and "weird fantasy" on a rainy November night. The narrator describes Frank, in contrast to Brad and Janet, as a "man of little morals and some persuasion," having a "diabolical plan" and a "crazed imagination."

Audience members take a similar journey with Brad and Janet. They are pulled out of their heteronormative world, and essentially taken on a strange journey into a world of queer sexual perversion and desire. Any conservative audience would notice and could list the many transgressions made in this film, including bisexuality and homosexuality, loss of virginity, incest, nakedness, swearing, suggestive dancing, and cannibalism to name a few. Like Brad and Janet, audience members willingly, and in parts unwillingly partake in the festivities of the performance, and in doing so, partake vicariously or literally (depending on

how true their acting is to the movie) of the above-named deviant pleasures. Brad and Janet are trapped in this realm of queerness, and must perform queer roles of gender and desire to stay alive and not be harmed by the aliens. Audience members, in comparison, are trapped for a space of 2 hours in a movie theater, or, rather, they have an excuse to be in the movie theater for that space of time. They've paid their tickets and have come for a show, come to be entertained. They are not queer themselves, perhaps, but they can play these queer roles, and be able to leave the performance at the end of the show and return to play their "normal" roles of gender and desire without being murdered or scrutinized, because everyone "loves Rocky Horror Picture Show." They are able to participate in these roles and in the film through the mechanisms of citationality that are built into the film. As Frank says: "A mental mind fuck can be nice," and for audience members, that's essentially what *Rocky Horror* is.

Citationality in Rocky Horror

In *Rocky Horror* there are several levels of citationality. First, many of the sets, props, and costumes used in *Rocky Horror* came from other films and productions. Additionally, there are references in the movie itself, posters, pictures, books, paintings, etc., which reference and cite other kinds of pop culture, history, politics, religion, mythology, science, etc. We find these citations in the lyrics of the songs and the dialogue between the characters as well. Movie-goers may and do recognize these citations in the film. They latch on to the familiarity of citationality. On another level, the songs and the scenes are easy to act out, coming from the fact that *Rocky Horror* was originally produced on the stage, making it easier for audience members to enact the film parallel to its viewing. Additionally, the DVD version of *Rocky Horror* includes a "Participation Prompter," which when activated lets audience members know when "its time to misbehave while your watching RHSP." The

DVD warns us: “Remember, flying hot dogs may have adverse effects on expensive home theater equipment so use discretion.” The DVD also has extra features which include an “Audience Participation” component, which allows viewers to see “members of one of RHPS’s finest audiences interacting with the movie as only veterans can,” enabling movie-viewers to become audience members, to easily recite the lines of their favorite characters, while they strut in their costumes, shake their props, and dance alongside their on-screen personas in simulacra.

Why the popularity?

So, why is *Rocky Horror* so popular, if the thematic of the musical is so queer? Literary and sexuality studies scholar Marjorie Garber writes how *Rocky Horror’s* popularity has in great part to do with its “anything-goes attitude toward gay, straight, bi and incestuous sex” (*Vested Interests* 111). But whether or not this is a fact audience members consciously accept, she does not say. Some scholars, like queer literary scholar Al LaValley, claim the overarching element of camp, or more specifically “conscious camp,” is the reason for *Rocky Horror’s* popularity (see LaValley in *Out in Culture* 63). LaValley defines camp as “a gay version of irony and critical distance.” Camp is a confrontation of opposites, and in a queer sense, queer-normativity meets heteronormativity. LaValley writes “The sense of too-muchness, the excess, or inappropriateness produces a sudden self-consciousness in the viewer, but one that needn’t dissolve the basic meaning of the gesture. Camp can explode that basic gesture [...], but also enhance and celebrate it [...].” (LaValley 63). He also argues that the use of camp, and in the case of *Rocky Horror*, the use of conscious camp and drag performance, is becoming more popular as a result of big budgets and large-scale financing and distribution. “The anarchic potential of drag is lessened; there’s always much less a sense

of rebellion and examination of gender roles and more a sense of mere surface play” (LaValley 63). And camp works hand-in-hand with citationality. Audience members utilize this sense of camp through the citationality, and in combination with the mainstream commercial support of the film, the gender-bending elements brought out through the use of camp are actually made bearable. Or rather, the audience members are distracted by the citations of commercialism.

What further compounds the effect of camp and citationality is the dynamics of the audience itself in the theater. One cannot deny the pressure and power of the group dynamic in an audience of *Rocky Horror* fans. In fact, due to this dynamic, audience members are egged on to be as queer and “true” and “real” to their on-screen personas as possible. Due to this intensive level of audience participation, entire scripts have been written by audience members for individual theaters, scripts which are supposed to be read and performed by audience members using “verbal campy wit” during the viewing of *Rocky Horror* (Peraino 234).

Other theories posed on *Rocky Horror*’s popularity include one supported by music and sexuality scholar Judith Ann Peraino, which links the film’s popularity to the fact that it appeared during the peak of the emergence of punk rock. According to Peraino, punk rock works much like queer musicals in that it works to “break down barriers between the performer and the audience—and also between genders, with its androgynous fashions and pan-aggressive music” (240). Peraino looks to such performers today as Marilyn Manson as an example of how punk rock culture has furthered developed to produce such queer figures who are at once “potent yet *emasculated* musical subject[s],” much as Dr. Frank N. Furter’s character is in *Rocky Horror* (240).

What remains clear is that in *Rocky Horror* one encounters a delicate mix, yet maintainable limit between queer-normativity and heteronormativity. *Rocky Horror* is a text that subverts the norm through the queering of citations, and a performance that queers its audience members. At the same time, this queer text and performance is essentially neutralized, or rather normalized through the continuous backlash from audience members in form of scripted dialogue which includes overtly heteronormative slurs, many homophobic in nature, which continually give more conservative audience members a means to absolve themselves from the truly queer nature of their own queer performances. “[City] dwellers and suburbanites, gays and straights [participate] *together* in a ritualistic celebration of unfettered and undefined sexuality” (Peraino 234). But at the end of the movie, all is put back into its heteronormative order. Frank, arguably the most subversive persona of them all, is killed, the incestuous aliens return to where they came from, and the white, middle-classed heterosexual humans are left to pick up the pieces of heteronormativity, marry, and propagate.

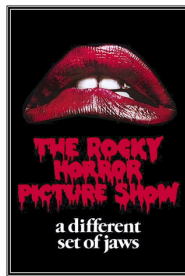
In the subsequent sections, I will illustrate several main characters in *Rocky Horror* are queered through citations in combination with their on-stage performance, through the agent of performative citationality. I will look at how certain performances in the film are queered in this manner. I will also show how audiences engage with *Rocky Horror* through the use of participation scripts. Finally, I will further develop my theory that *Rocky Horror's* overwhelming popularity and success is due to the fact that audience members are able, through the vehicle of citationality, to queer themselves performance-wise, while at the same time, protect themselves performative-wise. While the characters, performances, and scripts are queered through citations, they are at the same time normalized by those very same citations.

Queer Characters

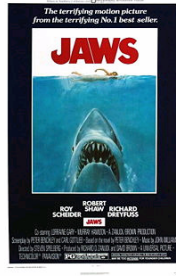
Like most films, *Rocky Horror* begins with the film distributor's trademark and a song. But even at the start, *Rocky Horror* plays with its audience. The 20th Century Fox background is accompanied by the opening song performed a little too playfully on a piano, warning viewers who recognize this tune that the following film has already transgressed a kind of boundary of the norm.

There is much to say in reference to citationality and the performance of the characters in *Rocky Horror*. However, within the constraints of this paper, I will describe in detail just a few characters who are depicted citationally in the most queer manner.

The Mouth



The screen fades to black and a disembodied, luminous pair of red lips appears from behind a black screen and moves towards us. The lips open and a pair of glowing white teeth with a pink tongue appear. The mouth begins to sing the opening song to the movie, “Science Fiction/Double Feature.” The lips, fellow fans know, are those of Patricia Quinn, who appears in the film as Magenta. Quinn actually sang the song in the *Rocky Horror Show*, while Richard O’Brien, the creator of *Rocky Horror*, sang the song for the film. This disembodied mouth, as it was often depicted on movie posters and paraphernalia along side the words “The Rocky Horror Picture Show: a different set of jaws,” recalls the blockbuster hit *Jaws*, which came out the same year *Rocky Horror* appeared, on June 20, 1975.

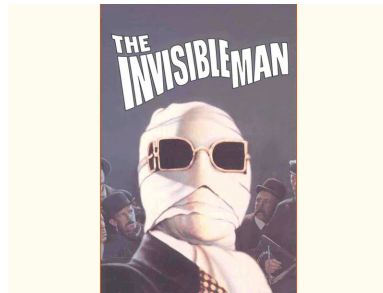


Additionally, during the introduction of the characters, the mouth is changed into an x-ray of teeth, alluding perhaps again to yet another “set of jaws.” The teeth and mouth may also remind viewers of a vampire’s mouth, covered not in red lipstick, but instead blood. This disembodied mouth and set of jaws also provides a subtle, but evident queer element to the movie. First of all, the mouth is painted red and appears feminine. In fact, the mouth was a woman’s mouth (Patricia Quinn). But the voice coming out of the mouth is that of a man, and at that, a queer sounding man (Richard O’Brien). Still, regardless of voice pitch or lip-shape, the mouth is just a mouth, and not a body. Our attempts, conscious or not to identify the gender of that mouth, is our way of putting heteronormative constraints of normalcy on this object. Can a mouth have a gender? Samuel Beckett explores a similar idea in his 20-minute dramatic monologue from 1972 entitled “Not I.” In this monologue audience members see only a mouth, including lips, tongue, and teeth, exactly like we find here in *Rocky Horror*. The mouth relates to the audience dramatic events in “her” life. Queer theorists and feminists, including Judith Roof have written on the possibly gender-less-ness of this mouth.

[...] Mouth's displaced self-narrative performs the shift of narrative from one grounded in binaries, families, genders, identities to a narrative sense that persists past the necessity for sense, a narrating for narrating's sake, a subjectivity that endures despite itself-or endures as an effect or by-product of Mouth's attempts to stop being a subject. (62)

As with Beckett's "Mouth," *Rocky Horror's* mouth challenges heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality. It also challenges the audience members in terms of performativity. Can and do any audience members ever play the mouth? Is this a queer role essentially, and would that person identify with a gender or sexuality when performing this role?

Rocky Horror challenges audience members again with this sense of gender-lessness, or rather the ability to NOT see a gender with the citation of Claude Rains in the song *Science Fiction/Double Feature*. Rains played in the film *The Invisible Man*, a science fiction film from 1933 taken from H.G. Wells's same-titled novel (1897).



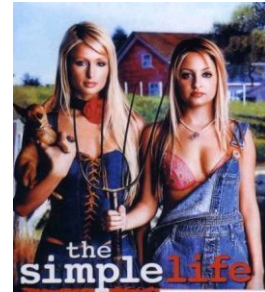
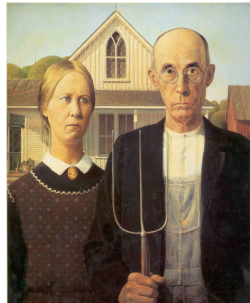
In the film, Rains "appears" mostly as a disembodied voice, resembling partly the disembodied lips at the beginning of *Rocky Horror*. The story of the *Invisible Man* also has references to irresponsible delving into science, much as one finds in *Frankenstein*. The *Invisible Man* is also a queer reference according to some scholars in that the "mad genius Claude Rains spurns his fiancée, becomes invisible, tries to find a male partner in crime, and becomes *visible* only after he is killed by the police" (Doty 83). Notably, this film was directed by John Whale, who was out as gay. Could the invisible man be a metaphor for Whale's own sexuality?

Riff Raff & Magenta



At the beginning of *Rocky Horror*, we are introduced to two characters, which seem to play the role of church custodians, posing in costume and sporting props similar to those in the painting *American Gothic* (1930). We later recognize the couple in the role of the Transylvanian, alien siblings named Riff Raff and Magenta. *American Gothic*, painted by American painter Grant Wood, features an older father and daughter standing in front of their prim and proper white farm house. The man holds a pitchfork; the woman stands somberly at his side. Despite the fact that many and most art critics have interpreted the painting to be a satire of American's deep-seeded puritanical culture, *American Gothic* is a, if not *the*, American icon. *American Gothic* is one of the most reproduced and recognizable paintings of all time, along with Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1519), which also appears in *Rocky Horror*.

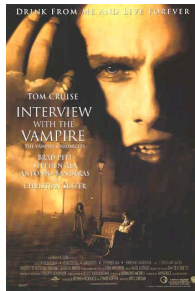
On that same note, there have been many parodies of this painting, in addition to that portrayed in *Rocky Horror*, including more political satires, such as the *American Gothic* from 1942 by Gordon Parks, featuring a black wash-woman holding a mop and broom standing before an American flag, or modern examples, such as that of Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie as they were depicted on advertisements for the TV series *The Simple Life*.



The theme of *American Gothic* does not, however, end at the church. In a later scene, when Riff Raff welcomes Brad and Janet into the castle, we discover a copy of the painting on the wall, and this time, as it was originally depicted by Wood. The satire of the painting becomes apparent as viewers (may) realize that the custodians in the church were, in fact, the highly sexualized and incestuous Riff Raff and Magenta. Viewers are thereby cautioned: things are not as they appear; or as Peraino writes “The painting also appears on one of the walls in the castle [...] which suggests that his dourness from outside—not the creatures within—haunts the castle” (236). Still, the satire does not end here. We find Riff Raff and Magenta represent this painting again at the end of the movie. This time Riff Raff and Magenta appear as queer aliens in garter belts and short skirts. Here, Riff Raff holds a ray gun which looks like the pitch fork from *American Gothic*. At this point in the film, the satire turns sour. Peraino writes: “They [Magenta and Riff Raff] are custodians of both Middle America’s puritanical church and Frank N. Furter’s libertine church. The dour gothic male Riff Raff in the end kills Dr. Frank N. Furter on account of his “extreme lifestyle,” thus implementing the rigid morality alluded to in the visual reference to *American Gothic*” (Peraino 236). On a more biographical note, Grant Wood, the painter of *American Gothic* was supposedly himself a closeted homosexual. Recent biographies of Wood have speculated, or rather exposed the fact that Wood was homosexual. One critic writes: “Wood, fiercely intelligent and well read,

was indeed a “timid, deeply closeted homosexual (whose) expression of gay sensibility prevented him from mocking his subjects openly...,” [yet there is evidence that his] orientation naturally informed his art” (Maroney, Jr. 3, 7). As with director John Whale’s work, we could also potentially view Wood’s work through a queer lens. In using *American Gothic* in *Rocky Horror*, this citation queers such heteronormative icons even further.

Riff Raff and Magenta’s roles in the movie are not, however, limited to the parody of *American Gothic*, but also in their so-called roles as custodians of Frank N. Furter’s “libertine church,” the pair appears to dabble in the role of vampires. The subject of vampirism has been dealt with extensively in queer literature and film and *Rocky Horror* is no exception. Notably, this citation emerges even before we meet the couple again in the castle. In line with Bram Stoker’s classic vampire novel *Dracula* (1897), the castle in *Rocky Horror* is of gothic style, including gargoyles, and even a flag with a picture of a bat imprinted on it. We first see Riff Raff looking down at Brad and Janet from a castle window. He looks like a vampire, emaciated and pale with what appears to be a bloodstain on his shirt. Once in the castle we encounter Magenta, Riff Raff’s sister. Magenta represents the stereotypical erotic vamp femme fatale. She is dressed as a sexy maid with pale skin and bright red lips.



The film makes clear that the siblings have an incestuous relationship, also a common motif in queer vampire tales, such as we find, for example, in Anne Rice’s *Interview with a*

Vampire (1976), which also includes the ever-prominent theme of homosexuality. They do share one more telling sexual moment à la vampire in which Riff Raff embraces Magenta and instead of kissing her, bites her neck; Magenta moans in sexual pleasure. Riff Raff and Magenta's overtly sexual nature in combination with their incestuous relationship make the vampire citation even queerer.

Rocky & Eddie



The characters of Rocky and Eddie can be seen as more or less polar opposites in *Rocky Horror*. This fact is made clear within the film in that Frank takes half of Eddie's brain to make Rocky's brain; Rocky is Frank's creation. Eddie, played by Meatloaf, might be seen as a literal representation of *Rocky Horror*; that is, he is a raw and trashy, campy queer rock star. Rocky, in contrast, is the ideal gay, pinup muscle boy. Both characters are queered through citations in *Rocky Horror*.

Rocky

Rocky's character is queered through citations of superheroes and other prototypical muscle men. What *Rocky Horror* does is to take what most audience members would consider to be heteronormative personas of masculine men from films, TV, etc., and then queer those citations. At the start of *Rocky Horror*, the song "Science Fiction/Double Feature" has many citations that the *Rocky Horror's* target audience would recognize. In fact,

in the internet there are several websites devoted to the citations in this song. One must simply click on the references, and one is led to a website describing that particular film, TV show, or comic. The film's original target audience would have been lovers of science fiction and horror flicks, and *Rocky Horror* is essentially a spoof of those kinds of films. Notably, during the production of the movie, the idea to include clips from all the citations mentioned in this song was dropped due to costly copyright fees, however much that may have added to the cult status and subsequent citationality of the film. In reference to Rocky, the song "Science Fiction/Double Feature" references the science fiction super hero Flash Gordon in his "silver underwear."



Flash Gordon was the space ranger superhero of a 1934 science fiction comic strip, originally drawn by American comic strip artist Alex Raymond. Television and film adaptations were made of the series in the 30s through 50s. This comic strip also notably contains references to WWII and its aftermath; and critics have also accused the author of anti-Asian stereotyping in reference to the Asian-like alien antagonists. Rocky's physique in *Rocky Horror* looks something like Flash Gordon's in his "silver underwear." In the film, Rocky is dressed in shiny golden underwear and same colored shoes. He is very well-built, and muscular. His hair is most uncommonly pale blond as Flash Gordon's hair is also depicted in the comic strip. Flash Gordon is a polo playing jock with much sex appeal; a fact on which movie makers and TV producers capitalized. A reference to Flash Gordon's underwear is also a

queer reference. In the Flash Gordon serial films¹, he often wore leather underwear and tights, resembling the outfits of queer disco boys of the 70s. Flash also has arguably a homoerotic relationship with his partner Dale. Flash Gordon is generally considered a gay icon in the queer community, and the Flash Gordon movies can oftentimes be found in the “gay” section of video stores. *Rocky Horror* also cites in passing another famous muscle men/movie star, bodybuilder, Steve Reeves. Reeves played many roles as the “muscle man,” or Hercules in the movie genre appropriately titled the “Strong Man” movies². Reeves is also commonly known as a gay icon in the queer community.



The overarching muscle man citation in *Rocky Horror* is, however, the reference to Charles Atlas. When Frank gives Rocky his birthday present of weights to strengthen Rocky’s muscles, he compares him to Charles Atlas. Atlas was a bodybuilder from the 1920s onward, and the inventor of a bodybuilding technique which promised to turn a “97-pound weakling” into a muscle man, which Atlas apparently did himself. Angelo Siciliano (otherwise known as Charles Atlas) took the name *Atlas* after a friend noticed he looked like a statue of the Greek Titan. One might rightly be able to classify most aesthetically beautiful body-building men under the category of gay icon. *Rocky Horror* queers this citation as much as possible, which queers Rocky at the same time. Rocky poses like a muscle man; he

¹ *Flash Gordon* (1936), *Flash Gordon’s Trip to Mars* (1938), and *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (1940).

² For instance, *Hercules* (1958) and *Hercules Unchained* (1959).

is a muscle man. Frank wanted to make a man, and he makes Rocky, not just to be his friend, but to be his gay male lover. Frank references Atlas in the song “I can make you a man.” Frank says: “He carries the Charles Atlas seal of approval,” and then begin the song which describes how men can make themselves into muscle men. Of course, this song and the scene itself have many sexual and homosexual references.



As he works for his cause
Will make him glisten
And gleam, and with massage
And just a little bit of steam
He'll be pink and quite clean
He'll be a strong man
Oh, honey!

While Frank is singing this song, he gives Rocky a birthday present of dumbbells wrapped like lollipops in red and white with bows, a rather queer present for a heterosexual man. To push the envelope even further, Frank gives Rocky a red mounting horse that looks clearly like a penis wrapped in a condom. Frank jumps on the horse and pretends to ride it sexually with his nylons and high heels exposed, clearly exciting Rocky in the process. Of course, the whole scene is queered even further as Frank runs his finger slowly down Rocky’s stomach in a sexual manner. At the end of this scene, Rocky and Frank enact a wedding processional, walking toward their make-shift marital bed. Frank jumps into Rocky’s arm in a sexual embrace and the curtain closes.

Finally, a third type of citation, which is referenced in connection with Rocky and muscle men, is of Greek and Roman statues and busts of strong, muscular men, Gods, and emperors. This motif runs throughout the length of the film. For example, in the foyer of the castle there are many shelves full of small Greek and Roman statuettes. Also, in Frank's laboratory there are several Greek and Roman looking statues. This citation is queered as well in that the statues in Frank's laboratory, for example, are wearing red lipstick and red nail polish. In other scenes, the statues are wearing clothes, ties, scarves, and have candles on their heads, and/or are posed in odd positions. Unmistakably, Frank creates Rocky to appear like the ideal heteronormative man, as represented in these citations, but he queers Rocky, just as the film queers the citation.

Eddie

As mentioned before, Eddie, played by real-life rock star Meatloaf, represents everything that Rocky is not. Whereby Rocky is fit, muscular, sexy, and glamorous, Eddie is over-weight, and down-right trashy. When we first encounter Eddie, he makes a violent entrance, breaking through the door of the deep freeze, where he was obviously trapped after being kidnapped by Frank. He enters the room on a motorcycle, wearing punk-style clothing of jeans and a jean jacket. He has blood on his forehead (we later find out later that Frank had removed half of his brain to give to Rocky). He comes out singing, and Columbia immediately runs to his side as a fan and a lover. Eddie begins to sing about hetero-sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll, which appears to make him rather heterosexual. But Eddie, like all the characters in *Rocky Horror*, is queered, first by the fact that Eddie is Frank's ex gay lover, but also by the film's queer citationality.

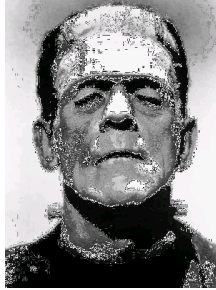
On a less controversial level, Eddie is compared to John McNeill Whistler's most famous painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother* (1871), more popularly known as *Whistler's Mother*.



The image on the original painting has become an icon of motherhood and heteronormative family values internationally. *Whistler's Mother* was even made into a US stamp in 1934 accompanied by the slogan: "In Memory and In Honor of the Mothers of America." There have been a number of parodies and satires of this picture in pop culture since that time, which is what we find here in *Rocky Horror*. Dr. Scott speaks of his nephew Eddie betraying his mother in the song "Eddie's Teddy." The scene switches to one in an office, where the criminologist is scrutinizing a copy of the painting of *Whistler's Mother*. However, one notices immediately that this is not a copy of the original painting. In the *Rocky Horror* DVD commentary by O'Brien and Quinn, they both indicate that the person in the photo is, in fact, Meatloaf (Eddie) himself. He is, however, almost unrecognizable in the shot. Eddie in drag is clearly a queering of this heteronormative citation.

The most intriguing example of queer citationality in perhaps all of *Rocky Horror* might be the references to *Frankenstein* in combination with Rocky, but even more specifically Eddie. *Rocky Horror* abounds with citations referencing Mary Shelley's horror novel *Frankenstein* (1818), and film versions of this classic as well. First, when Brad and Janet approach the castle, the characters begin to sing the song "Over at the Frankenstein place." The master-of-the-house is also appropriately named Dr. Frank-N-Furter, who is

depicted as a mad scientist who creates a man, much like in the novel. In *Rocky Horror* Frank reenacts the entire Frankenstein creation scene.



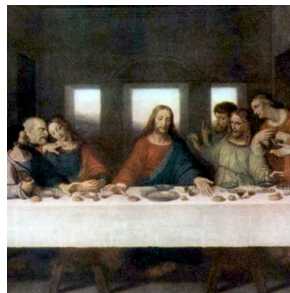
The reference to *Frankenstein* can be read as queer fundamentally on two different levels. First, as queer theorist Alexander Doty writes, *Frankenstein* is essentially a story about “men making the ‘perfect’ man” (see Doty in *Out in Culture* 84). Not only does Frank want to make a man, but he wants to make himself a homosexual companion. On a more complex and insightful level, *Frankenstein* represents a queer construction, or more specifically a deconstruction of the body. Some literary scholars, such as Mary Daly, Marjorie Garber, and Susan Stryker, have written on the connection between the construction of the creature’s body in *Frankenstein* and that of a transsexual and/or transgendered person. Daly discusses transsexuality, for instance, in her essay “Boundary Violation and the Frankenstein Phenomenon,” in which she characterizes transsexual persons as agents of a “necrophilic invasion” of female space (69-72). Garber calls *Frankenstein* “an uncanny anticipation of transsexual surgery,” and uses *Rocky Horror* as evidence of this analogy (111).

Stryker compares her own body and transgendered experience to that of the creature's in *Frankenstein*:

These are my words to Victor Frankenstein, above the village of Chamounix. Like the monster, I could speak of my earliest memories, and how I became aware of my difference from everyone around me. I can describe how I acquired a monstrous identity by taking on the label "transsexual" to name parts of myself that I could not otherwise explain. I, too, have discovered the journals of the men who made my body, and who have made the bodies of creatures like me since the 1930s. I know in intimate detail the history of this recent medical intervention into the enactment of transgendered subjectivity; science seeks to contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender: physical alteration of the genitals. (see Stryker in Curry's *State of Rage* 203)

In this same essay, or rather presentation, Styker also speaks of Peter Brooks's famous critique of Frankenstein in "What is a Monster? (According to Frankenstein)"¹, in which Brooks states that a monster "may also be that which eludes gender definition" (199-200). Along similar lines with the *mouth* at the beginning of *Rocky Horror*, a queering of Eddie's character in the film through the citation of *Frankenstein* is really a way to perhaps not elude, but rather deconstruct his gender as well. The film does this in the most poignant way by allowing the cast of *Rocky Horror* to literarily deconstruct Eddie by eating him at the dinner table in an act of cannibalism. Rocky is constructed; Eddie is deconstructed.

Directly before this scene, we are led into the criminologist's office, where we discover a book open to Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of *The Last Supper* (1498).



¹ See Brooks *Body Work* 219.

To begin, the meal presented in *Rocky Horror* is, of course, nothing like in da Vinci's painting, but instead the table is covered in a disarray of odd dishes and too many utensils. Magenta is serving wine from a urine bottle. The guests are only half-clothed, and sitting in silence, depressed, as Frank serves the cannibalistic meal. This scene is however, full of citations and performative utterances in the form of heteronormative rituals, including a toast, and the singing of *happy birthday*. The queerness of this scene is however intensified, of course, when we discover that they are actually eating Eddie's body, and that his remains are in the table.

Queer Performances

One critic of *Rocky Horror* from 1978 wrote: "when a really fine Dr. Frank N. Furter singalike stood in his small flashlit pool, well, I found myself watching him, not the film. It was a valid performance. Who, you could justifiably ask, is lip-synching whom?" (Peraino 239). Most viewers of *Rocky Horror* don't just watch the show, they perform with the show. Most have their favorite character from the movie, and they tend to dress up as that one particular character each time they go to the show. The act of putting on the clothes, displaying and using props, as well as performing with other fellow audience members through pre-written or impromptu scripts, is an act of fetishism itself.

Queer Scripts

In order to more closely look at the ways the audience really participates in *Rocky Horror*, one can also watch live performances, or even better for the constraints of such a paper, one can look at audience participation scripts. Notably, *Rocky Horror*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and *Stadt der verlorenen Seelen*, which I will analyze later in this paper, are not

the only musicals known for some form of audience participation. For example, for the musical *The Sound of Music* (1960), there was in 1999 a weekly *Singalong-a-Sound-of-Music* in London, which enjoyed much success. As film scholar Stacey Wolf writes: “*Singalong* revels in its gayness. [...] all the ‘girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes’ are men. [...] The producers of *Singalong* understand the pleasure of the musical. They know that musicals invoke visceral responses and call up active engagements. But they also understand the specific seductiveness of theater. *Singalong* makes film spectatorship performative and theatrical, imploring spectators to come dressed for the occasion” (Wolf 237).

In the case of *Rocky Horror*, the audience’s engagement with the film has been exploited to the maximum. For example, there are many audience participation scripts to be found on the internet, including some which are more famously used in major cities throughout the US and the world. For this paper, I have looked at one of the most popular scripts used in New York, NY for the 8th Street Playhouse, which took over the original script used at the Greenwich Village film screening at the Waverly Theater¹. In comparison with other scripts, there seems to be some consistency across scripts in dialogue. The official *Rocky Horror* website suggests participants contact their neighborhood theaters to see if there is a local script available.

When participating at their local theaters, some audience members buy or make costumes that look identical or nearly identical to the ones the characters wear in the movie. Notably, one can also purchase such costumes online, while some audience members fashion their own. In addition to costumes, the characters oftentimes bring props, including the ever-popular bag of rice and squirt gun. The New York script has a list of suggested props

¹ See “None Ya” in Works Cited for the script.

oftentimes used during their screenings of *Rocky Horror*. These include, but are not limited to:

Rice
Bouquet
Rings
Newspaper (preferably the <i>Plain Dealer</i>)
Water (and squirt gun)
Matches (light)
Doughnuts
Rubber Gloves
Noisemaker
Confetti (torn newspapers will suffice)
Toilet Paper (preferably “Scott”)
Toast
Party Hat
Bell
Frankfurters
Sponges
Cards
Paper Airplanes

Most audience members find a character with whom to identify, they dress as that character and arrive at the theater donning a number of props listed above. With a participation script in hand, viewers can easily participate with the group. The standardization of such scripts, according to queer scholar Judith Ann Peraino “[fosters] a familiar feeling among cultists despite local inflections” (Peraino 234). What is truly fascinating to see is how the participation scripts actually work to counteract the queer(ed) citations, as well as the queer(ed) characters in *Rocky Horror*. They do this literally by producing in unison a backlash of overtly sexual, violent and/or homophobic slurs which reference these queer citations in the film.

For example, one may examine a portion of the script during which audience members interact with the song “Science Fiction/Double Feature,” which cites many movies, including *Flash Gordon* (1936), *Dr. X* (1932), and *King Kong* (1933).

(Please note: The **participation script** is bolded and all caps, while the **original movie script** is NOT):

And Flash Gordon was there, in **EDIBLE** silver underwear. **KINKY!** [...]
Faye Wray and King Kong, they got caught in a **SEXUAL** celluloid jam. **YEAH JAM!** Then at a deadly pace, it came **ON JANET'S FACE!** from outer space. [...]
Science fiction - double feature, Doctor X **SEX, SEX, SEX!** will build a creature.
See androids fighting **AND FUCKING AND SUCKING ON** Brad and Janet.

The following script comes from the opening scene of *Rocky Horror*, a heteronormative wedding scene:

GROOM: I don't think there's any doubt about that. You and Betty have been almost inseparable since you met in Dr. Scott's refresher course. **THEY USED SUPER GLUE AS A CONTRACEPTIVE!** [...]
BRAD: Looks like Betty's going to throw her bouquet. **THROW IT TO THE SLUT!**
JANET: I got it! I got it! **HOW WAS IT?**
BRAD: There's three ways that love can grow. **FIND 'EM, FUCK 'EM, AND FORGET 'EM!** That's good, bad, or mediocre. **HOW DO YOU SPELL SLUT? J-A-N-E-T** I love you so! [...] Here's the ring to prove that I'm no joker. **HE'S A QUEEN!**
B&J: There's one thing left to do **THAT'S SCREW!** ah-oo.
PICK A BUGGER AND LET IT FLY ASSHOLE!

The following script comes from the queer wedding scene; the wedding between Frank and Rocky:

JANET: Well, I don't like men with too many muscles **JUST ONE BIG ONE!**
FRANK: He'll be pink and quite clean. He'll be a strong man, oh honey, but the wrong man. **SHOW US KING KONG'S DICK!** [...] Will make him glisten **WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TOOTHPASTE?** and gleam and with massage and just a little bit of steam. **GO FOR THE GOLD, BUT MISS THE HOLE!** [...] In just seven days **AND SIX LONG NIGHTS!** I can make you a **FAG, JUST LIKE YOUR DAD!** man! Dig it, if you can! In just seven days **AND SIX LONG NIGHTS** I can make you a **FAG, JUST LIKE YOUR DAD!** man.

The following selections include random samples of how a *Rocky Horror* audience interacts specifically with citations in the film. In some cases, new citations are brought into the script,

in a way that queers those citations as well; such citations include *The Smurfs* children's television show¹, Disneyworld (Epcot Center), queer movie icon Keanu Reeves, *Fruit of the Loom* underwear, *Lucky Charms* cereal, *Star Trek*², and *Secret* deodorant:

- **JANET. HEY RIFF, KILL THAT SMURF!**
- There's a light, over at the **EPCOTT CENTER**. Frankenstein place.
- Or if you want something visual, that's not too abysmal, we could take in an old **KEANU REEVES'**. Steve Reeves' movie.
- And what charming underclothes you both have. **THEY'RE FRUIT OF THE LOOM.**
- It's all right Janet! **HE'S WORKING SO HARD HE'S GOT STEAM COMING OUT OF HIS ASS! YELLOW MOONS, GREEN CLOVERS, BLUE DIAMONDS, AND PURPLE HORSESHOES!**
- **HEY DR. SCOTT, COVER UP YOUR HARD ON!**
- And that's how I discovered the secret, that elusive ingredient, that... **WHO GIVES THE BEST BLOWJOBS ON THE ENTERPRISE? ...spark!**
- Yes! I have that knowledge. **WHAT DEODORANT DO YOU USE? I hold the secret.**
- He'll be a strong man, oh honey, but the wrong man. **SHOW US KING KONG'S DICK!**

The script incorporates the following sexual, derogatory, homophobic, and violent words/inuendos:

Sexual slurs:

Edible, kinky, sexual, sucking, slut, the Clap, blow, screw, pregnant, masturbate, balls, cum, gang bang, condom, douche, breasts, get off, sex, hooker, orgy, well hung, hole, Frankie has crabs, fuck, orgasm, dick, asshole, oral sex, hard on, etc.

Degratory slurs:

Fuck/fucking, jewish, shit, fat boy, midget, asshole, ugly, hispanic, sieg-heil!, stupid, heterosexual, cripple, etc.

¹ Produced by Hanna-Barbera Productions in association with SEPP International S.A., 1981-1990.

² Debuted in the US on NBC in 1966.

Homophobic slurs:

Queen, gay, fag, bugger, butt fucking/butt fucked, sick motherfucker, ring around the lesbians, who's the faggot here doc?, getting laid by a fag, butt dart, there's a transvestite in my soup, three more triangles, what ever happened to feeling gay and merry, what about that one time in Boy Scouts, etc.

Violence:

Whips and chains, kill, fight, a beached whale, harpoon it!, tied me up and pissed all over me, etc.

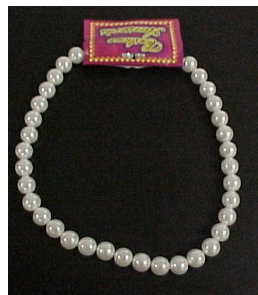
According to queer scholar Peraino, the use of scripts “[protects] the original gay audience base from increasingly homophobic audience reactions” (Peraino 234). But the use of scripts not only protects the queer crowd (if one can call homophobia protection!), but also, and more specifically it protects the heterosexual crowd. Given the fact that everyone in the audience is most likely dressed up in a queer way, the use of such homophobic scripts works also as a disavowal of one's own potential homosexuality. The script is so jam-packed with derogatory slurs, audience members hardly have time to consider whether or not they might look queer, act queer, or sound queer, as they are at the same time violently deconstructing their own queer performance while performing it at the same time. This is an act of fetish. The entire performance, including costumes, props, and scripts, acts as a fetish, which works to produce this disavowal. I will examine various theories of fetish in combination with *Rocky Horror* below.

The Fetish in Performance

According to Freud, the creation of a fetish is a way for a male child to both reject and acknowledge the castration of the mother, while at the same time safeguarding himself against his own emasculation and homosexuality. This theory ties in directly to the castration

complex, the fear of losing one's penis, which plays a fundamental role in Freud's theory on infantile sexual development. An individual harboring a fetish will play out and/or revisit this fetish repeatedly, compulsively, in order to disavow the traumatic event of the mother's castration¹.

According to this theory, audience members of *Rocky Horror* are, in fact, covering up their lack of a queer identity, and at the same time, their desire for one by participating in this performance, and in particular, by using these participation scripts. Pop-culture scholars Amanda Fernbach and Valerie Steele have written books on the fetish in pop-culture today, which they view as an extension of one's gender and sexuality, used to mentally and sexually stimulate oneself or others. A fetish could be an inanimate, or even animate object, such as whips, chains, leather, furs, and animals; a game of role-play, such as S&M or transvestitism; a scenario, such as the playing out of a sexual fantasy, voyeurism, exhibitionism, or humiliation; and ways in which one treats one's body and that of others, such as worshipping women's feet or the lack of an appendage, and mortification of the body. The audience members of *Rocky Horror* wear and sport all kinds of fetish items, including overtly sexual costumes and props, like the ones listed above and those shown here below:



Plus, the very act of performing is an act of exhibition and voyeurism; one can play out one's sexual fantasies, and at the same time, their performances may be construed as an

¹ See Freud "Fetishism" (1927).

act of self-humiliation, especially when audience members are queer and disavowing homosexuality at the same time.

Steele, speaking as a fashion historian, suggests that the modern fetish is simply a commodity in today's world in which "'perversity' sells everything from films and fashions to chocolates and leather briefcases" (9). In the case of *Rocky Horror*, fetish sells the movie, as well as all the merchandise that goes with it, as shown in the above pictures. Similarly, Marxist literary theorist Walter Benjamin writes how "[f]ashion [has] prescribed the ritual by which the fetish commodity wishes to be worshipped;" in is the "sex-appeal of the commodity" that sells (166). *Rocky Horror* is undoubtedly sexy, and in this case is the *queer* sex-appeal of the commodity that sells.

Whatever the fetish, normal or abnormal, the individual will play out and/or revisit this fetish repeatedly, compulsively, in order to relive, work through, and at the same time deny and disavow their own sexuality, and any possible queer identifications they may have. Their performance in a *Rocky Horror* show is an act of fetishism. Through the citations of the film, audience members can better access the identities in the film. Through the film's queering of citations, the characters are better able to queer their own on-stage identities. Their costumes and props enable them as well to perform these queer identities. Finally, the citations and violently derogatory scripts, along with the fetish of their group performance, debunks and disavows successfully any possible notion of sexuality and/or gender performed out of bounds.

Conclusion: Rocky Horror Picture Show

At the end of *Rocky Horror*, Riff Raff and Magenta, Frank's fellow aliens claim that Frank's lifestyle is too "extreme," and so they kill him. According to Thomas Waugh, who wrote *The Fruit Machine: Twenty years of Writings on Queer Cinema* (2000), queer-themed movies often maintain "safe limits of the dominant stereotype of gayness as evil and decadent," which *Rocky Horror* does to its fullest extent (65). Brad and Janet, the engaged heterosexual couple, are fundamentally good, however much their behavior defies heteronormativity within the space of an evening. We know, or at least we assume, they will return safely to their roles within heteronormativity. The queer transvestite Frank is, on the other hand, fundamentally bad. He will not change, and thus, he will have to die.

Bad endings are typical of queer movies, especially those from earlier days in Hollywood. Waugh writes: "Gay characters traditionally drop off like flies, with clockwork predictability, at the service of dramatic expediency and the sexual anxiety of the dominant culture" (19). Despite the overt sexual references and queered citations in the film, at the end of *Rocky Horror*, "the sexual anxiety of the dominant culture" is subdued, the limits of heteronormativity have been reestablished, and all notions of queerness have been effectively disavowed.

When spectators leave the theater, knowing that they can successfully return to heteronormativity, they may have no qualms about returning to the theater again sometime soon for another showing of *Rocky Horror*. The average heterosexual man, who, consciously or not, longs to play a queer role, can yet again easily dress up in the role of Frank, and wear the costume of a transvestite in high heels and stockings, sporting a purse. This is a sublime encounter with the queer Other in which moment the self, or rather the notion of a solid

essence of gender and sexuality, is disabled. What comes out of this performance is the emergence of a new queer identity, which is created out of the excess this sublime encounter creates. Still, this performer knows that his macho buddies will not accuse him, however, of being gay, as they too are dressed up next to him, indulging as well in this excess, all screaming homophobic slurs at the screen about Frank being a “fag.” In essence, he is calling himself a “fag”! But instead of focusing on his performance, or the connotation of that word in combination with the queer role he is playing, this man is watching the citations of *Frankenstein* on the screen and thinking about the last time he read the book, or thinking about the last time he saw an episode of *Flash Gordon* on TV. He may also think how much fun he is having participating with this group of spectators; and on an unconscious level, how well he can participate – even if the scripts literally enable him to participate perfectly according to the rules of group dynamic. So, who is this *he* in this moment in the theater? Is he the heterosexual male he says he is outside of the cinema, dressed in drag to play along with others in a theater? Or is he in this moment really a transvestite? Or something queer?

If we look to Judith Butler and her theories of performativity¹, we see that there may be no clear line between *being* and *speaking*. Butler speaks of gender and sexuality as not having an essence, but instead these identities are created through the performance of such. In other words, if one performs the role of a straight woman by wearing high heels, make-up, and speaking softly, then one becomes a woman only in as much as that person continues to perform this act through the fetish of clothing and appropriate speech acts. If this is done repetitiously over time (how much time is of course the question), one creates the illusion that one has a stable and identifiable gender and sexuality. Of course, how one performs one’s identity and how one performs the roles in *Rocky Horror* differ slightly, and yet are

¹ See Bulter *Gender Trouble* (1990).

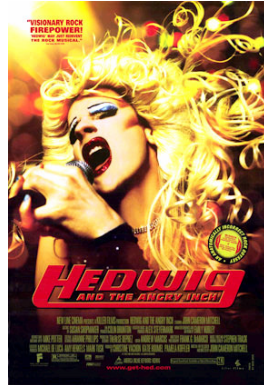
still too intertwined to separate. For instance, when performing our own identities of gender and sexuality “in reality,” this is what Butler calls a performative act; that is we are not really conscience of the fact that we are playing this role; it has become second nature to us, as it is prescribed through the norms of heteronormativity in society. This means, through television, and the internet, and culture in general, through the family, and ultimately through the dominant power structures according to Michel Foucault¹, we learn how to play heteronormative roles. But when we play the roles in *Rocky Horror*, we are conscious of the queer identities we want to play. This means here we are performing gender and sexuality deliberately, playing with the heteronormative codes subversively. For example, to play the role of Frank, I put on make-up and a corset and a garter belt, etc., because I want to play a gay man vs. when I wake up in the morning, I shave my face, and put on a suit and tie, because I am a homosexual man. Now, the average heterosexual man may have a hard time dressing in drag and going to work or to school, for example, as he would most likely be publicly ridiculed. In fact, just by performing such an act, he would be jeopardizing his assumed role as a heterosexual man, which shows just how unstable sexual identities are, however stable we may believe they are. But, when we are when watching and performing such roles with *Rocky Horror*, there are several mechanisms that heighten our security so that we will not be publicly ridiculed. Instead one is actually able for the space of 2 hours to perform these roles without jeopardizing one’s own, or even heteronormative society’s ideas of one’s gender or sexual identities.

In sum, the fact that *Rocky Horror* includes this pastiche of citations, including being such a playful parody of horror and science fiction films, makes it easy for audience members to feel that watching *Rocky Horror* is simply a game, of which they are a part.

¹ See Foucault *A History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1976).

Once the game is over, they can discard their costumes, props, and scripts. But does not the song, “The Time Warp,” stay in their heads, bound to be repeated the next day in the office when they are performing their own roles of gender and sexuality?

Chapter 2: Blurring Borders: Hedwig and the Angry Inch



Hedwig and the Angry Inch (2001) is an American rock musical film, whose cult status is growing, like that of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). Like *Rocky Horror*, *Hedwig* began as a stage performance. The musical has been performed world wide including more famously in the US, UK, South Korea, Peru, and Australia. As with *Rocky Horror*, fans can purchase costumes and prop items to perform along with Hedwig. In fact, in a step one above *Rocky Horror*, New Line Cinema handed out yellow Styrofoam wigs at the premiere of *Hedwig*, an item which has taken on a cult status as well; they can be purchased for a high price on Ebay.com. Fans of *Hedwig* call themselves “Hedheads,” and oftentimes bear the same tattoo Hedwig wears on her leg in the film, a tattoo based on the story Hedwig sings of a “third sex.”



The film premiered at the Sundance Film festival in 2001, where the film won the Best Director and Audience awards. *Hedwig* also received the Best Directional Debut from the National Board of Review, the Gotham award, and the L.A. Film Critics award. Cameron Mitchell received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor as well.

Like with *Rocky Horror* picture show, there are fans who claim to have seen the musical over 1000 times. The film has been shown like *Rocky Horror* as a midnight musical, in front of which audience members have dressed up in drag and performed the part of the characters.

Back in 1994 American writer, actor, and director John Cameron Mitchell, along with American musician and composer Stephen Trask, began working on an idea of a drag performance of sorts. Cameron Mitchell wrote the text; Trask wrote the music and lyrics. This idea developed into a one-man show which dealt with the queer lovers of the character *Tommy Gnosis*. In 1994, Cameron Mitchell playing Gnosis debuted this performance at Don Hill's Squeezebox, an underground punk and drag dive in New York City in the early 90s. Trask was the musical director at the Squeezebox at that time, and also played in the house band, called *Cheater*, which was the band that accompanied Cameron Mitchell in his performance in the early years of *Hedwig* and in the film adaptation. Through time Cameron Mitchell and Trask developed the character of Hedwig, who was one of Gnosis's lovers.

Eventually Hedwig's character became more popular than Gnosis, and essentially took over the show.

Cameron Mitchell's initial performance was received with mixed reviews at the Squeezebox. Unlike most drag performances which are lip-synched, Cameron Mitchell performed his own songs. Additionally, during his performances of Hedwig, Cameron Mitchell would tear off his drag costume - for some drag queens a taboo. But, as audience members of the Squeezebox began to accept Hedwig as a regular part of the evening's entertainment, and as the character of Hedwig began to develop, the show's popularity increased. Eventually, Cameron Mitchell and Trask developed the story of Hedwig while performing in clubs, such as Squeezebox, and in doing so helped the piece evolve into the show length performance *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, which consequently retained the punk rock energy of the environment in which it was developed. Around 1998 they began looking for a theater where they could perform Hedwig autonomously. After having little success performing *Hedwig* before a mainstream audience, Trask and Cameron Mitchell realized they would need an untraditional location for such an untraditional performance. They found the Jane Street Theatre in the meatpacking district in New York. This theater is, or rather was, the ballroom of the Hotel Riverview. The Hotel Riverview is known for being the location to house the surviving crew of the Titanic in 1912, a fact which is cited in the film adaptation. Rumor has it that Herman Melville had also worked at the reception desk of the hotel. The ballroom was the location for shots in other movies, including *The Bodyguard* (1992) starring Whitney Houston. The first performance at the Jane Street Theatre debuted on February 14, 1998. The stage musical performance won a Village Voice Obie Award and the Outer Critics Circle Award. Cameron played the part of Hedwig in this off-Broadway musical for 2 years,

after which time other actors and even actresses played the role of Hedwig, including Tony award-winning actor Michael Cerveris, American actress Ally Sheedy, and Anthony Rapp, who played a starring role in the Broadway musical *Rent*.

In 2001 Cameron Mitchell directed and starred in a film adaptation of *Hedwig*. The cast also included Trask and the band *Cheater*, as well as Miriam Shor as Yitzak, Hedwig's "husband." Notably, most of the lead vocals were performed live to maintain the live rock and roll sound. The movie is also influenced by the drag performances from the queer clubs where the stage performance of *Hedwig* appeared, as well as the sound of queer and punk, and glam rock music, including David Bowie, John Lennon, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, and notably Meatloaf, who also appeared in *Rocky Horror*. On a final note, the movie was shot with the low budget of \$6 million.

The Plot of *Hedwig*

The story of *Hedwig* is based loosely upon life events of Cameron Mitchell. Mitchell is the son of the influential U.S. Army Major General John Henderson Mitchell who helped command the U.S. sector of occupied West Berlin, Germany, after WWII. Hedwig's character is based upon a German babysitter of Cameron Mitchell's, a divorced U.S. Army wife, who also worked as a prostitute out of her trailer home in Junction City, Kansas.

The story is told through the character of Hedwig in the form of an extended dialogue with the audience in the movie, be that the clientele in a restaurant, at a music festival, fans after a show, or to herself aloud, and to us, her audience. *Hedwig* is the story of a queer German boy named Hansel who grows up in a broken home in postwar Germany. After Hansel's mother Hedwig kicks his father out for molesting Hansel, they move to East Berlin to live together in seclusion. Hansel's only friend is the US Armed Force's radio and the

music of US rock and roll. Then, Hansel meets Luther Robinson, a U.S. soldier, who falls in love with him. Luther plans to take Hansel with him to the capitalist US. In order to leave, the two must marry, and ultimately, Hansel must become a woman. Luther and Hedwig convince Hansel that he should undergo sexual reassignment. The operation is not, however, fully successful, and Hansel, now named Hedwig after his mother, has a one-inch mound of flesh in place where his male genitals used to be – aka “the angry inch.” Hedwig and Luther still marry and move into a trailer park in Junction City, Kansas. On the day of their one year anniversary Luther leaves Hedwig for another young boy, the same day the Berlin wall falls. Hedwig joins a band of Korean-born American army wives. She names the band “the Angry Inch.” Hedwig meets Tommy Gnosis, a Christian-oriented yet queer and shy teenager and falls in love. They write songs together and eventually perform together, that is until Gnosis gains popularity with the female fans. Gnosis goes off to become a famous rock-star, claiming the songs they both or rather even those Hedwig wrote alone were his own. Hedwig, in the meantime, has moved on to a new band of queer boys, including his “husband,” a transman (that is, a transgendered person that transitions from being a woman to a man) named Yitzak. Although she is with Yitzak, Hedwig makes it more than clear that she believes Gnosis to be her soul mate. The band performs at restaurants and malls, trailing Gnosis around the country on his rock and roll tour, until Hedwig and Gnosis finally meet up at the end of the movie. The end of *Hedwig* is rather ambivalent. In any case, Hedwig removes his drag costume and walks away naked. Some critics speculate that the movie’s events are simply the dying thoughts of Hedwig.

Deviant Desires in *Hedwig*

In comparison to *Rocky Horror*, *Hedwig* is much more in-your-face concerning the deviant desires and queer identities presented in the film. Within the first 5 minutes of the movie, viewers are already bombarded with what looks like a drag queen and non-normative behavior: Hedwig walks with an umbrella through a clearly dry alley to get to her gig, wearing sunglasses at night, and tosses the umbrella carelessly into the street before entering. She is wearing an outrageous outfit of a short denim skirt, a long blond wig, and a large cape on which it is written “Yankee go home...with me,” and a reverse swastika. Hedwig has unshaved armpits and a man’s voice; so, viewers already have a sense that this is not your typical drag queen either. Hedwig’s band is a bunch of queer boys; his partner Yitzhak is also transgendered, a transman – female to male. The story of *Hedwig* is about queer love; the love and/or attraction between Hedwig and Gnosis, Hedwig and Luther, and/or Hedwig and Yitzhak.

The journey taken by a viewer of *Hedwig* is a little more radical than that taken by one of *Rocky Horror*. In *Rocky Horror* we follow along Brad and Janet’s strange journey into a queer world. While they do take on queer identities during the space of the movie, or at least, they are able to satisfy to some extent queer desires, they are able to escape this queer world at the very end. In *Hedwig* audience members follow along Hedwig’s journey from adolescents to adulthood, but the price of identification seems much higher than with Brad and Janet, and even more so than with Dr. Frank N. Furter. First of all, there is no main heteronormative character with which to identify, like Brad or Janet. For those fans of *Rocky Horror*, if one desires to play the part of Dr. Frank N. Furter, one only has to consider disavowing their sexuality, but in the case of playing or identifying with Hedwig, one must

contend with both transgressions of sexuality and gender; Hedwig is after all now transgendered or even intersexed, depending on how one defines the terms. Still, one of Hedwig's largest fan groups is apparently straight housewives, who do not feel necessarily threatened by Hedwig's subversive gender or sexual preference. But the motto of *Hedwig* is not the motto of *Rocky Horror*; how the audience interacts with the text is not the same. In *Rocky Horror*, one can take on a queer identity for the space of 2 hours, and then leave the queer identity behind. One takes part in a *Mindfuck*, as Dr. Frank N. Furter tells Brad and Janet: "A mental mind fuck can be nice," but after the fuck, one can return to heteronormativity. In contrast, as Luther explains to Hedwig: "To walk away, you've gotta leave something behind," and Hedwig's mother chimes in "to be free, one must give up a little part of oneself." In watching *Hedwig*, the borders of heteronormativity are crossed and lines are blurred. Just like in *Rocky Horror*, there are citations to be found that help hold the audience members close to heteronormativity; and most can and will recover from the performance and be able to return to their more solid notions of gender and sexuality. However, while viewers of *Rocky Horror* have strong mechanisms through the citationality that help queer them, and at the same time, steer them away again, no one comes away from *Hedwig* and lives to tell the tale completely unscathed. One does leave a part of oneself, or rather, one is queered, if only momentarily, by being a part of this queer musical performance.

Why the growing popularity?

Looking at *Hedwig* we find on a superficial level that the directors and writers of this screenplay, John Cameron and Stephen Trask, queer men, repeats and reiterates stereotypes of queerness, possibly with negative connotations throughout the film. If through those

reiterations, heteronormativity is reestablished and strengthened, why would large queer audiences and surprisingly even larger heterosexual audiences for that matter flock to the movie and live-showings of *Hedwig* off-Broadway? Could it be that heteronormative audience members get something different from watching *Hedwig* than do queer audience members? I think we can separate out here intention and effect.

For instance, the director's intention was most likely to play around with and become in some way this genderqueer character. On the second CD that comes with the movie, we learn how Cameron began to develop the character of Hedwig in drag bars in the 90s. Almost ironically, his budding performance was not well accepted by the queer community, due to the fact that he broke performative boundaries by actually singing during his drag performance, as opposed to most performers who just lip-synch to music. What Cameron's intention was for others, we can only guess. For himself, we can assume that in performing this drag role of Hedwig, he desired to identify with her, and took pleasure from this in some way. In fact, when performing, he is Hedwig.

The audience's intention is not really that different from the director's, screenwriters, or the actors of a performance. I think we can separate the terms queer and heteronormativity however on a more superficial level of intention. In other words, many queer-identified individuals may want to watch *Hedwig* because they desire to identify with her queerness. Within heteronormativity, an individual might say they want to watch the film because of the taboo and fetish-like position this kind of film and subject matter holds for them. They don't say, I watch the film because it's taboo, but instead, because they like the music! They like singing along with Hedwig, and the film acknowledges and fulfills this need. One of the best

meta-cinematic moments in the film is when the text appears on the screen and we follow the bouncing wig, singing along with the text.

Citatoriality in *Hedwig*

In *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* the issue of gender and desire performativity is also explored in a postmodern way. Both are performed through songs, costumes, and dialogues, which are overrun with heavily laden historical, cultural, and religious citations and references, and yet both escape definition and identification. Both gender and desire are in a way vacated of meaning through this aspect of performativity, and in particular, a pastiche of citational performativity. We can still, however, identify the unstable and translucent queer identities in the film, simply by pinning down language itself in this moment. We can trace along a blurred borderline queer identities, even if they are in fact always spilling over and beyond the semantic threshold of meaning and identification à la Derrida.¹ In comparison to heteronormative identities, genderqueer identities can be identified perhaps however pessimistically in their non-conformity, non-identification, their state of negation, but like heteronormative identities, in fact, all identities are only constituted in a transitory moment in a single, reiterated performance of language.

When we perform in and with Hedwig it would seem we put into question not only our own sense of identity, but also we face the possibility of literally erasing ourselves of our identity and humanness à la Butler². However, due to this eclectic nature of performative citationality, we are able, arguably, to take on genderqueer identities, queer desires and genders, and leave the theater thereafter, return to our constructed notions of gender and

¹ See Derrida's essay "Signature, Event, Context" in *Limited Inc.* (1988).

² See Butler *Undoing Gender* (2004).

desire, queer or not, and return relatively safely to our own comfortable conceptions of solid and stable identity. But, do we not realize that we can never fully leave behind that performance? There is, in fact, an excess that comes out of performativity, which we can only locate in the memory of that performance. Chances are, whatever led us to desire to see *Hedwig* in the first place, will lead us back to her again.

Queer Characters

Citations in *Hedwig*, as opposed to those in *Rocky Horror*, attempt to transmit a much stronger political and queerer message. Queer scholar Judith Ann Peraino writes: “[Hedwig] probes and burlesques the intimate, constructed bonds between gender ‘citizenship’ and national citizenship, both of which can be strategically circumvented through medical technology and musical celebrity” (246). In *Rocky Horror* citations are queered subtly, so as to allow the audience members to view the citation within its heteronormative context consciously, while the queered-ness of the citation affects them more subversively, more subconsciously. For example, Dr. Frank N. Furter’s name evokes the citation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), while at the same time Frank appears in drag as a transvestite. For example, if one were to say one is going to dress up as Frank, the first thought one may have is the name *Frank N. Furter*, instead of thinking of the fact that he is queer. Plus, performances at *Rocky Horror* usually include the use of a derogatory homophobic script, which further un-queers this performance. In contrast, in *Hedwig* we have similar allusions to seemingly heteronormative citations, which the film queers, but because of the overtly politically controversial, queer nature of the citations, and the less subversive way in which they are presented, audience members might have a more difficult time un-queering themselves. Plus, audience participation scripts have not been developed for *Hedwig* as they

have been for *Rocky Horror*, which might have helped un-queer these citations even further. But this is not the case. I will show below examples of such politically charged, queer citations.

Hansel



Hansel Schmidt is Hedwig as a child before his sex change, and he represents a childish innocence and naiveté in Hedwig, which the heterosexual family unit and post-war politics eventually corrupts, and eliminates. Hansel grows up in a small, cramped apartment with his parents in Communist East Berlin; he is a child the post-war and of molestation. His mother kicks his father out, after discovering that he has sexually molested Hansel. Living in a state of irresolvable limbo, Hansel escapes from the isolation and repression of Communist Germany and repercussions of molestation by watching the American Force's Television Network and listening and singing to American rock songs on the Armed Force's radio station.

Hansel's Queer Mind

The TV show cited in *Hedwig* is *Jesus is Good*, one of the many citations of Christianity and the Bible in the film. But this citation is queered, as it is challenged by Hansel's child mind. Hansel is watching TV with his mother in the kitchen on a black and white TV. The cartoon is poorly drawn and the figure of Jesus is standing in the desert next

to a camel. Jesus looks quite frightening, thin and obscure. Directly before the camera turns to Hansel, we see a military tank enter the cartoon, an allusion to the US occupation of Germany, looking oddly out of place in the desert. Hansel says to his mother “Jesus says the darndest things.”

Mother: (slaps Hansel): “Don’t you ever mention that name to me again.”
Hansel: “But he died for our sins.”
Mother: (Turns the TV off): “So did Hitler.”
Hansel: “Eh?”
Mother: “Absolute power corrupts.”
Hansel: “Absolutely.”
Mother: “Better to be powerless, my son.”

The screen flashes to a map of Europe with a hammer and sickle superimposed over it. Obviously, this discussion between Hansel and his mother has to do with the political climate of Communist East Berlin, but it is also an allusion to what will physically happen to Hansel; that is, he will become sexually powerless after his sex change. Hedwig will become the physical representation of Communist East Germany. The connection between Hansel/Hedwig and the post-war history of Germany is not subtle in the film. Hansel is born the year the Wall was erected in Berlin. Later, Hedwig is left by her lover the day the Wall falls.

Hansel’s Queer Body

The name Hansel evokes the citation of the Brothers Grimm adapted fairy tale *Hänsel und Gretel* (1812)¹.

¹ See Grimm *Household Stories* (1883).



Hansel represents the boy lost in the woods of a politically and sexually tumultuous environment. Politically, he is a child of Communism and the Cold War. At the beginning of the movie, Hansel is shown wearing the uniform of the *The Ernst Thälmann Pioneer Organisation*; a white button up shirt with a blue sash and a patch on the sleeve which depicts the emblem of the pioneer organization, and a blue cap.



The Ernst Thälmann Pioneer Organization was a youth organization of the German Democratic Republic in the 1960s and 70s. Nearly all school children in East Germany were members. The pioneer group ran somewhat similar to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in the US, supplemented with socialist philosophies. Hansel queers this uniform in showing his early side of performance in this costume. He dances on his bed without reservation, as children might do, to an American rock song written by Stephen Trask, performed with the indie rock/post-hardcore band *Girls Against Boys*, “Freaks.”

In this scene we don't hear much more than the refrain of the song in the movie:

*We are freaks we follow the code of freaks
We are freaks stand back and that's that
We are freaks. We fuck who we please and do what we choose
We look bad we're not disease or confused
One of us one of us
One of us one of us
One of us one of us
One of us one of us*

On the soundtrack for *Hedwig*, however, we learn the entire song and here we discover just how truly queer the song is:

*We are freak we fuck who we please and do what we choose
We look bad we're not disease or confused
We are freaks we are butch we are fem [...]
And my mother has a friend who has 3 tits [...]
Walks like a lumberjack and talks like a lady[...]
She's the king, she's the queen[...]
She's the bearded lady of Avenue A
That's the way God planned it
That's the way
That's the way God planned it
That's the way*

It references anarchy, homosexuals, human deformation, transvestites, and the genderqueer, all within the context of religion. This song is notably also a citation, in that it was originally sung in Tod Browning's over-the-top queer, horror film *Freaks* (1932)¹, which showcased freaks in a circus.

Evoking the Grimm Brother's fairy tale again, Hansel is later depicted in a queer scene when he meets his future lover Sergeant Luther Robinson, who plays essentially the role of Gretel and the witch from the fairy tale. Luther is the Black American "Candyman," an American GI who seduces Hedwig with candy and sex. In the seduction scene in the film, Hansel appears naked lying on his back. From behind, Luther is not able to identify Hansel's

¹ Directed, produced, and written by Tod Browning.

gender; he is simply too effeminate; his body soft, lacking muscles. Luther says: “Damn, Hansel. I can’t believe you’re not a girl.” Ultimately Luther, with help of Hansel’s mother, encourages Hansel to undergo a sex change, to cut off his penis in order to make him a “woman,” so that Luther can marry him. He wants to take Hansel with him to the US. Again, as referenced above, Luther tells Hansel, “to walk away you have to leave something behind,” and to this Hansel’s mother agrees saying “to be free you have to give up a little bit of your self.” Might this be not only a political statement about the nature of relations between post-war Germany and the US at that time, but also a commentary on the nature of performative citationality? Even after Hansel moves to the US, life is not as perfect as American propaganda led one to believe. In the case of performative citationality, if one performs with and watches genderqueer musicals such as *Hedwig*, one must give up a part of oneself, one’s heteronormative identity within the space of time when one is watching the musical; and even after the musical is over, can one really ever completely believe in a solid notion of gender and sexuality?

Hedwig



Hansel becomes Hedwig after the sex change operation. Hedwig’s body cannot be etched into a little black box of gender and desire on the heteronormative questionnaire. Is Hedwig a man, or is (s)he a woman, transgendered or intersexed? Or should we more

appropriately use the transgendered pronouns “zim”, “hir”, “sie” and so on to designate someone who does not fall into those supposed straight and narrow categories of gender and desire? Is he gay, straight, or something else? Just as mystifying as Hedwig, is her band, made up of genderqueer individuals, including Hedwig’s partner Yitzhak. “It is clear I must find my other half. But is it a he or a she? What does this person look like? Identical to me or somehow complimentary? Does my other half have what I don’t? Did he get the looks, the luck, the love?” The camera pans from a clean-shaven Hedwig, her hair up in a hairnet, to her naked feminine shoulder, down across her thin emaciated arms, to Hedwig’s feminine tattooed hip covered up under the sheet. What is she hiding? A penis, a vagina, something else... (we know!), the infamous “angry inch”?! The camera moves onward to meet her finely manicured nails upwards toward her partner, Yitzhak, a transman. Yitzhak’s body contrasts Hedwig’s in every way. Yitzhak lies awake, pensive, sweaty, sporting a full beard and a dude rag. His entire body is covered by the sheet up to his neck. He spoons with Hedwig beneath the sheets, just as Hedwig’s cartoon persona does in the song “The Origin of Love,” yet another citation, but this time from within the film itself. What are they doing under there? What parts do they have to work with? Are they functional? What does it mean to have functional sex, or desire, or gender? Must procreation be possible? An orgasm? Or maybe love? When is desire not functional? As Hedwig’s voice over fades out, Yitzhak pulls away. Can we call the desire that did or does possibly exist between Hedwig and her partner homosexual, heterosexual, or is this something transsexual? This human drive to identify and classify gender and desire are never entirely fulfilled for queer or heteronormative identities. Instead, we can literally only try to capture our identities through this repetition of performance, and the language of that performance. Thus, Hedwig is what we want her to be,

and only for us individually. In fact, we need to identify with Hedwig in some way either through acceptance or negation, in order to even *see* her, and then we in a way take on that identity as well. She becomes Hedwig as we become Hedwig. But the question remains, how is this identification and becoming at all possible? The answer lies in the performative citationality.

The text, but most specifically the songs, in *Hedwig* are full of citations. In the song “The Origin of Love” we find perhaps the most significant pastiche of citations. Hedwig tells a creation story, which many audience members would recognize. In Plato’s *Symposium* (385 BC), Aristophanes speaks about the nature and power of love, beginning with what he calls the nature of men and women, not as two separate parts, but instead as one original androgynous *third sex*, made up essentially of the two sexes owning two arms and legs. Plato spins a tale of the Greek God *Zeus* cutting this third sex in half in an attempt to weaken humankind. *Love*, for Plato, is our yearning to put our selves literally back together again, to become again this third sex. Hedwig’s song parallels Plato’s storyline intimately. But what she also does is pack this citation with even more citations, which spill out from the song on every which side in performative excess. For instance, we uncover allusions to the Vikings, Thor and his hammer, Greek and Roman mythology, Zeus and his lightning bolt, Indian mythologies, Osiris and the gods of the Nile, and the 7 plagues. Hedwig also alludes to Christianity and the “price we paid,” Adam and Eve and the tree of knowledge, and Noah’s ark and the flood. Antithetically, she also references the theory of evolution and the dinosaurs, biology of the human body, our belly buttons, physical symmetry, and therewith even possibly modern physics, and superstring theories of multi-dimensionality. Hedwig represents a third kind of sex, as alluded to in these citations. By linking historical references

to Hedwig, this kind of gender and sexual transgression is also historicized and justified in a way, history is queered.

Hedwig is also associated with what he calls in the film “crypto-homo” rock and roll stars, including Toni Tennille, Debbie Bonne, Anne Murray, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, and David Bowie. Peraino writes: “Glam rockers, the crypto-homo ‘idioms’ of identity, light the way for Hedwig’s only hope for self-invention outside the laws of marriage and citizenship—laws that had already imposed the price of castration. As critic pop-music critic Eric Weisbard writes, Hedwig becomes ‘one of those extra-gendered ‘strange rock ‘n’ rollers’” (Weisbard).

Finally, there is again a queer political connotation to Hedwig’s character. Just as Hansel was the physical representation of Communist East Germany, so too is Hedwig’s, as they are one in the same. Yitzhak in the song “Tear me down” at the beginning of the movie makes this point clear when she compares Hedwig to the Berlin Wall in a queer way:

Ladies and Gentlemen, Hedwig is like that wall, Standing before you in the divide Between East and West, Slavery and Freedom, Man and Woman, Top and Bottom

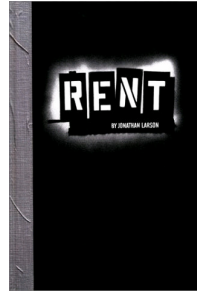
Peraino describes how here “the post-war is likened to the split of genders; it is an artificial division of the world into East and West based on political ideology, just as the social division between ‘man’ and ‘woman’ is itself an artificial divide” (248). The dichotomies explored in *Hedwig* are, however, not just those commonly accepted within heteronormativity, like straight and gay, male and female, but also as in the case of Yitzhak and Hedwig, there are new dichotomies created that break down old ones and challenge viewers to see the world in a new, queer way.

Yitzhak



Yitzhak, Hedwig's lover, plays his, or rather her opposite. Yitzhak, played by American film and television actress Miriam Shor, is a transman in *Hedwig*, which means a woman who becomes a man either through a sex change, or presumably in the case of Yitzhak, by performing the role of a male clothing- and personality-wise. As with many transgendered persons, Yitzhak possibly considers himself a queer heterosexual man, a definition that still defies heteronormativity, of course. The fact that Yitzhak and Hedwig are lovers complicates and queers their relationship to the utmost extreme. Since Hedwig is a man who is now essentially a woman dating a woman who is performing the role of a man, does that make their relationship heterosexual? The question is of course rhetorical, as their relationship is simply and essentially queer.

While Yitzhak's identity clearly need not be further queered in *Hedwig*, her role is queered again through a citation, and again with a political connotation. Yitzhak is from Croatia, a fact which Hedwig makes clear when she tears up Yitzhak's passport when he tries to leave her. (Note: I use the pronouns *he* for Yitzhak and *she* for Hedwig, as is appropriate with most transgendered individuals). The citation named in *Hedwig* in reference to Yitzhak is the queer Broadway musical *Rent*.



Rent is a rock musical by Tony award-winning composer and playwright Jonathan Larson; *Rent* tells the story of the lives of a group young artists and musicians in NYC struggling in the face of AIDS. In *Hedwig*, Yitzhak wants to run away from Hedwig, as she ultimately rejects his love. He finds a job poster of *Rent* in a laundromat, and later leaves Hedwig and the band to play the role of *Angel* in *Rent*. Angel's character is a gay drag queen musician. Towards the end of the movie Yitzhak makes one further and final transition, and that is he plays the role of a drag queen with Hedwig's band. This complicates her queer identity, for Yitzhak is a drag queen means that she is a woman who maintains an identity of a man, performing the role of a woman on stage. The queerness of her position is pushed to the extreme. One must also note that Trask and Cameron Mitchell were intentionally making fun of *Rent* here as a travesty of a queer rock musical – all the queer characters die by the end of the show.

Queer Performances

Hedwig is similar to *Rocky Horror* in terms of its queer citationality and growing phenomenon of audience participation. Like in *Rocky Horror*, some theaters show midnight screenings of *Hedwig* during which audience members dress up and perform with Hedwig and the band. However, my research shows that up until now, there are no participation scripts to be found; not that this phenomenon will not develop sometime in the future. In fact,

it is very likely that this may happen sometime soon. But, *Hedwig* has actually another outlet that *Rocky Horror* does not. *Hedwig* is more popularly performed on the stage still today, more than *The Rocky Horror Show* is now. *The Rocky Horror Show* is the precursor to the film adaptation *Rocky Horror*. *Hedwig* is performed locally, and in these local performances, the show itself takes on its own identity and flair. This means that the audience participates through and with *Hedwig*, as the actors of local troupes allow and encourage their audience to participate.

For example, one such local performance took place in October of 2007 in Carrboro, North Carolina. Along with the show, the local troupe decided to encourage local townspeople to participate in the musical by having a drag show before the performance began. On the stage, there were all types of individuals, drag queens, trans-women and trans-men performing their queer identities in full drag, including costumes and props. Those audience members seated participated in the show by encouraging the drag performers, putting money in their hats and stockings, and with their jeers and jublations. The performers in the musical itself were from the surrounding area, and they brought into the show a local flair by initiating a dialog between Hedwig and the audience, making references to Carrboro and the university town of Chapel Hill. After the show, the cast members, along with the drag performers, came out onto the stage and danced again, encouraging members of the audience to get up and perform/dance as well. Many of the audience members also brought wigs and/or came in full drag, and/or wore the traditional foam wigs that *true* fans, called “Hedheads” of Hedwig, sport. Finally, at the conclusion of the show, the cast members and drag performers opened up the floor for questions. Audience members were again encouraged to ask questions about the history and background of *Hedwig*, as well as to ask

questions about queer notions of gender and sexuality, and ways they could participate in the local LGBTIQ community.

In comparison to the audience participation that works in *Rocky Horror*, the degree of engagement through local performances of *Hedwig* is intensified. Audience members do not just come for the performance, perform in drag, and then leave, like they do after watching *Rocky Horror*. Instead, audience members are asked to actively engage and think about queer identities, and more specifically, how that might apply to their own notions of gender and sexuality. Here the group dynamic works obviously in an opposite manner than it does in *Rocky Horror*. In *Rocky Horror*, through the use of scripts, audience members use homophobic and derogatory slurs in a way to counteract the queering that goes on in the film, and to re-heteronormalize their own queered gender and sexuality during the performance. But when watching *Hedwig* in this example, one finds that the group dynamic actually promotes a queer-friendly awareness of sexuality and gender. In fact, any notion of homophobia is booed upon and ultimately silenced.

Finally, when audience members leave *Hedwig* in a local show, their notion of gender and sexual identity has been altered in some way through the active engagement the musical encourages. Heteronormativity is not restored in its entirety. While audience members may not, of course, decide that they suddenly identify as queer, they will hopefully have gained an appreciation or at least a better understanding of what it means to identify and live queerly, or have at least satiated their desire for a queer encounter.

Conclusion: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

Intentions, however fundamentally essential and important we would like to believe they are, break down under the deconstructive effect of watching, performing, and singing

along with and through queer musicals. Here, there is no difference between queer and heteronormative-identified individuals. In fact, these categories are vacated of meaning in each passing sentence as they are at every moment of life otherwise. At the same time, we become in a split second during the performance that which we play. There is something sublime about the discrepancy between what we believe, according to our intentions, and what happens to us in this situation, the actual effect that befalls us. We all take on a queer identity when watching and singing along with Hedwig, whether we admit this fact or not. The sublime distance we believe we maintain throughout the performance is simply not real. We only believe we can maintain this safe distance between our identities and others because if we couldn't the heteronormative scaffold that arguably holds our society together politically would crumble. It would seem for our own sanity we need to believe we have some kind of stable gender and desire identities, in order to hold onto this scaffolding. This is not to say that other kinds and structures of worlds are not possible; but instead, I'm saying as our world is now heteronormally constructed, a deconstruction of gender and desire identities would mean a chaos of sorts. Still, and this is the point, we can deconstruct the dynamics working in queer films, just like we perform these roles in them, and return safely to our constructed notions of self because language and these performative utterances, speech acts, are always vacated of meaning, and always misfire in some way. They are never fully successful, as J.L. Austin¹ would say, or they are mystifying or full of allusion as Wittgenstein² said. A sublime desire and intention to visit a queer world and experience it unscathed prompts us to watch *Hedwig*. Citations, and in particular, a messy pastiche of citations, allow us to enter the theater, performativity allow us to take on these kinds of queer

¹ See J.L. Austin *How to Do Things with Words* (1965).

² See Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* (1968).

identifications, and the misfirings of language and speech acts allows us to think we have indeed left the theater unscathed. Still, when we leave the theater, are we really able to leave the queerness behind? Can we return, at least according to our intentions, back to our “true” gender and sexuality? Do we take or leave something of our identities when watching the film? What are the repercussions of our actions?

In essence, citationality functions as a scapegoat. Citations are easy to learn and repeat. We watch *Hedwig* and immediately begin to make identifications with the songs, words, costumes, and other motifs in the film. Upon recognition we encounter a sense of identification, and security. Especially when we watch a genderqueer film like *Hedwig*, where the characters seem to escape heteronormative identifications entirely, we can safely latch onto the citations in the film like a safety net. Again in the case of *Hedwig*, where the text is overloaded with citations, working as stepping stones throughout the entire film, we find ourselves walking along with Hedwig skipping from citation to citation easily. We begin to sing and speak and perform with Hedwig and now we’ve begun to transition into a different identity, that is, our identity which, already unstable and translucent, takes on a new form. One might presume that normally, that is to say, hetero-normally, most non-queer identified individuals would not feel comfortable taking on a queer identity or watching such a film with a queer subtext. But because the film is truly overburdened by citationality, it would seem that some audience members do not even recognize what they see and/or what is happening to them. In watching this film, they are in a way queering themselves. Still, this is again, as with *Rocky Horror*, a sublime encounter with the queer Other, at which moment their own notions of gender and sexuality are put into question, and ultimately, however momentarily, disabled. Any identifications made with Hedwig are necessarily queer and this

new queer identity is manifested out of the excess that is exhumed from the sublime encounter with the performance of the film through the aid of the queered citations. Many audience members may think that they like the film for the songs, the citations, the costumes, the humor, etc., and in doing so, think they escape identification with the subject matter and queerness of the film. Still, if you sing along with Hedwig when she speaks about being intersexed and transgendered through the codes of citationality of war and politics, and “Midwest midnight check-out queens,” are you not, in saying those words, doing and being exactly as Hedwig is? To push this point even further, we must ask the question: if any and all performative utterances make us who we are, then how can we distinguish between who we are in “reality” and who we are when we watch a movie like *Hedwig*? My answer is: we can’t differentiate. Our own identities, of gender or desire or otherwise, are always already unstable and translucent, and in this way we *are* only that which we *perform*. Therefore, we cannot possibly know ourselves outside of the performance. Such performances are not, however, solely limited to spoken utterances. I think that we must extend the performance to include all aspects of performance, including the costumes, props, the bodily movements, and the texts which we speak. When in the theater, watching *Hedwig* for instance, we perform temporarily this kind of identity, and then after the performance on the streets we believe we revert back to some kind of stable identity. Perhaps one thinks, I am a woman and heterosexual. But in all reality, only in that moment, and in every type of reiteration can one claim such an identity. Still, this identity can be torn down in an instant. We see this happen all too often when people come out as gay politically. One moment a person identifies as straight and seems to fit snugly into heteronormativity and in the next, that person is out and then oftentimes, unfortunately ostracized by society. Of course the trick here is whether one

can go back to performing the heteronormative role again. Society is not so forgiving of such transgressions into non-heteronormativity.

In comparison to *Rocky Horror*, *Hedwig* may never be as popular due to the fact that too many heteronormative limits are blurred in the performance of the show. But its growing popularity attests to the fact that all limits are not broken. Somehow *Hedwig* manages to blur the borders of heteronormativity without completely violating them. Perhaps one may attribute the ambiguous ending of *Hedwig* to the movie's attempt to provide some kind of oddly heteronormative therapeutic element to the show. At the end of the movie, Hedwig disrobes and performs as a man, and Yitzhak dresses as a woman, albeit supposedly in drag, but we know the character of Yitzhak is played by a woman; so now, Yitzhak is a woman playing a woman, and Hedwig is a man playing a man. In the end, Hedwig walks away into a dark alley and disappears. Some film critics speculate that Hedwig has died, and that the movie is nothing other than the last dying thoughts of Hedwig. If audience members interpret this to be the case, then, in a way, all does return to heteronormativity; the queer genders dress again hetero-normally, and the queer protagonist is dead. Here, audience members can walk away from *Hedwig* and return to heteronormativity more easily, if they wish, having only transgressed the limitations lightly, having only blurred the borders of heteronormativity slightly before returning home.

Chapter 3: Overstepping Boundaries: Stadt der verlorenen Seelen



Stadt der verlorenen Seelen (1982) (also known in English as *The City of Lost Souls* or *Berlin Blues*) is a queer German rock musical from one of the most infamous German queer directors, Rosa von Praunheim. Much like the British *Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the American *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *Stadt* is a campy, cabaret-style queer musical, which also delves into more serious political issues, including post-WWII/post-war politics, post-war anxiety, fascism, anti-Semitism, as well as questions of sexual, gender, racial, political, and geographical identities. *Stadt* also engages with these issues through the many citations dispersed throughout the dialogue and lyrics of the film, and in this way, citationality plays an equally important role as in *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig*. In comparison to these films, however, *Stadt* treats controversial issues much more explicitly with its unapologetic, in-your-face narrative style.

In *Rocky Horror* and for the most part in *Hedwig*, citations work in part to distract the viewer from the queer content of the film, while at the same time the film queers these

citations and thereby the audience as well, a process which works only when a delicate balance is maintained between these two elements. In other words, in order to maintain a position of heteronormativity when watching queer musicals, one must not become too aware of the queer content of the film, but at the same time, one watches such films in order to fulfill a desire to be queered, or at least watch queer content. If one becomes too aware of the queerness of the film, or the queered citations, than a heteronormative viewer will be in danger of becoming aware of the process of queering going on in the film and may feel one's own gender identity and sexuality put into question as a result of watching such a film and/or being associated with such a film. This is exactly what happens when one watches *Stadt*; the delicate balance between perception and reception is not maintained. *Stadt* is so over-the-top, the citationality does increase the viewer's awareness of the queerness of the film, and those citations. Unlike what viewers do when watching *Rocky Horror*, and in some cases when watching *Hedwig*, one cannot, when watching *Stadt*, maintain a safe distance necessary for the heterotypical viewer to come away from this film unscathed. In other words, while *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig* use citations to distract the viewer from the queer elements in the film, while at the same time queering the citations and the viewers subversively, in *Stadt* the citations are queered and politicized to such an extreme that the viewer can no longer view the citations within any heteronormal context. For example, a hamburger at the "Hamburger Königin" (Burger Queen) is no longer just an allusion to a "Burger King" hamburger. The hamburger depicted in *Stadt* is a rotting piece of meat and becomes a physical metaphor for American capitalism and consumerism, for broken political promises after the end of the WWII, as well as a symbol of right-wing gay bashing politics of moral degeneracy and degradation.

Stadt witnessed only a short-lived popularity in Germany despite, at least initially, a following of fans that might have proved it to be cult classic much like *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig*. *Stadt* has not, however, gone entirely unnoticed. The film has been shown at various film festivals internationally, including the New York International Festival of Lesbian and Gay Film and the Toronto International Film Festival (Midnight Madness). When gay filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim directed *Stadt*, he had already made quite a jolting impression on the New German Cinema film industry, and critics claimed *Stadt* to be yet another revolutionary and/or revolting addition to his collection. He had already directed such controversial films as the satirical *It is Not the Homosexual Who is Perverted, But the Situation in Which He Lives* (1970), a movie which documents the gay coming-out experience, and *Army of Lovers or Revolt of the Perverts* (1979), which examines the gay rights movement in the US, as well as a documentary trilogy on AIDS, amongst other films. Von Praunheim's work is in many ways self-aggrandizing and perverse, and at the same time bold enough to tell the story of marginalized groups, such as the queer, immigrants, and the poor. Von Praunheim is notably not a gay story teller, but instead a queer one. According to queer scholar, Alice Kuzniar, "the broad spectrum of 'queers' – the loud, extreme, not mainstream personalities—that he brings to the screen prevent him from being classified solely as a 'gay' director" (90). Call him queer, call him gay, von Praunheim has become a symbol of queer visibility, for better or for worse. Even his name, the pseudonym Rosa von Praunheim – a citation, which Holger Bernhard Bruno Mischwitzky took on in the 1960s, stands as a symbol of the pink "rosa Winkel" triangle patch that gay prisoners wore in German concentration camp in WWII. Looking at von Praunheim's films and documentaries from the last 40 plus years and the controversial reception he has received for most of these,

it is clear von Praunheim himself, like his film *Stadt*, has a radical, unapologetic queer agenda. One can infer that Von Praunheim wanted viewers of all kinds, heteronormal and queer, to watch *Stadt* and actively engage with the queered citations. Ultimately, viewers of *Stadt* will not walk away from the film unscathed, but instead will be forced to think about and reconcile with issues of gender and sexuality, as well as those political issues presented in the film. In the case of *Stadt*, the boundaries of heteronormativity have been overstepped and done away with.

The Plot of *Stadt*

Stadt tells the story of the lives of expatriate Americans living in West Berlin during the Cold War. This queer group of friends includes transvestites, transgendered folk, transsexuals, bisexuals, homosexuals, and even heterosexuals. The main characters include Angie Stardust, who is a black, pre-operative transsexual drag performer from Harlem; Gary Miller, a nude interpretative dancer, whose dancing lessons prove to have a healing and orgasmic effect on his pupils; Tara O'Hara, a feminine transvestite and former male nurse; and finally, Joaquin La Habana, who lives out the role of both the male and female gender at the same time, challenging even the queer notion of transgenderism.

Stadt begins at Angie Stardust's seedy restaurant called the "Hamburger Königin" (Burger Queen), where much of the queer cast works. The restaurant is literally a cesspool of dirt and decay, and queerness, juxtaposing the two metaphorically and problematically. The wait staff dances half-naked in drag and aloof on the counters and table tops covered in rotting food, vomit, and trash. Judith Flex and Tron von Hollywood, a pair of American erotic trapeze artists, arrive on this queer bohemian scene looking for a place to stay. Angie offers them a room in her equally derelict hotel, the *Pension Stardust* (there are human feces

on the floor, no toilet paper in the bathroom, and bed bugs in the bedrooms); the rest of the wait staff live in the hotel as well. The plot of *Stadt* is thin: it focuses mostly on satirical dialogues between characters and some individual character development. Judith and Tron arrive in Berlin to work, and they encounter prejudice from the West German bureaucracy because they are working as *Gastarbeiter*. Judith experiences her own sense of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as a Jewish American by dating a German Neo-Nazi. Tron has a mental breakdown and becomes a born-again Christian healer, and dies in the hotel fire (the *Pension Stardust* burns to the ground). Angie tries to reconcile with the fact that she is a washed-up drag queen, her restaurant is robbed, and her hotel burns down. Loretta, who suffers from depression, finally gets a job as an actress in the *Theater des Westens* (Theater of the West). Lila, who had hitherto be working as an escort girl, is offered her own TV show in East Germany, and becomes one of East Germany's most famous Communist rock stars. Gary, who faces prejudice from the West German Government as a result of his queer gender and sexual orientation, starts his own sexual therapy group, and is eventually asked to leave West Germany. In protest, depression, and ultimately as an act of suicide, he lights Angie's hotel on fire. The movie is narrated in parts by Judith in German. Her accent is notably so American, so unapologetic, and so authentic and raw, that it has the effect of shocking viewers and at the same time making *Stadt* seem much more credible, giving it an almost documentary-like authority.

Deviant Desires in *Stadt*

In comparison to *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig*, *Stadt* depicts the most diverse spectrum of deviant desires and queer identities. The film challenges notions of normative gender and sexuality by showcasing the lives of transvestites, transgendered folk, transsexuals, bisexuals,

and homosexuals, as well as introduces the idea of a “third sex.” Other taboos are challenged, including kinship relationships between men, women, male-to-female transgendered and lesbian, transvestite and straight, young and old, and transnational and trans-racial relationships across conflicting religious and political positions. We find the characters naked most of the time, in sexually explicit positions – the film borders on what would be considered pornography, at least in the US. The film was made before there was a real understanding of HIV and AIDS in the queer community, and sex is shown as something to be enjoyed without restraint. Still, von Praunheim pushes the threshold of normalcy and even decency to the limits of camp itself. For example, Angie’s restaurant only serves spoiled food, and clients are shown eating it and throwing up on the tables. The hotel is infested with bed bugs – and the guests equally covered with bites; and the bedrooms are covered with trash, feces, and ejaculation. The storyline even breaks outside the realm of relative possibility. For example, Lila, a male transvestite, becomes pregnant by another man. *Stadt* not only challenges notions of heteronormativity: it even challenges the dichotomies between hetero-, and homo- and/or queer-normativity. The film is fundamentally provocative, oftentimes offensive, and even downright disgusting at times, and von Praunheim undoubtedly meant it to be that way. No one leaves a screening of *Stadt* unaffected.

Why the lack of popularity?

Rosa von Praunheim’s reputation, as well as his films and documentaries, have always been controversial with hetero- and even queer audiences. In fact, von Praunheim has been known for more radical left-wing behavior, ostracizing and/or setting him apart in many ways from the gay community. For example, early in his career von Praunheim was known for outing politicians and famous businessmen on German television. His films have treated

even queer issues in controversial ways. For instance, in his film *A Virus Has No Morals* (1985), he depicts AIDS in a tasteless and satirical way, as well as openly criticizes the lack of activism in the gay community. As gay film scholar Thomas Waugh writes: “[...] most of the prophetic ‘performance’ films that stand up well in this retroactive view— autobiographical, experimental, and erotic, by [...] von Praunheim [...] had uneven relationships with the lesbian and gay masses who allegedly preferred positive images and realist convention. Self-indulgent or self-reflexive mannerism were liabilities in the post-Stonewall political context of simultaneous mobilization and backlash” (267). To put it plainly, just because von Praunheim makes queer movies, does not necessarily make him a queer ally.

Still, *Stadt* did enjoy its successes, at least, in its naissance. The film premiered as a live show for the short period of time it was shown in Berlin in theaters, and it was accompanied by audience members who danced and sang along in drag to the lyrics and text in the film. At least for one small moment, even one of Germany’s most popular newspapers, *Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, wrote that they thought *Stadt* might indeed turn into a cult film: “Die Hälfte des Publikums tanzte mit. Es hatte den Anschein, daß der Film jene Qualitäten besitzt, die einen Film zum Kultfilm machen“ (*Half of the audience danced while watching the film. It looks like this film might have just the right qualities to become a cult film*). *Stadt* did receive, however, more of an onslaught of bad critique than good. Film scholars generally ignored the film altogether, and more popular German newspapers ridiculed it, calling it degenerate, political avant-gardism, a collection of self-denounced clichés, claiming it showed the fall of the gay liberation movement. Still others acclaimed it to be a poignant comedy with a lax social critique, and one cheered, or possibly jeered: “Es

lebe das dritte Geschlecht” (*Long live the third sex*) (see Kuhlbrodt in *Rosa von Praunheim* (1984).

Arguably, the factors which make films like *Rocky Horror* a true cult film and *Hedwig* at least half as successful, are their ability to combine more radical queer politics in form of citations with mechanisms of disavowal. A disavowal could come in the form of more subversive forms of queering citations and characters, and other mechanisms such as homophobic audience scripts and the dissolution of some of the more radical queer persons/elements at the end of the movie. For a film to be a cult success, limits of heteronormativity must be maintained, as they are in *Rocky Horror*, as in the case of *Hedwig*, borders may be blurred, but must still be visible. In *Stadt*, the limits of normativity are in some way perhaps reestablished through the dissolution of some of the queer persons and elements in the movie, i.e., the queer restaurant is robbed, two queer men perish, and the queer hotel burns down at the end of the movie; but this is not enough. In the case of *Stadt*, too many boundaries are overstepped, no balance is maintained, nor does any real sense of heteronormativity exist at all in the movie. Even the dead characters reappear alive again at the finale in the *Hamburger Königin* and dance in front of an audience of gawkers outside the front window, gawking and mocking perhaps at the audience as well. The shades on the windows close like a curtain, and the movie ends. The characters sing “Berlin city without shame. They’re changing sexes, they’re changing names. A wrong island in the Red Sea, East or West. Berlin City, it never dies. Your past, present, and future lies [...] Come on, come on to the city of lost souls.”

Citatoriality in *Stadt*

In *Stadt*, one witnesses in particular how citatoriality is truly campy. Queer theorist David Bergman offers readers in his book, *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (1993), a definition of camp that applies well to queer theory. He writes:

First, everyone agrees that camp is a style (whether of objects or of the way objects are perceived is debated) that favors ‘exaggeration’, ‘artifice’, and ‘extremity’. Second, camp exists in tension with popular culture, commercial culture, or consumerist culture. Third, the person who can recognize camp, who sees things as campy, or who can camp is a person outside the cultural mainstream. Fourth, camp is affiliated with homosexual culture, or at least with a self-conscious eroticism that throws into question the naturalization of desire.
(4-5)

Using this definition, one can understand easily how *Stadt* falls under the category of camp. The film’s style is exaggerated, artificial, and extreme. It depicts the characters and their lifestyles in a way that exceeds boundaries of normalcy, in terms of gender and sexuality, even within the realm of realistic possibility. Additionally, von Praunheim’s style of incorporating citations of American culture, such as those of *Burger King*, the American President, the American flag, etc, is also a recognized use of German camp according to Camp scholar Johannes von Moltke¹. The film exists in tension with popular culture, commercial, and otherwise, as shown through the numerous queered citations in the film. As for the individual who can “recognize camp, or see things as campy,” these terms can apply to the willing viewers of *Stadt*. They seek camp when watching this film, and thereby implicate themselves in camp in doing so, placing themselves outside mainstream culture as well. Finally, there can be no doubt that *Stadt* is associated with homosexual culture, and the film certainly “throws into question the naturalization of desire” in its depiction of alternate

¹ See von Moltke in *Camp* fn. 28, 430.

non-heteronormative forms of kinship relationships (inter-racial, young and old, homosexual, etc.), gender (transgendered and intersexual), and sexuality (homosexual and transsexual).

The term camp also applies particularly to the musical. Musical scholar Raymond Knapp writes:

To some extent, the musical becomes camp the moment it actually becomes *musical*, for the first notes that sound under the dialogue are like a knowing wink to the audience, a set of arched eyebrows that serves as quotation marks around whatever is ostensibly being expressed, whether musically or dramatically. The element of camp in a musical thus shifts sudden attention to the performed nature of the drama, and in particular to the actual performer, thereby providing a more direct channel of communication between the performer and whoever in the audience may note and relish the artificiality. (13)

The queer musical is particularly campy in that it not only contains this aspect of self-referentiality in the musical performance, but also in the fact that the character's performances are self-referential in that they are in drag. Drag performances according to theories of camp are essentially campy and queer, and at the same time queer, or rather gay, is essentially campy as well. The terms "camp," "gay," and "drag" work together in a definition offered by Carole-Anne Tyler in her essay on "Boys Will be Girls: Drag and Transvestic Fetishism." She writes "In theories of camp, butch-femme drag is visible as such because of an essential 'gay sensibility', invoked to keep straight the difference between gay and heterosexual gender impersonation. Some theorists, like Babuscio¹ and Russo², explicitly refer to it as the ground of camp, explaining that 'passing' sensitizes gays and lesbians to both the oppressiveness and artificiality of gender roles" (see Tyler in *Camp* 381-2). But what occurs in *Stadt* in terms of camp and citationality is that the film seems to be even too campy, in so far as the camp moment is disrupted by camp itself. As Tyler writes "Disrupted

¹ See Babuscio "Camp and the Gay Sensibility" in Dyer *Gays and Film* (1977)

² See Russo "All About Camp" in Works Cited.

by camp, the camp moment does not last; misrecognition follows upon recognition, and incredible acts, unfortunately, begin to seem credible once more” (see Tyler in *Camp* 388). When the camp dissolves, so does the laughter, and the enjoyment of such films. In *Stadt*, the scenes and characters are not always that funny, but instead oftentimes truly disgusting. Not only are the characters half-clothed or nude, leaving little to the imagination, but also often the drag performers themselves act in ways that seem taunting, bitchy, violent, if not psychotic. These performances are no longer always enjoyable, nor always something to sing along with or lip-synch to, but instead they are almost painful and/or embarrassing to watch. Finally, what is also over-the-top campy in *Stadt* is the way the film queers citations. It does this as well to an extreme, making the citations lose all sense of meaning, and after the film is over, viewers remember little of the meaning, subversive or otherwise, of such citations. In the following section I will look at these kinds of performers, performances, and citations in more detail.

Queer Performers:

Angie Stardust



The “Hamburger Königin” and its queen Angie Stardust are at once a parody of the American *Burger King*, and at the same time a commentary on American culture. Even more, the restaurant represents the metaphorical disarray of sexual and gender identities that fill this

locale, which includes the owner, Angie, a pre-operative, male-to-female transsexual. The restaurant is trashed, food lies rotting in every corner. American flags line the walls, along with other icons of American commercialism, including a faded red Coca-Cola sign. The phallic and/or somehow sexual-looking food is rotting away on the counters. For example, we see a massively oversized burger, that is so large, in fact, that the camera cannot seem to capture the whole sandwich in one frame. Mayonnaise or a cream of sorts (cum?) is oozing out of its sides. Overripe tomatoes bleed (blood?) from the top of the burger downwards. The lettuce is rotted and dried. There is something wantonly sexual and queer about this hamburger, and the way the wait staff and clientele act and look as well.

The wait-staff ash their cigarettes into the moldy food, squirt sauces everywhere and on everyone. Both the wait staff and the clientele eat the rotting food wantonly, and suck away on pickles, for example, in a phallic way. Even the special of the day is queer, a “Titi-Shake” anyone? But the debauchery doesn’t stop here; the clientele vomits the rotting food, the wait staff is half-naked dancing and gyrating on the table tops, and pretend to clean but instead really jerk off table legs like penises.

Angie Stardust wears a crown that matches the decal on the restaurant door, a pink crown with a gold star on it. She is wearing something that looks like a uniform from *Burger King*, red and white, but the outfit has been queered with ruffles, a low cut top that shows her post-op breasts, pearls, an oversized white and blue bow in the back, nylons, and pink high heel shoes. She is also fully made up and her hair is long and curly. In this scene Angie’s transgendered queer gender is juxtaposed with American politics through camp and the queering of the citation of Burger King.

In another scene, Angie becomes a symbol not only of a deviant gender and sexuality, but also for a race, in association with the citation of the song “10 kleine Negerlein¹” (*10 Little Niggers*). In this scene, a child on the street sings the song “10 kleine Negerlein,” while Angie stands in full drag waiting for the bus. Even more than in *Rocky Horror* and in *Hedwig, Stadt* actively engages with these citations. Angie comments on the monstrosity of such a song, sung by innocent children in Germany. According to her, this shows how little Germany has advanced, changed, and/or improved politically, specifically in its relationship to tolerance since the end of WWII. The queering of this citation illuminates Germany’s failure to overcome its past. Angie asks, what would happen if I were to sing “10 kleine Weißerlein” (*10 Little Whites*). She talks about being spat at for being gay and black on a boat ride in Germany. “So wie das Wetter, so finde ich Menschen...kalt, kalt, kalt“ (*I find people are like the weather, cold...cold....cold*). Her impression of Germany’s lack of tolerance refers not just to her black race, but also to her gender and sexuality. Angie is a minority of a minority, a black, gay transsexual.

Finally, Angie also brings in the citation of the skyline of New York City and the Statue of Liberty. She tells the story of how she came to terms with her transgendered identity; the image of the Statue of Liberty, a figure which stands for freedom and tolerance, stands to her right contrasting with her own figure. She talks about becoming a woman and taking hormones, growing breasts, and facing prejudices, hate, and violence from her family and friends, all of this in New York. Angie also talks about the lesbian relationship she has with a woman. The citation of “*West Side Story*²” is in the background as well; here we find a queer kind of story of *Romeo and Juliet* (1595). In these scenes, citations of American

¹ See Benary (1885).

² Music by Leonard Bernstein. Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. (1957).

culture are queered in a way to force viewers to question not only American politics, but the dominant power structures that the US and Germany represent. To question and queer such citations is a means to question heteronormativity itself.

Lila

In the opening scene of the movie, Lila, a transsexual, sings the “Burger Queen Blues,” yet another spoof on American, or more specifically Southern American, culture; this is a citation referencing the jazz and blues music scene in the Southern United States. Lila is supposedly from the southern US, but is “now stuck in Berlin,” as she explains, cleaning a chair leg she were performing fellatio. According to character Judith Flex’s narration: “Sie kam nach Berlin, weil sie gehört hatte, daß nur die deutschen Jungs wissen, was echte Liebe ist” (*She came to Berlin because she heard that only German boys know what real love is*).

Lila wants to become an actress in Hollywood, and her character manifests itself into a campy spoof of this citation – the Hollywood starlet. Lila dresses to look like “a lady,” her figure and dress are comparable to a cross between Dolly Parton and Marilyn Monroe. She wears a platinum blond wig. Her skin is white and fair. Her makeup is overdone with dark black eyeliner, eye shadow, and bright red lipstick. She wears feminine looking clothing, including sheer and/or see-through blouses, skirts or dresses with nylons and heels. She often wears a flower in her hair. Throughout most of the movie, she makes a queer face with puckered lips and crossed eyes. Toward the end of the movie, Lila claims to be pregnant by a communist agent from East Germany. Of course, this is not possible, even within the realm of this film, as Lila is a male transvestite. The agent offers Lila her own show in East Germany and she becomes one of East Germany’s most famous Communist rock stars with the hit song “I fell in love with a Russian soldier.” Lila performs in East Berlin, and her queer

friends watch her on TV from West Germany. On the TV, Lila sings against a red and yellow background with the images of a hammer and sickle on it, as well as photos of Karl Marx and Lenin. The lyrics of the song are really over the top with historical citations which mock the post-war and Communist East Germany:

<p>“I fell in love with a Russian soldier. I fell for his communist charm. [...] He’s my comrade in arms. [...] Let’s go, Moscow! [...] We go marching through the park. [...] I just love Karl Marx. We’re going to go to Afghanistan. And then we’ll march into Iran. Then honeymoon in Pakistan. America, Siberia. [...]</p>

At the end of the song, Lila gets down on her knees and bows before the communist citational background. The queer characters in the film watch Lila and dance in the hotel room in West Berlin, all equally as queer. Not only is Lila’s performance queering these political citations, but her friends do so well, through their queer appearances and parodic performances itself – Tron swings Judith around in her wheel chair despite her full body cast, and the rest of the gang dance in drag, as usual.

Notably, the queer characters seem not to notice the politically charged connotations of this song, but instead find it amusing and entertaining like a song in a musical. Viewers are surely at once amused and at the same time disturbed by these contrasting images. This scene is overburdened with political citationality and queerness, just like the rest of the movie.

Gary

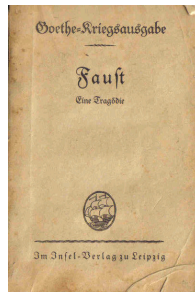


Gary is a black bisexual man, who spends most of his time naked in *Stadt*. Gary's character is depicted in association with citations of imperialism, and accordingly, primitivism. Towards the beginning of the film, Gary is shown coming out of a monster's mouth, a prop perhaps from a stage play. The film notably makes the transition from a scene of Lila and her face which flips to the monster's face. Viewers are forced to make a connection between the idea of a monster and queer identity. But who is the monster? The film suggests the monster is, of course, heteronormal society, which ultimately fucks up the lives of most of these queer characters in *Stadt*, and Gary's life is no exception.

Gary is the dark, unknown continent of sexuality and queer desire. Of all the characters, he is the least reserved sexually, and his open sexuality is addictive. As Gary is unemployed, apparently he has begun to dabble in the art of magic and witchcraft. Judith's narration suggests that Gary is unemployable because of his over-the-top queer sexuality and personality. Gary starts a sexual therapy group, which includes activities of what appear to be devilish orgies of queer sensual pleasures, drug hallucinations, and lots of *FKK*, *Freikörperkultur* or nudity. Gary is depicted in *Stadt* in conjunction with citations of the devil in an ironic way. His bedroom is dark and on the walls are images of devil horns and skulls. In one scene Gary is seen holding a skull in his hands, and in another striking a sexual

pose in red light with hands raised towards the heavens, his followers lying, moaning, and withering in sexual pleasure at his feet; these are scenes parallel to many often depicted in movies of devil worship. Gary doesn't sing like the rest of the group, but instead he chants. His followers crawl through the house behind him naked, making slithery sounds like snakes, which is another allusion to the devil, and in particular, the snake in the Garden of Eden in the Bible.

These queer citations of the devil are further strengthened with the citation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's book *Faust* (1808), which is lying next to what looks like a sacrificial cup filled with a preserved tarantula and a wax hand. *Faust* is the archetypical story of man who sells his soul to the Devil.



But Gary is not only associated with the Devil, but also with American politics. Much like in *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig*, in *Stadt* there are citations of American presidents, politicians, and politics. For instance, in *Rocky Horror*, we hear Nixon's resignation speech on the car radio as Brad and Janet drive towards the castle, as well as pictures of Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Regan on the desk of the criminologist's office. In *Stadt*, we find a scene in which the queer group of friends is dressed up in drag singing the American national anthem, queering the anthem in the way they sing and perform the song in drag. On TV, we see Ronald Reagan giving a speech, followed by footage of protests and rioting. Gary's character is the most provocative of all. He is naked, wearing nothing but a mask of Reagan.

He slinks around the group in an interpretative and provocative sexual dance. Lila yells “Do something about that horrible creature!” Gary slinks away from the group in fear; the film follows him with only a shot of his buttocks and testicles hanging between his legs. He raises his leg for a second, like a dog peeing and then disappears behind a wall. Then, the crowd turns back to the TV screen and says: “God bless you Ronald!” “Tron says: “So, Ronald Regan can make Americans around the world proud again. And I can say, I am an American.” Tron says this wearing an oversized foam cowboy hat, with an intonation that makes it clear he is mocking the US.

Tara O’Hara

Tara O’Hara is a transvestite. Her body is very feminine, lacking muscle, having soft feminine curves. She is on bottom pre-operative, and wants to remain that way, although she does take hormones. On top, she has small breasts. Still, despite being transgendered, Tara wants to retain her male genitalia. She works as a prostitute or, rather, as a more or less high-class escort. She speaks of “das dritte Geschlecht,” which references the German 19th century sexologist Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld’s work on *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* (1904). The book was a guide book of sorts to homosexuality, and the must-sees of homosexual life in Berlin. Not only did Hirschfeld underscore the diversity of circumstances within the homosexual subculture in this book, but also the need for societal compassion for homosexuals. Hirschfeld attempted to persuade the reader to take a stand against paragraph 175, which was a German law that prohibited sodomy. Hirschfeld tried to portray homosexuals as good, respectable citizens, who live according to the norms of bourgeois life. Hirschfeld also notably coined the term *transvestite*. Rosa von Praunheim made a biographical film about Hirschfeld, *Der Einstein des Sex – Leben und Werk des Dr. Magnus*

Hirschfeld later in 1999. In bringing this citation of the “third sex” into *Stadt*, von Praunheim is perhaps trying to add his own commentary to the discussion on what indeed makes up a third sex.

Within the reality of the film, Tara and Angie interpret this citation to mean for each something different. Tara wants to remain a transvestite, and ultimately keep her male genitalia, while taking hormones. The third sex for her is anything that falls outside the category of heteronormativity, to which she feels they both belong. Angie on the other hand, wants to become a woman, and have a sex change operation, as well as take hormones. Angie explains how Tara is from a new generation, for whom the older generation has made way. Angie’s generation fought to become women by being overly-feminine, while Tara’s generation can simply be as they will, without acknowledging unapologetically the struggle of the older generations of queers. Ultimately, Angie rejects the term “the third sex” that Tara accepts, and instead Angie believes “Wir sind die neuen Frauen” (*We are the new women*), which could be perhaps von Praunheim’s way of making fun of radical feminism.

Tron von Hollywood

Judith Flex and Tron von Hollywood are erotic trapeze artists, who work together to perform an erotic burlesque-type, carnival-like show. They swing from the rafters half naked; the camera focuses in on Judith’s naked breasts and thighs. Judith is a voluptuous, big-breasted Jewish American dating a German whose grandfather was a Nazi – a testament to von Praunheim’s love for transgressions of normalcy and acceptability within any hetero-normal or even homo-normal context.

Her performance partner, Tron von Hollywood, looks like your typical Hollywood hunk, with blond hair and blue eyes. He is bisexual, or as he says, “Ich treibe es mit allem. Ich bin kein Schwul, noch hetero, noch bisexuell, noch trisexual. Ich bin ganz einfach sexuell“ (*I am not gay, nor straight, nor bisexual, nor tri-sexual. I am simply just sexual*). Tron references the citation “Arbeit Macht Frei” (*Work Liberates*). This citation, like many of the citations in *Stadt*, recalls WWII, and in this case the sign outside of the concentration camps in Nazi Germany. The motto “Work Liberates” takes on a queer meaning in this film. Working in Europe is for Tron a sexual awakening. He came to Europe to learn what that which was “Verboten” in the US is, having come from a conservative family in which everything but the church and food were forbidden. There was no “sexuelle Aufklärung” (sexual awakening) in the US, Tron explains, but in Europe he experiences just that, and more specifically he experiences this through his work. Once Tron comes to Europe, he works as a stripper and a nude model, and finally as this sexually-charged trapeze artist in a team with Judith. He begins a bisexual relationship with a German plumber, who literally shows him how his pipes work.

Joaquin La Habana

Joaquin La Habana lives out the role of both the male and female gender at the same time, challenging even more traditional notions of transgenderism. Joaquin wants to become a Hollywood star like the rest of his queer group of friends. When she dresses as a woman, she dresses in a similar fashion to that of Angie Stardust; she is a black diva. When he is a man, he looks like a man, but still in a feminine, if not androgynous way. Joaquin references citations from the Bible, as is often done in both *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig*, as a way to reinterpret its content, and in a way opening the text for a queer interpretation. In the song,

“My own free will,” Joaquin sings “The Bible says we are all free men and equal in the eyes of God.” He then goes on to show the different kinds of gender and sexual identities that one does not heteronormally include in this notion of equality, including: “lesbians, homosexuals, transsexuals, men and women, bisexuals, young and old, we are human.” American flags hang notably in the background. This commentary on the Christian religion and in particular Christian morality is handled here in a blasphemous way.

Queer Performances

Much like *Rocky Horror* and *Hedwig, Stadt* began as a theatrical performance of sorts, which demanded, or at least procured, the audience’s participation. In fact, the film’s premiere was advertised as the “Filmball der verlorenen Seelen” (*Film ball of the lost souls*), a showing in which all invited guests, i.e., the audience members, participated to some degree in the drag performance. This “ball” was given notably during the week of the Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, as an act of protest to heteronormative, mainstream films. From all accounts, the premiere and the viewings of *Stadt* thereafter were intoxicating parties of self-portrayals of queer identities (see Kuhlbrodt in *Rosa von Praunheim*).

Whether or not a resurgence of popularity for queer films such as *Stadt* may emerge with the growth of the internet remains unclear. In any case, there are no copies of the film available on DVD, and in my case, I had to ask Rosa von Praunheim personally for a copy of the film. When I asked him for additional information on the making of the film, background info, etc, he simply responded:

I have a Website ,also english I wrote about City of lost souls love Rosa

It would seem that von Praunheim himself does not feel the need to further advertise this film, or dream of it one day achieving a cult status, or at least, not any more.

Conclusion: *Stadt der verlorenen Seelen*



Stadt is not a pretty movie; in fact, by many movie goers' standards, the film is campy and downright disgusting in parts. The scenes are perverse aesthetically and sexually. For example, aesthetically-speaking, the burgers in the "Burger Queen" are not funny, oversized spoofs of *Burger King* burgers, but instead, they are rotting pieces of meat. The customers eat the burgers and vomit on the restaurant tables. This scene is not just comical, but nauseating. Sexually-speaking, the film is pornographic by US, if not German standards. One cannot simply watch *Stadt* and disavow the viewing with statements one uses with *Rocky Horror* and/or with *Hedwig*, "everyone loves this film." Instead, one must admit on some level to oneself that one not only enjoys indulging in the queer performances and/or musical numbers in the film, but also one enjoys "camp" and "trash" to the utmost extreme, to the point where the moment of camp itself is disrupted. One would hope that viewers are encouraged to process the messages, cultural, sexual, or political, that flash across the screen in the form of queered citations, and possibly to ask themselves what their own positions are on sexuality, gender-identity, desire, kinship relationships, politics, history, culture, heteronormativity, and homo-normativity. But the messages, like the messengers, are so

convoluted and perverse that most viewers leave the theater after watching *Stadt* not knowing what hit them. Von Praunheim is known for his over-the-top, queer, politically charged films, and he is, in fact, disliked and understandably misunderstood by many critics and film aficionados, queer and straight. Still, von Praunheim is, according to many queer scholars, like Alice Kuzniar, “unquestionably the most important figure in the Queer German Cinema as well as the most energetic spokesman for the gay movement in Germany in the last quarter century” (88). At the same time she writes “The very best of Rosa von Praunheim’s work is engaged precisely in this queer visibility, where the gendered and sexually unconventional subject is placed center stage, such that his/her presence becomes an affront to the bourgeois status quo and an encouragement to all queers. When von Praunheim can capture the political edge to this histrionics his work excels; without it his movies run the danger of seeping into self-indulgence and silliness, as in *Stadt der verlorenen Seelen* [...]” (111). Whether this is a kind of “self-indulgence and silliness” or rather a more radical notion of political activism on the part of von Praunheim, is up to discussion; still, fundamentally, *Stadt* is too outlandish, campy and trashy for us to know what von Praunheim’s purpose was when making this film, if there was a purpose at all; not that it matters anyway. In any case, *Stadt* is clearly too outlandish to have become a cult queer musical classic.

Conclusion: Queer Musicals as Safer Sex?

Watching and performing with queer musicals is a form of safe, or at least safer sex. We can satisfy a perverse sexual desire without getting dirty. In fact, watching queer musicals is in many ways like watching pornography. Film scholar Linda Williams has compared pornography to musicals, including the later use of musical numbers which she claims have a similar function to the sexual numbers in a porn film. She compares the solo song or dance to a masturbation scene, the classic heterosexual duet to a “sublimated expression of heterosexual desire,” the narcissistic “I Feel Pretty” number from *West Side Story* to lesbian sex, a trio number to a ménage à trois, and choral love songs to orgies. (132-3). Williams also identifies a major difference, however, between the two symbolically, in that the musical is “the always-sublimated expression of desire,” whereas the feature-length pornographic film is that of “unsublimated sex” (134).

Fundamentally, we watch queer musicals in order to satisfy a voyeuristic, perverse desire, what queer film scholar Brett Farmer calls “fantasies of the perverse, de-oedipalized desire or, [...] fantasies of queerness” (see Farmer in *Queer Cinema* 81). This means we have a desire to watch others overstep and blur the boundaries of gender and sexuality, without having to deal with the real consequences of doing something like this ourselves. As Farmer writes, “musicals are generally seen to offer [...] ‘something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes [...] something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized’” (see Farmer in *Queer Cinema* 76). Like viewers of pornography, some musical viewers choose to just watch voyeuristically, while others

actually enhance their own viewing experiences through the mimicry of a performance, oftentimes including the aid of props and costumes. The typical solo-voyeur of pornography, like that of the queer musical, performs with and through the film with the steadfast illusion that they can somehow maintain and separate in a sublime way their *real* self from those they perceive as *imaginary* and more exciting on the screen. In other words, one can enact a pornographic scene at home alone without believing one is a sexual deviant, and just as much one can perform with the queer characters in a queer musical without believing one is queer or perverse. In fact, many individuals might participate in such performances, only if they can successfully disavow at the same time the anxiety, social and political stigmas, as well as other potentially transforming effects of such a performance; only if they somehow believe they may return to a solid sense of *real* self after the film ends. This disavowal can and does usually occur through the aid of the performance itself, and the props and costumes used, both of which function as a fetish. This means, through this performance, they may disavow the truly queer nature of their (drag) performance. At the same time, a drag performance actually exposes the arbitrary nature of gender and sexuality, the queerness of that performance, and the role of the fetish in the performance. Feminist and queer scholar Judith Butler writes how drag performances function:

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (*Gender Trouble* 175)

Drag performances in queer musicals in combination with audience participation essentially double the imitative structure of gender and sexuality, as well as its contingency. Here, the audience member's own performance is a drag performance itself. Fundamentally, the audience member is imitating the gender and sexuality of the drag performer on-screen, who is herself or himself imitating a kind of gender and sexuality with which one does not necessarily identify. One finds here a kind of *mise-en-abîme* in which solid notions of gender, sex, and sexuality are not to be found, but instead is contingent on the viewer's own values and perceptions s/he brings to the film. Put differently, we watch queer musicals because we desire to indulge in the different queer identities depicted on the screen, identities with which we may or may not be able to identify, and, even if we could, we might not be able to admit this fact easily to ourselves or others. Instead, we laugh and enjoy the show, disavowing on some level the denaturalization of sex and gender, in opposition to the "law of heterosexual coherence" that is occurring before our very eyes.

This kind of disavowal works well when watching queer musicals like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. By counting the sheer number of actual viewers of this queer musical, one can see how well mainstream, heteronormative society has been able to disavow the queer nature of the musical through the development of audience participation. How audiences strengthen this fetish, and essentially reestablish heteronormativity through various mechanisms in collaboration with the film's use of citationality, I have explained in detail in this paper. What is interesting to note is the gradation from best to worst from *Rocky Horror* to *Hedwig*, and finally to *Stadt* in terms of how well these films are able to maintain this fetish successfully. If we tear down the films to their bare bones, we find that *Rocky Horror* maintains its limits of heteronormativity by only depicting a softer, campy form of deviancy,

the transvestite, who is destroyed at the end of the movie. The citations in the movie are queered just enough so that the viewer is able to enjoy the campy perverseness of the queer roles without revealing the nature of his fetish. *Hedwig*, however, goes one step further in depicting not just a transvestite, but in fact, an intersexed individual, and transsexuals. The citations in this film are in-your-face and queered, but in a comical, campy, subversively nudging way. Viewers may leave the theater knowing various kinds of queer, left-wing political messages were conveyed in the movie, but perhaps they might not be able to pinpoint exactly what those messages were. *Stadt* goes to the utmost extreme, depicting many kinds of sexual deviants in a way too literal and self-indulgent to be enjoyable. On this same note, the citations in the movie are so queer and campy, so in-your-face, viewers seeking the “giddiness” or lightness of camp in *Stadt* may discover it to be nothing more than trash.

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