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FLUXES OF DESIRE

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FLUXES OF DESIRE: QUEER MONSTROUS
BECOMINGS IN CONTEMPORARY HORROR
CINEMA

A Master's Thesis

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To all the amazing monsters in my life



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BECOMINGS IN CONTEMPORARY HORROR
CINEMA

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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HORROR CINEMA

By Rüya Neşe

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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ABSTRACT

FLUXES OF DESIRE: QUEER MONSTROUS BECOMINGS IN CONTEMPORARY HORROR CINEMA

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M.A. in Media and Visual Studies

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This thesis re-evaluates the intersection of queerness and monstrosity in contemporary horror cinema by moving beyond identity-based and representational frameworks that have dominated queer horror studies. Presenting an alternative to psychoanalytic and structuralist approaches rooted in binary oppositions (e.g., self/other, male/female, human/non-human), it critiques their heteronormative biases and highlights their inadequacy in accounting for the fluidity and ambiguity of real-life queer experiences and their manifestations in monstrous figures. In search of a more affirmative approach, this thesis draws on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming, as well as insights from contemporary Deleuzian scholars like Rosi Braidotti, Patricia MacCormack and Verena Conley to reconceptualize queerness and monstrosity as fluid,

indeterminate, and liminal processes that challenge rigid categorizations and interpretations within anthropo-phallogocentric order. Engaging with six contemporary horror films, *Raw* (2016), *Bones and All* (2022), *The Lure* (2015), *The Untamed* (2016), *Titane* (2021), and *Hellraiser* (2022) and bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives in horror film studies, queer theory, and Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, this thesis shifts the analytical focus from representational and identitarian readings to the affirmative and transformative potential of queer-becoming, reframing monstrosity as an open-ended and dynamic process of radical creativity that produces alternative modes of existence beyond the confines of majoritarian discourses on identity, gender, sexuality, and subjectivity.

Keywords: Becoming, Contemporary Horror Cinema, Deleuze and Guattari, Monstrosity, Queer Horror Film

ÖZET

ARZUNUN AKIŞLARI: ÇAĞDAŞ KORKU SINEMASINDA QUEER VE CANAVARCA OLUŞLAR

Neşe, Rüya

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

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Bu tez, çağdaş korku sinemasında queerlik ve canavarlık arasındaki kesişimi yeniden değerlendirerek queer korku çalışmaları alanında baskın olan kimlik temelli ve temsili çerçevelerin ötesine geçmeyi amaçlamaktadır. İkilikler üzerine kurulu (örneğin, özne/öteki, erkek/kadın, insan/insan-dışı) psikoanalitik ve yapısalcı yaklaşımlara bir alternatif sunarak bu yaklaşımların heteronormatif önyargılarını eleştirir ve gerçek hayattaki queer deneyimlerin akışkanlığını ve belirsizliğini, aynı zamanda bu deneyimlerin canavarsı figürlerdeki tezahürlerini açıklamakta yetersiz kaldıklarını vurgular. Daha olumlayıcı bir yaklaşım arayışında, bu tez, Deleuze ve Guattari'nin oluş (becoming) teorisinin yanı sıra Rosi Braidotti, Patricia MacCormack ve Verena Conley gibi çağdaş Deleuzecü düşünürlerin görüşlerinden yararlanarak queerlik ve canavarlığı, katı kategorizasyonları ve antro-po-fallogosantrik düzen içindeki yorumları sorgulayan akışkan, belirsiz ve sınır-aşan süreçler olarak yeniden kavramsallaştırır.

Bu çalışma, *Raw* (2016), *Bones and All* (2022), *The Lure* (2015), *The Untamed* (2016), *Titane* (2021) ve *Hellraiser* (2022) gibi altı çağdaş korku filmini ele alarak korku sineması çalışmaları, queer kuram ve Deleuzoguattarian felsefesi gibi disiplinlerarası perspektifleri bir araya getirir. Temsili ve kimlik temelli okumaların ötesine geçerek analitik odağı queer-oluşun olumlayıcı ve dönüştürücü potansiyeline kaydırır. Bu bağlamda canavarlık, kimlik, toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik ve öznellik gibi hegamonik söylemlerin sınırlarını aşarak alternatif varoluş biçimleri üreten açık uçlu ve dinamik bir radikal yaratıcılık süreci olarak yeniden çerçevelenir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Canavarlık, Çağdaş Korku Sineması, Deleuze ve Guattari, Oluş, Queer Korku Filmi

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Problematizing Queer Horror Studies

Since the early 1980s, horror film studies have primarily centered around culturalism, Marxism, gender theory, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and postmodernism (Powell, 2005 p. 3). The conceptualization of monstrosity within film studies has been grounded on Julia Kristeva's definition of "the abject" as "what disturbs identity, system, order...what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (p. 4). With this definition, the function of the monstrous has been theorized as "to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability", emerging from and inhabiting the boundaries between binary oppositions such as human/non-human, man/woman and normal/abnormal sexual desire (Creed, 1986, p. 71). This theoretical foundation has made the genre a focal point for queer-feminist film scholars as "a transparent source for (sub)cultural attitudes toward sex and gender" (Clover, 2015, p. 69), functioning as an engagement with "repressed fears and desires and its reenactment of the residual conflict surrounding those feelings" (Clover, 2015, p. 73).

Feminist critiques have drawn on a psychoanalytic framework to explore the gendered nature of monstrosity, aligning the attributes of abjection with the *female* aspects of the monster (Powell, 2005, p.16). Majorly regarded as foundational figures for the feminist turn in horror film studies, Carol Clover (2015) discusses the gender ambiguity at play in the monsters, arguing for the monster as “a male in gender distress” (p. 77). Instead of gendering the monster itself, Barbara Creed (1993) goes further, arguing that the concept of monstrosity itself is gendered feminine. Adopting a more sociological approach, Cynthia A. Freeland (2000) explores the dynamic of good and evil in horror movies from a gendered perspective, arguing that horror monstrosity illustrates society’s fears about new gender roles and their evolution (274). Continuing to draw on Kristeva’s abjection and Freud’s uncanny, the body of the monsters has been variously interpreted by feminist scholars through castration anxiety, taboo sexual acts, and subjective loss (Powell, 2005, p. 64). Following this framework, Creed (1993) conceptualizes the horror behind male-gendered monstrosity in its uncanny alignment with the maternal body, animals, and death—areas designated as *other* by the symbolic order (p. 7).

In the late 1980s and 1990s, queer activists and scholars reclaimed and politicized queer as a critical term while keeping its definition deliberately vague (Davis, 2013, p. 3). As a controversial turn in the trajectory of horror film scholarship, Noël Carroll (1990) argues for the affective nature of horror monstrosity as a paradox of simultaneous fascination and repulsion, explained by the cognitive exercise of audiences that transform horror into pleasure. This has led the horror genre to be explored as a potential aesthetic and socio-political tool for queer film theory. Building on feminist groundwork and the paradoxical relationship audiences form

with monsters, queer film scholars extended the literature by constructing subversive readings of monstrosity as reflections on queer identity politics. Queer horror scholars like Harry M. Benshoff (1998) and Alexander Doty (1993) argue that the horror genre inherently invites queer readings, theorizing monstrous characters as allegories for homosexuality, while Russo Vitto (1987) explores the subversive identification strategies of queer audiences with the monsters despite their negative connotations. Following this, post-AIDS era brought a wide shift for both audiences and filmmakers towards celebratory post-human approaches for boundary-crossing figures, queer mutants, and lesbian vampires and so, privileging the deviant over “the more conventional versions of the human” (Braidotti, 2000, p. 157).

Exploring the problems within critical queer theory, Annamarie Jagose (2009) explains that the term queer, as substantiated by Teresa de Lauretis (1991), aims to offer a way of “thinking about lesbian and gay sexualities beyond the narrow rubrics of either deviance or preference” (p. 157). In this conceptualization, queer gender identities and sexual practices are perceived as forms of resistance to cultural homogenization within dominant discourses. Thus, the term queer initially emerged as “a provocation rather than a position”, complicating the task of establishing a consistent definition of queerness needed for both political and academic discourse (pp. 157-158). Jagose (2009) notes the pursuit of a consistent definition of queer is “already a paradoxical ambition for a concept that prominently insists on the radical unknowability of its future formations”, which has prompted critiques highlighting the limitations of queer theory and its potential expiry, particularly concerning its practical applications for real life marginalized subjects (pp. 157-158). This problem

critically underscores the challenges within the historical trajectory of queer horror film studies that this thesis aims to address.

As Anna Powell (2005) notes in her book *Deleuze and Horror Film*, despite the fluid nature of Kristeva's abject, critical readings of horror films tend to retain fixed dichotomies of self and other, as well as the gender binary (p. 16). This has significant implications for real-life queer politics, especially when queer theory operates as an umbrella term for marginal self-identification (Davis, 2013, p. 9). As Patricia MacCormack (2009) explains in her discussions on monstrosity and queer theory, monsters are often condemned as nature's mistakes, and their physical alterity is associated with mental or moral turpitude (p. 137). Therefore, within Lacanian and Freudian frameworks, the queer-monster identification is linked to psychopathologizing ambiguous and non-normative bodies and sexualities. Hence monstrosity depends on a "transcendental a priori truth in bodies and subjects through their prehuman nature," which leads to real-life queer characteristics, such as intersex bodies, to be seen as things that need to be cured or corrected (MacCormack, 2012, p. 260).

Hence in reclaiming queer monstrosity in contemporary horror films, it is crucial to acknowledge its fluidity and indeterminacy, as well as to move beyond the notion of monstrosity as direct representational images of queer characteristics and practices. Adopting such an approach for contemporary horror film studies, however, brings several complications. Without relying on a stable definition of queerness or fixed cinematic codes, discussing or even identifying instances of queer monstrosity on screen becomes increasingly challenging within established frameworks.

Furthermore, as repeatedly pointed out by Claire Colebrook (2008, 2009) in her discussions on Deleuzian queer theory, the psychoanalytic model structured around attachments to desired objects instead of harboring tendencies towards expansive and creative desires, possesses “a heterosexual matrix that constitutes and delimits subjective possibilities” (Colebrook, 2008, p. 21). In this context, queerness would reside in assigning a privileged transgressive value to the “supposedly failed or extrinsic modes of subjectivity” (Colebrook, 2008, p. 21). Even an “intrinsically queer” queer theory, formulated through the celebration of postmodern, post-human, and post-metaphysical values, would only function as parasitic and relative, as queer would possess no intrinsic power beyond its interrogation of the normal (Colebrook, 2009, pp. 11-12). Therefore even within the most critical approaches to queerness and monstrosity, as suggested by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2000), as long as these concepts remain marginal to the existing system, they cannot offer genuine liberation (p. 350).

1.2. Aims and Objectives

The identified issues highlight the limitations of the traditional trajectory of queer horror film studies that adheres to the binary structures of heteronormative order. These frameworks fall short of in explaining the nuanced and sometimes paradoxical nature of real queer experiences, as well as the similarly complex relationship queer audiences form with the monsters on screen. To address these challenges, this thesis primarily aims to construct an alternative framework for examining the concept of queer monstrosity in contemporary horror films beyond representational and identity-based formulations of queerness and monstrosity that have dominated the existing literature. By extension, the secondary aim of this thesis is to investigate the

possibility of studying queer monstrosity in the selected contemporary horror films as lived queer experience beyond fixed and stagnant metaphors. As demonstrated, these tasks are both politically crucial and challenging to accomplish within the established frameworks.

Therefore this thesis proposes a new approach based on Deleuze and Guattari's non-teleological, dynamic and open-ended ontology of becoming and its associated concepts. Moving beyond the categories of representation, recognition, identity and subjectivity, as well as the psychoanalytic conceptualization of desire organized around Oedipal law and a transcendent lack, Deleuzoguattarian thought offers more than just alternative terminology for examining queer monstrosity. Instead, it constructs a new image of thought that challenges and transcends the confines of Western metaphysics and dialectical thinking. By adopting a Deleuzoguattarian framework, this thesis seeks to challenge the limitations of established approaches and move beyond them, by generating discussions on queerness and monstrosity that acknowledge the ambiguity, fluidity, and indeterminacy of bodies and sexualities without confining them to phallogentric, representational, or identity-based discourses on body and subjectivity. This framework not only incorporates the numerous individual works by Deleuze alone, but also his collaborations with Guattari, as well as other contemporary Deleuzian scholars from different fields from film studies to queer theory. This approach aims to foster new perspectives on queer horror cinema, expanding the possibilities for understanding the complex and dynamic queer experiences and monstrosity without limiting their existing or future transformations and potentialities.

On a final note, despite the significant emphasis given to the relation between queerness and horror in traditional horror film studies, and the fact that both Deleuzian queer theory and Deleuzian horror film studies are built on the same main concepts such as desire, becoming-animal/monstrous, Body without Organs, zones of indiscernibility, and unnatural participations, there is a remaining gap in the literature for a specific Deleuzoguattarian study on queer monstrosity in horror films. In this light, the final aim of this thesis is to fill this gap by bringing together the literature from these different fields to investigate how a Deleuzoguattarian framework specific to studying monstrous queer characters can be constructed. The framework proposed in this thesis does not claim to reject or replace the established psychoanalytic perspectives but simply aims to offer an alternative or a supplementary non-identitarian and non-representational approach to be utilized in studying the ambiguous and indeterminate monstrous characters in horror cinema beyond the limitations of existing frameworks.

To account for the dynamic socio-political situatedness of monstrosity and queer activism, the corpus of this thesis focuses on contemporary horror films released within the last decade (2014 - 2024), featuring ambiguous, liminal, and uncertain monstrous characters in relation to gender or sexual identities and human/non-human boundaries they traverse; and therefore defy easy categorization within majoritarian thought. To illustrate how this framework is not a complete rejection of the existing literature but a supplementary alternative, the chosen films deliberately incorporate psychosexual themes and motifs that have dominantly guided the critics and scholars in labeling them as queer. Additionally, to highlight the supplementary perspective of the proposed framework, each film includes characters and practices that on the

surface are clear representations of majoritarian identity labels such as homosexuality, or recognizable as sexual or cultural taboos such as cannibalism, incest and such. Throughout their screen time, these characters and practices either get interrogated and destabilized or remain fixed but nevertheless act as an anchor for comparisons that highlight the radical queerness encountered in another character in the film. Therefore, while established approaches can be and have been partially utilized to a satisfactory degree to investigate these films, there is a necessity to move beyond these existing frameworks to fully explore the queer themes they encompass. To demonstrate the versatility of the proposed framework, a diverse corpus of contemporary horror films from multiple countries with different scales of aesthetic, thematic and commercial concerns has been gathered.

With these criteria, six films have been chosen for this thesis. French filmmaker Julia Ducournau's cannibalistic coming-of-age horror-drama *Raw* (2016) and Luca Guadagnino's 2022 Italian-produced American romantic horror film *Bones and All* are selected for their unique approaches to the established queer cannibal trope. Agnieszka Smoczyńska's 2015 Polish horror musical retelling of the Little Mermaid story *The Lure* is chosen for its blend of the familiar fairytale narrative with queer themes and underground experimental filmmaking practices, resulting in an obscure yet intriguing viewing experience that embodies a unique sense of queer sexual desire. Amat Escalante's 2016 Mexican science-fiction horror *The Untamed* is chosen for its focus on the themes of sexual liberation as well as societal expectations and internalized oppressions around sexuality and gender. Ducournau's Palme d'Or-winning feature *Titane* (2021) is chosen for its theme of machine-human hybridity and inhuman pregnancy as an example of queer monstrous corporality

beyond psychoanalytical frameworks. Finally David Bruckner's 2022 reboot of *Hellraiser*, a franchise already known for its queer and BDSM themes, for the streaming platform Hulu is chosen for demonstrating how even the most psycho-sexual codings on monstrous bodies can be evaluated from a Deleuzoguattarian lens. This corpus is in no terms a comprehensive list or an attempt to establish a new canon for contemporary horror cinema. It simply serves as a diverse example pool sufficient to demonstrate the possibilities of the framework this thesis aims to construct. Admittedly, due to the still taboo and in some instances illegal status of queerness in certain countries resulting in far fewer instances of appropriate productions for this thesis, along with the concerns for accessibility of the films themselves and their existing literature, the corpus remains majorly western-centric. However, a future study to extend this framework beyond American and European cinemas is entirely possible.

1.3. Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

Queer monsters inhabit the in-between, the indiscernible plane between the binaries that cannot be perceived, or even imagined within the limits of heteronormative hegemony. Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming and its surrounding concepts primarily explored in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2005) such as multiplicity, assemblage, deterritorialization/reterritorialization, becoming-animal, becoming-minoritarian, molecularity, zones of indiscernibility, unnatural participations, body without organs (BwO) etc. constructs the necessary grounds to approach queerness as a dynamic and fluid non-identitarian and non-teleological process, as well as to reconceptualize the liminal in-betweenness that aligns with queers and monsters as an affirmative and productive zone of

potentiality. Additionally, for a nuanced exploration of non-normative and monstrous desires and sexual practices featured in the selected films, Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of desiring-production and its associated concepts such as non-Oedipal desire, non-human sexuality, partial objects mostly discussed in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2000) are utilized.

Several scholars have adapted Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming to examine the potential of a non-identitarian queer theory. Amongst these scholars, the works of Verena Conley, Claire Colebrook, Rosi Braidotti and Patricia MacCormack directly align with and ground the conceptualization of queerness this thesis proposes. Conley's (2009) conceptualization of "queering" as "an ongoing differing of difference" which constantly produces "becomings that go beyond normative couplings" (p. 25) and new ways of desiring that do not pre-exist (p. 26) constitutes the definition of queer that this thesis adopts. Patricia MacCormack's (2009, 2012, 2019) appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of becoming-animal and unnatural alliances/participations to queer theory is also heavily utilized in this thesis. MacCormack (2009) grounds her ideas on the notion that, for Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings are animal becomings (p. 135), suggesting that a radical conceptualization of queerness involves "liberation from the notion of the human" which "liberates us from humanist transcendental metaphysics and the powers it expresses" (p. 136). MacCormack's conceptualization of queerness without adhering to the limits of humanity generates significant potentials for re-evaluating the gender-based feminist perspectives on contemporary horror cinema. Similarly, Braidotti's (2009) discussions on becoming-animal in relation to feminism and minorities are adopted for a queer lens within the analytical chapters devoted to filmic discussions.

To investigate queer sexuality beyond the definitions and impositions of binary and heterocentric frameworks, Frida Beckman's (2013) discussions on demonic-sexuality as appropriated from Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) concept of demonic packs and becoming-animal is utilized.

As the theory of becoming does not refer to a simplistic leap from one fixed identity category to the other, but instead affirms and embraces the potentialities of hybrid, transitory in-betweenes, scholars working with Deleuzoguattarian approaches to queer theory have often discussed the relation between monstrosity and queerness to different extents. MacCormack's (2009) formulation of queer theory as theory of hybridization argues hybrids born from unnatural alliances, frequently encountered as monsters, challenge the like-for-like sets of binaries that "give some minoritarians power as long as they continue to oppress others, thus maintaining majoritarian power...homosexuality is ok but don't let in the queers" (MacCormack, 2009, p. 144). Hence as MacCormack (2009) argues, Deleuzoguattarian theory of becoming, focusing not on the fixed terms themselves but their transitory inbetween states (p. 136), has significant potential for theorizing cinematic monsters whose non-normative bodies and sexual practices blur binaries such as between human/non-human, organic/inorganic in selected films. MacCormack's (2015) ensuing discussions on the non-human as a site of queer becoming further informs this thesis' approach to queer monstrosity. Similarly, Braidotti (2000) adopts the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of becoming and BwO to discuss monstrous queer embodiment, arguing that Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of body opens up "a variety of subject-positions that are postmetaphysics of gender, or beyond sexual

difference” (p. 162), which informs the discussions on monstrous embodiments and bodily transformations in Chapter 5.

A Deleuzian approach to cinema would necessitate a move away from semiotic analysis and psychoanalytic interpretations, to engage with the formal aspects of the selected films several Deleuzoguattarian film scholars have also been gathered for this thesis. Engaging with the aesthetic qualities of the selected films is a necessary task for this thesis due to Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) eradication of the form/content binary (p. 4). To engage with artworks Deleuze and Guattari (2000) propose a new method titled “schizoanalysis” which prioritizes sensory affects and creation over semiotic decodings of the image. To apply this methodology to this thesis, works of Anna Powell (2005, 2009) who creates a significant guide on how Deleuzian thought and aesthetics can be applied to horror film studies as a “complementary rather than oppositional approach” (Powell, 2005, p. 3) and Steven Shaviro’s (2008) work which centers affective and embodied film spectatorship are taken as a basis. Nick Davis’s (2013) Deleuzian exploration of contemporary queer cinema further grounds this thesis’ approach to what constitutes a queer image. As a last note, Deleuze’s own cinema books have been mostly excluded from this thesis for the concerns of length and relevance to the core aim. Yet a further study that utilizes the terminology and philosophy in those books remains possible.

1.4. Chapter Organization

This thesis consists of six chapters organized around different ways queer monstrosity has been studied. This chapter introduces the problems at play in existing approaches to queer horror cinema and introduces the aims and theoretical

framework. The second chapter aims to create an approachable guide to the relevant concepts of Deleuze and Guattari and brings in secondary Deleuzoguattarian literature on queer theory and film studies to map out how the various focus points of psychoanalytic horror film literature can be renegotiated as powerful aesthetic and political tools. The third chapter demonstrates how established queer allegories within the horror genre can be re-evaluated through a Deleuzoguattarian lens and the possibilities such a project would bring by discussing the theme of queer cannibalism in *Raw* (Ducournau, 2016) and *Bones and All* (Guadagnino, 2022) from a non-identitarian and non-allegorical perspective mainly through the concept of becoming-animal. The fourth chapter builds around the theme of queer desire and sexuality to investigate how even the most representational and psychoanalytically coded images of monstrous sexual intimacy can be deterritorialized as expressions of a more fluid, molecular and schizoid sexual becoming. In this task *The Untamed* (Escalante, 2016) is examined for its depiction of the oppressive nature of gendered sexual roles and domestic dynamics, suggesting monstrous copulation as a potential line of flight. Following this, the discussion on *The Lure* (Smoczyńska, 2015) focuses on the aesthetics of erotic non-human sexuality. The fifth chapter centers around queer monstrous body and investigates the possibility of discussing it beyond gendered psychoanalytic frameworks. For this aim the chapter discusses physical transformations of humans and non-human bodies in relation to monstrous becomings in *Titane* (Ducournau, 2021) through the film's central theme of non-human pregnancy and the bodies of cenobites from *Hellraiser* (Bruckner, 2022) via the concept of BwO. The conclusion chapter recaps the discussion and offers areas of future study.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Aiming to explore how a Deleuzoguattarian framework can be utilized for studying queer monstrosity in the selected horror films, this chapter serves two functions: to act as a cultivated guide to Deleuze and Guattari's writings that form the basis for analytical chapters and to bring together works from Deleuzoguattarian scholars on queer theory and horror film studies to show how they can work together to construct an alternative approach to queer horror monstrosity. In this aim the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section introduces Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming and its related concepts and discusses their potential for building a non-identitarian approach to understanding queerness and monstrosity. Concepts such as assemblage, symbiosis, molecular lines, unnatural participations, becoming-animal, BwO, etc. offers a way beyond fixed categories and dominant identities, allowing for the exploration of complex, hybrid, and fluid forms of existence. The second section focuses on Deleuze and Guattari's writings on desiring-production and sexuality. It offers both an alternative to and a critique of psychoanalytic frameworks in queer horror film studies by adopting Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire as an

affirmative, productive force. It redefines queer monstrosity and sexuality through desiring-production, emphasizing molecular flows, partial objects, and the potential for queer-monstrous becomings that exceeds determined identities and binary regulations. The third section starts by exploring Deleuze's ideas on homosexuality, emphasizing its fluidity and potential for creating new relations beyond majoritarian norms. Building on this discussion this section brings together scholars working on a Deleuzoguattarian queer theory that prioritizes experimentation, invention, and the affirmation of diverse encounters over identification and the scholars that offer Deleuzoguattarian approaches to monstrosity to discuss marginalization and radical social revolutions. Combining these discussions with the previous sections, the third section aims to build a framework specifically for studying queer monstrosity. The last section moves the discussion to film studies. Advocating to approach films as dynamic assemblages of desire, this section critiques existing psychoanalytic and semiotic film theories for their distancing effects and proposes a more engaged, affective approach to queer horror cinema that embraces the complexities of viewing experience and the socio-political dimensions of horror narratives. In this task it introduces Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis as well as several Deleuzian film scholars to build a foundational analysis methodology for the analytical chapters.

2.2. Theory of Becoming and its Related Set of Vocabularies

In *Difference and Repetition* (1994) Deleuze challenges the dogmatic image of thought that assumes an "affinity with the true" by presupposing a "pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from... common sense" (p. 131).

Recognition, defined as the harmonious exercise of all faculties (perception, memory,

imagination, understanding...) to identify an object (p. 133), for Deleuze (1994), functions as a sign of rediscovering the established values in a seemingly new object (p. 136). What is truly new, or different, resists categories of recognition and representation, as recognition can only account for difference in relation to established identities as “identical, similar, analogous or opposed” (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 137-138). Deleuze and Guattari (2000) extend this critique by examining how established thought relies on binary machines that organize everything in either/or structures. These machines are not actually dualistic, but function as successive choices: “if you are neither a nor b, then you are c”, each time producing binary options that go beyond the initial dichotomies (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 128). Within this framework, even deviations from norms are evaluated based on the degree of binary choice, eventually establishing enough dichotomies that nothing can escape being “pinned to the wall” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 21). This leads to the marginalization of anything lacking a clear image, or getting “denounced as a nuisance”, as they can only be falsely recognized as error (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 13-14; Deleuze, 1994, p. 148). This can clearly be seen in the traditional way monsters have been regarded. MacCormack (2012) highlights the iconic status of the monster among entities whose “capacity to effect” has been oppressed by signifying systems. The monster, embodying alterity as both wonder and horror, challenges the limits of humanity as a proof that the human consistently exceeds its perceived capabilities. However, despite being used to describe various phenomena throughout history, monster as a term itself lacks a specific and consistent definition. Crossing species and boundaries, the monster is hybrid and metamorphic, yet it does not represent a fully defined entity but rather that which “fails to be something else—the traditional dominant human subject” (p. 257).

However for Deleuze and Guattari, non-existence is not a failure, but positive, real, and affirmative (Colebrook, 2009, p. 18). In *Difference and Repetition* (1994), Deleuze emphasizes a form of existence beyond recognition, which can only be grasped as encounters with its affects, forcing thought beyond pre-established and pre-existing structures (pp. 138-139). These “fundamental encounters” exist as pure intensities, or “pure difference in itself.” They resist representation and remain imperceptible within empirical thought which is only capable of grasping them as the mediated qualities they give rise to (Deleuze, 1994, p. 144). To be able to talk about those that are imperceptible yet nonetheless real, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) offer a dynamic image of thought that rejects both representation and recognition. Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) philosophy challenges linear, static, and hierarchical modes of thinking, as well as the belief in the fixed essences of beings. Instead, they advocate for an open-ended, dynamic, and ever-changing existence. In this framework, each determined being is understood as a multiplicity, composed of rhizomatic relations and interconnections between various heterogeneous elements in a constant state of production and transformation. These elements co-create, interact, and function together in assemblages, giving rise to new and unpredictable relations, individuations, forms, and experiences.

This understanding not only escapes binary organizations, but also necessitates rejecting essentialist identifications, rigid categorizations, and semiotic interpretations, as any recognizable state emerging during this process would ultimately be bound up with temporality “since those operating in a present moment presuppose untapped potentials for past or present variations, and for future

transformations” (Davis, 2013, p. 20). To account for this co-existence of temporarily bound recognizable states and constant unpredictable transformation, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) propose shifting away from interpreting and retracing fixed meanings to instead focus on mapping the relationships and connections between assemblages. This includes exploring their interactions, intensities, movements, and potential paths, even those “that are yet to come” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 5). This approach inherently affords a more affirmative approach to liminal, indeterminate, and hybrid positions inhabited both by monsters and queers that necessarily remain within dominant thought.

Challenging the essentialist views on embodiment and subjectivity, Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) relational process-oriented thinking replaces the subjectivity of determined “being” with the dynamic concept of “becoming.” As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) state,

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equaling,” or “producing.” (p. 239).

Becoming refers to a unique mode of existence in a perpetual dynamic process of movement and flux, establishing transversal communications between heterogenous bodies and constantly producing new multiplicities that go beyond binary machines: woman-becomings of man that are neither man or woman, animal-becomings that are neither animal or human (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 26). Approaching queer monstrosity through the concept of becoming not only moves away from recognizing the liminal, indeterminate, and boundary-crossing embodiments as well as desires produced through monstrous transformations as taxonomical failures, but also opens

up the possibility to examine queer monstrosity beyond identitarian discussions, metaphors, or symbolic representations.

Becoming does not refer to a simplistic change between two fixed or molar identities, nor to the production of a third signified hybrid state (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 237). Instead, becoming is a dynamic process consisting of “creative involutions” between heterogeneous terms (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 238). To explain this process Deleuze and Guattari (2005) offer the symbiotic alliance between the wasp and the orchid as an example, stating:

The line or block of becoming that unites the wasp and the orchid produces a shared deterritorialization: of the wasp, in that it becomes a liberated piece of the orchid’s reproductive system, but also of the orchid, in that it becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction... The line, or the block, does not link the wasp to the orchid, any more than it conjugates or mixes them: it passes between them, carrying them away in a shared proximity in which the discernibility of points disappears (p. 294).

Thus the wasp does not really become the orchid any more than the orchid really becomes a wasp. Instead, the wasp-becoming of the orchid and the orchid-becoming of the wasp produces a single bloc of becoming that snaps up both terms, pushing these two disparate organisms outside their own habitual identitarian content and toward a mutual becoming. The only thing produced in this process is a “veritable” becoming-other of both: “a becoming wasp of the orchid and a becoming orchid of the wasp,” creating a shared deterritorialization of each (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 238). This idea is crucial in examining diverse monstrous transformations in the analytical chapters as queer-becomings, but this first necessitates clarifying a few points.

As previously mentioned, becoming does not refer to a relation through resemblance or imitation. Instead as seen in the example symbiotic alliance of the wasp and the orchid, “each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 10) into a zone of proximity. The zone of proximity or indiscernibility does not correspond to any formal similarity or structural analogy of relations but rather constitutes a shared relational space where distinct entities encounter and are drawn into one another, transforming each beyond their fixed, autonomous identitarian content in a molecular exchange. A man can engage in a process of becoming-dog by eating iron, not because he eats iron like a dog eats a bone, but “by making his jaw enter into composition with the iron “in such a way that he himself becomes the jaw of a molecular dog” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 274). Furthermore the encountered multiplicity does not necessarily have a direct relation to what the other becomes, “you can become-dog with cats, or become-monkey with a horse” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 274). With this approach, monstrosity becomes not a static or stagnant state, but a fluid and ongoing process of becoming, where difference is experienced outside predefined roles or pre-given identity categories. The heterogeneous elements embodied by these monsters, the human, the animal, the feminine, the queer, etc., interact and co-function to create something new that exceeds the identitarian characteristics of each of these orders and their existing structures of meaning, allowing examining monstrosity as a process of becoming-queer.

A line of becoming is not defined by the points it connects; the fixed nodes or points to create a rhizome, which constitutes a perpetual middle that has no beginning or end, an origin or a destination (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 294). Hence rhizome is another key concept in Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) philosophy. Unlike tree-root structures that connect two fixed linear points that "go from the least to the most differentiated" (p.10), rhizome is an "a-centered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system" (p.21) that has no fixed points or positions, only lines that connect any point to another which are not necessarily linked by any shared traits of the same nature, but heterogenous (p. 8). Rhizome "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (p. 7). Through the concept of rhizome, the socio-political dimensions of queer horror films can be discussed without reducing them to static representations of identity-based thinking, instead exploring how they function as rhizomatic assemblages, connecting with broader social structures and power dynamics while simultaneously exceeding and disrupting them.

The middle in this context thus does not refer to a fixated mid-point between two determined terms, like a hybrid, but to a dynamic and mobile space of continuous creation; a zone of intensified potentiality characterized by absolute speed and movement which is not concerned with traveling from one fixed identity position to another, but rather is defined by the intensity of the movement itself (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 30-31). It "constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility... a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other—and the border-proximity is indifferent to both contiguity and to distance" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 293). Thus the middle is

not a static, determined location but a dynamic fluid and mobile area that continues to unfold and change, defying any fixed categorization or definition and exceeding any attempt to predict its course.

Here the concepts of multiplicity and assemblage also become significant. As briefly mentioned before, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy starts with challenging the most fundamental ontological question by rejecting the singularity of being for multiplicity, stating "Everything is a multiplicity" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 182).

Multiplicity does not define what something is, but rather how everything is.

Multiplicities are "peripheral totalities" where the whole is just a product existing alongside various separate parts and "establishes aberrant paths of communication" between elements that retain all their differences (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, pp. 42-43). Becomings are multiplicities, and multiplicities are rhizomes: without beginnings or ends, always in the middle, replacing "is" with "and...and...and" (p. 25), ultimately escaping dualisms. Multiplicities have no units that can serve as subjects or objects, instead, they only have "determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature" (p. 8). Following this, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) distinguish between 2 kinds of multiplicities: molar multiplicities which are unifiable and organizable, such as a woman defined by her form and subjectivity (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 275), and molecular multiplicities that are composed of particles "that constantly construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communications, as they cross over into each other at, beyond, or before a certain threshold" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 33).

Deleuze and Guattari use the word “line of flight” or “line of deterritorialization” to explain the continuous line of borderlines: a fiber that stretches “from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible” following which the multiplicity changes (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 249). Molar and molecular multiplicities are not dualistic oppositions, they are multiplicities of multiplicities, forming and operating in a single assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 34). Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) becoming emerges as these multiplicities transform through “lines of flight or deterritorialization,” changing in nature as they connect with other multiplicities (p. 9). Therefore, becoming necessitates a departure from fixed molar identities and categories and towards molecular in-between processes between them. This framework provides a valuable lens for studying queer monstrosity, as it allows for an understanding of identity as fluid, ceaselessly changing, and in constant flux in response to others such as racial others, sexual others, technological others, non-human others etc., resisting normative classifications of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Queer monstrosity, then, becomes not a deviation from the norm which could be understood in identity-based foreclosures, but a mobile process of becoming, a continuous change and transition along lines of flight that destabilize established categories.

In this task, the concept of assemblage provides the necessary ground for a non-identitarian and non-representational study of queer monstrosity. Assemblage in this context refers to an a-centered multiplicity characterized by the symbiosis or co-functioning of its heterogeneous components and the relations it establishes between them (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 69). In assemblages there are “ lines of articulation

or segmentarity, strata and territories”, making it a organism, a signifying totality; but also “ lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification... continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 4). Thus assemblages are not static aggregates with already determined elements but instead they undergo constant processes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization, allowing elements within the assemblage to “combine their affective capacities to function and interact with one another in a becoming” (Baykan, 2021, p. 201). The concept of assemblage, therefore, is useful in examining how queer monsters in the selected films participate in a fluid, open-ended and mutating process of becoming-other, destabilizing hegemonic structures and creating a space for alternative expressions and connections within the broader social fabric.

As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) explain, assemblages are populated by intensities, various multiplicities, and movements of becoming (p. 79). The ideas of multiplicity and assemblages therefore nullify the dependence on fixed identities and definitions based on unified, self-enclosed and coherent structures, as they shift the focus from each term to their relations. This brings a unique form of individuation, each “taking shape according to the compositions of nonsubjective powers and effects” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 93). In this sense, queer monsters do not merely transgress or blur boundaries of sexuality, gender, and species, but each is a unique individuation born from different intensities encountering and crossing over each other in different relations of movement and speed. As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain, “We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman; they come from different

worlds, are borne on the wind, form rhizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming” (p. 242).

The dynamic intensive movements between molar and molecular multiplicities is essential in examining the signifiers of alterity that monsters embody as molecular lines of deterritorialization in a process of becoming-queer. In this aim the concept of becoming-minoritarian, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari provides a powerful tool for establishing a non-identitarian and non-representational alignment between queerness and monstrosity based on shared alterity. Majority for Deleuze and Guattari (2005) does not relate to actual quantity but to establishing a state or a standard against which all others, even with larger quantities, can be deemed as minoritarian. Majority implies a state of domination, where the “man”, defined as white, male, adult, rational, etc., constitutes the standard against which all else is measured, positioning himself as the majoritarian par-excellence and assuming a pre-given right and power over all else. Therefore women, plants, animals, and even molecules are minoritarian (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 291-292). Becoming-minoritarian, therefore, is not about the aggregate state of being a minority but about becoming, or a process of deterritorialization away from fixed molar identities and categories constructed in relation to the majoritarian man-standard. Thus while only a minority is capable of serving as the active medium of becoming, it is with the condition that it deterritorializes itself, and “ceases to be a definable aggregate in relation to the majority” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 291). Therefore while women, Jews etc. might constitute minorities under certain conditions through reterritorialization, even women must become-woman, and even Jews must become Jewish (p. 291). In this sense, minorities “never exists ready-made”, they are formed

on lines of flight (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 43). Approaching the feminized, racialized and animalized alterity that constitutes the queer monster through the concept of becoming-minoritarian allows acknowledging “the transgression that the monster offers is the transgression for which it was maligned”, affirming “the potentialities of future experiments in flesh and subject” without forgetting or ignoring “the history of oppression that has constituted the category at all” (MacCormack, 2012, p. 259).

As Hawkins (2020) posits, the figure of the monster is traditionally understood as “the ultimate embodiment of difference, as the (generic) human’s Other”, with the category of human being defined through the man-standard (p. 19). Thus for the aims of this thesis, approaching queer monstrosity beyond anthropocentric structures is crucial for an affirmative view of queer-monstrosity. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming-animal provides the necessary grounds for this task. Specifically, in *Chapter 3: Carnivorous Queers: Cannibalism And Becoming-Animal In Raw And Bones And All*, becoming-animal emerges as a powerful analytic tool for exploring how established queer-coded horror tropes, such as vampires, werewolves, and as the chapter examines cannibals, can be reconceptualized as instances of becoming-queer beyond their semiotic and representational codings. This framework enables a more affirmative and empowering interpretation of these figures, moving beyond symbolic readings based on their non-human abjection to appreciate their capacity for destabilizing normative structures.

Challenging hierarchical taxonomies, becoming-animal disrupts the notion of the animal as merely human’s inferior other. Instead, they are understood as “affects and

powers, involutions that grip every animal in a becoming just as powerful as that of the human being with the animal” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 241). Because human is not privileged over and territorially separated from the animal, becoming-animal initiates non-human relations (Braidotti, 2002a, p. 123). It constitutes a metamorphic process where one’s human identity is suspended and destabilized in ways that allow for non-hierarchical and boundary-crossing alliances with non-human entities or forces. Since becomings are not about formal resemblances or literal transformations, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) emphasize that while one does not really become an animal, there is a reality of becoming-animal, which they describe as creative involutions bearing witness to “an inhumanity immediately experienced in the body as such” and “unnatural nuptials outside the programmed body” (p. 273). Thus becoming-animal does not equate with acquiring a specific form or characteristic of an animal, but rather involves a process of embodying intensities and relations that destabilize human-centered subjectivity.

Becoming-animal is nothing but a map of intensities, “grafted onto the man insofar as he is searching for a way out. It is a creative line of escape that says nothing other than what it is” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p. 36). This means that becoming-animal functions as a line of flight—a pathway of transformation that opens up new ways of existing, unbound by rigid identities or predetermined structures. It is less about the endpoint and more about the process itself, emphasizing movement, creativity, and the potential to move beyond fixed categories. Becoming-animal thus is a process that produces and affirms modes of existence that operate in the liminal and in-between dimension of humanity and animality, moving beyond the established structures of identity, body, gender, and sexuality. It constitutes an

“absolute deterritorialization” that resists reterritorialization within normative structures (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 13).

The last concepts in this section that require exploration are the anomalous and demonic packs due to their direct resonance with traditional monstrous imagery and their nuanced applications within Deleuzoguattarian queer theory. Since multiplicities cannot change their dimensions without changing in nature, as they recruit and expand, they continuously transform themselves into a string of other multiplicities according to their borders and thresholds. Because of this, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain, “all that counts is the borderline—the anomalous” (p. 245). The anomalous for Deleuze and Guattari (2005) is not an individual or species, but a “phenomenon of bordering” (p. 245). It is an encounter that designates absolute deterritorialization, which “carries the transformations of becoming...always farther down the line of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 249). Therefore, the monster as an anomalous entity is not fixed in its identity but exists in a state of constant flux. Defined by its encounters, it disrupts boundaries, generates new affects, and embodies a process of becoming that continually reshapes itself and its relations, while also drawing others into similar processes of becoming-other.

For Deleuze and Guattari (2005) one of the main principles of becoming is that it concerns an alliance or a pact with a demon head of the pack: an exceptional individual situated in the position of the anomalous (p. 244). As MacCormack (2009) explains, the demon head, not necessarily an individual but an encounter or an infection, elicits fascination. Monsters create fascinating unnatural alliances, strange relations born from “desiring a relation with the power(s) of an irreducible other” (p.

136). In each encounter “various intensities cross each other for the first time, or the next time, where different molecules meet familiarly or as strange combinations” (MacCormack, 2009, p. 143). Monstrosity, therefore, is not simply a deviation from the norm; it is a process that reconfigures and creates new interkingdom relations, such as human-animal, organic-artificial etc. Encounters with the monstrous open up new pathways and enable the creation of new assemblages that challenge established identities and norms. In this sense monstrosity can be studied as both positively and revolutionarily queer: “an imperative in forming relations which enter subjects into becomings” (MacCormack, 2012, p. 255).

Citing Foucault, Braidotti (1994) argues that the medicalization of the reproductive body, through becoming the dominant organization of sexuality in modernity, constitutes a form of biopower, exerting “the power of normativity over the living organism” (p. 58). Consequently, the contemporary image of monstrosity based on liminality and sexual indeterminacy has been built around the anxieties of late post-modernity over “the bodily roots of subjectivity”, acting as a counterpoint to the dominant cultures’ emphasis on “the construction of clean, healthy, fit, white, decent, law-abiding, heterosexual and forever young bodies” (Braidotti, 2000, p. 162). In this context, Deleuze and Guattari’s reimagining of the body through the concept of body without organs (BwO) is an essential concern for this thesis. BwO is not “an empty body stripped of organs” but rather a site of radical potential, a heterogeneous assemblage of multiplicities that has “blown apart the organism and its organization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 30). It defies categorization by genus, species, organs or their functions (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 60), existing instead as a fluid network of desubjectified intensities, flows, and connections in which organs no longer

signify anything or function in fixed roles or forms, but understood as non-signifying intensities distributed “independently of the form of the organism” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 164-165). In short, the BwO represents a radical openness, a body that escapes fixed structures and roles, constantly in flux and defined not by what it is, but by an ongoing process of becoming-other-than-itself.

Through the concept of BwO, Braidotti’s discussions on embodied existence guides the discussions in Chapter 5 on studying the queer monstrous becomings of the body beyond gendered, racialized, and sexualized interpretations. Braidotti (2000) explains, by shifting the focus from predefined structures to dynamic processes, the BwO allows for an understanding of embodiment as situated, intensive, and dynamic, effectively challenging the constraints of biological determinism (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). In Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology the body is viewed as a dynamic assemblage of forces with spatio-temporal materiality (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). Thus the “enfleshed Deleuzian subject”, for Braidotti (2000) is rather an “in-between”, neither a transcendent subject nor purely social shaped entity, but a “folding in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outwards of affects” (p. 159). The body “remains faithful to itself” not in terms of an identity or ego, but to the “repetition of the expression of one’s continuing and structuring adherence to certain dynamic spatial-temporal coordinates” (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). Assemblages concern “heterogeneity and an extended state of relationality”, establishing transversal communications “between potentially innumerable domains, whether organic forms or manufactured artefacts, human or non-human, animate or inanimate registers” (Baykan, 2021, p. 201). Therefore the reimagining of the body as a dynamic assemblage through the BwO. As Braidotti (2000) argues, opens up

numerous indeterminate configurations of embodied existence “that are postmetaphysics of gender, or beyond sexual difference” (p. 162). This perspective provides a valuable lens for examining monstrous physical transformations and hybrid bodies, particularly those often relegated to the realms of psychopathology or interpreted solely as allegorical representations of oppressed queerness. It allows for an engagement with these non-normative hybridizations of bodies on their own terms without dismissing their defiance of fixed categories of gender and human/non-human binaries that grounds their monstrosity.

2.3. Desiring-Production and Queer Sexuality

Providing a fundamentally distinct alternative to psychoanalytical frameworks within queer horror film studies, Deleuze and Guattari’s radical conceptualization of desire as an affirmative and productive force is another crucial concept for this thesis. Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of psychoanalysis argues that psychoanalysis no longer functions as a state tool to maintain social norms, but instead has itself become a “specific and symbolic order” itself. It has tasked itself with “overcoding assemblages in order to subject desires to signifying chains, utterances to the status of subjective examples” to stop all those “in the process of talking, thinking, acting and becoming in other ways” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 88-89). In this aim psychoanalysis “breaks up all productions of desire and crushes all formations of utterances” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 77). This critique is particularly relevant for queer horror film studies, where unconventional desires expressed by monsters and their victims are often reduced to reflections of societal anxieties about contagious and specifically non-heteronormative desires.

On the contrary, desire for Deleuze and Guattari (2000, 2005) is not grounded on, nor has any concerns with lack, castration or any Oedipal scenario. Going beyond, but not necessarily excluding sexuality, in Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) philosophy, desire is defined as a machinic process of production. Machinic in this context does not refer to mechanical systems, but instead to "machine assemblages", in which machine refers to "a 'proximity' grouping between independent and heterogeneous terms... it is the abstract line which crosses them and makes them work together" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 104). Desire essentially functions as the world's "core machinery" and its "subatomic power source" (Davis, 2013, p. 15). Instead of being limited to libidinal investments, for Deleuze and Guattari (2000) desiring machines are fundamental to the production of everything, in the sense that everything is made out of desire; from basic acts like sleeping and walking to seasons like a winter or spring (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 95). Deleuze and Guattari (2000) both credit psychoanalysis for discovering desiring production in the unconscious (p.24) and critique it for imposing Oedipus on the unconscious as the source of all productive forces (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 56). Against this, they advocate "schizophrenizing" the unconscious as well as the socio-historical domains; shattering "the iron collar of Oedipus and rediscovering everywhere the force of desiring-production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 53). Schizophrenia for Deleuze and Guattari (2000) refers to a state of liberation of desiring-production from the symbolic and the structural; scrambling all the codes and transmitting "decoded flows of desire" (p. 35). It is "the Real in itself, the 'impossible real' and its production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 53). Therefore, adopting Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of desire necessitates a significant shift in the way the relationship between queer desire and monstrosity in horror movies is approached.

First of all, desire is essentially a molecular affair; it moves and produces by rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 14). In that sense it belongs to the realm of intensities, multiplicities, deterritorializations, and becomings. It does not “take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 292). Such an approach could no longer be concerned with resemblances, allegories or a shared transgression, as “desire is no more symbolic than figurative, no more signified than signifier: it is made up of different lines which cross, articulate or impede each other and which constitute a particular assemblage on a plane of immanence” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 97). Furthermore, desiring-production requires breaking away from psychoanalytical readings and gender-based discourses on bodies and sexualities, as desire is a productive force that “overtakes all idealistic categories” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 5). It is not prompted by internal drives or needs, not concerned with lack or negativity, nor has pleasure as its end goal (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 96; Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 27). With this understanding, the question of desire shifts from “What does it mean?” to “How does it work?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 109). “Oral, anal, genital, etc.: we ask each time into which assemblages these components enter, not to which drives they correspond, nor to which memories or fixations they owe their importance, nor to which incidents they refer, but with which extrinsic elements they combine to create a desire, to create desire” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 96-97).

In this framework of desiring-production, sexuality becomes “one flux among others” in assemblages of desire (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 101), significantly

challenging the privileged power assigned to sexuality in relation to social organization within psychoanalysis. While Deleuze and Guattari (2000) make harsh critiques on sexuality as a tool of societal control, it is crucial to establish their critique does not concern sexuality as a whole, but is exclusive to an anthropomorphic and phallocentric sexual desire constructed between “a fixed subject, an ego specified according to a given sex, and complete objects defined as global persons”, under the rules of familial reproduction (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 323, pp. 70-71). Their critique is essentially a prompt to approach sexuality within the realm of desiring-production; to seek out a “sexuality for itself” away from “all idealizing sublimation” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 102) which would open up “an entire field of multiple, molecular sexualities, of radical differences that are irreducible to the binary code of sexual opposition, and that explode...the hypocritical requirements of social morality” (Shaviro, 2008, p. 69). Far from arguing for a relationship between queerness and monstrosity that does not rely on sexuality, approaching sexuality within the concept of desiring-production highlights representational images of erotic desire and couplings as productive zones of potentiality in creating queer-monstrous becomings that extend beyond binary regulations of gender and sexuality, as well as essentialist oppositions of human/non-human, organic/inorganic and such.

This potential carries on even in instances that are initially recognizable as between molar subjectivities of a determined sexual identity, as for Deleuze and Guattari (2005) to love someone is to no longer take yourself or the other as unified subjects but “to find that person’s own packs”, the multiplicities within them “which may be of an entirely different nature” and to join them to yours (p. 35). In this sense,

sexuality possesses a significant power in initiating becoming-others of man. It is not confined to binary organizations of sexes, nor to “a bisexual organization within each sex.” Instead “sexuality proceeds by way of the becoming-woman of the man and the becoming-animal of the human” — producing “a thousand sexes” with “so many uncontrollable becomings” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 278). With this transformative potential, sexuality can be thought of as an imperative in initiating queer-monstrous becomings, as sexuality as desiring production also has the potential to possess a demonic/anomalous function as “a power of alliance inspiring illicit unions or abominable loves” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 246).

Moving away from “anthropomorphic representation of sex” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 294), all that counts in sexuality is assemblages of flows and partial objects. A concept appropriated from Melanie Klein, for Deleuze and Guattari (2000) partial objects are molecularly dispersed elements within desiring-production. They do not refer to “the differentiation of a single being, such as the masculine and the feminine in the human sex.” Rather they are “distinct ‘beings,’ as found in the dispersion of the nonhuman sex, like the clover and the bee.” Partial objects, anything from breasts to stones to a pipe bowl, are “preindividual and prepersonal singularities” that “do not belong to any organism that would function phantasmatically as a lost unity or a totality to come” (pp. 323-324). This understanding opens desire towards “the imperceptible, the machinic and the nonhuman” (Beckman, 2013, p. 120), allowing a conceptualization of queer monstrosity that is simultaneously grounded on sexual desire while having nothing to do with metaphors or symbolic codings related to determined identities or sexual deviance.

As a final note, one of the biggest challenges in evaluating the erotic desires and sex scenes from a Deleuzoguattarian framework comes from Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) direct refusal of pleasure and orgasm in the process of desiring-production. For Deleuze and Guattari (2005), any external pleasure is a reterritorialization: it ties the flows of desiring-production back to subjective embodiment or to an end goal of satisfying a lack and therefore must be renounced or delayed as long as possible (p. 155). The majority of the films chosen for the corpus of this thesis involve what will be argued as queer instances of sexual couplings driven by or fundamentally grounded on sexual pleasure as a core component in the process of becoming-queer-monster. To address this challenge, Beckman's (2013) discussion on the possibility of a Deleuzoguattarian theory of post-human sexuality that could re-claim pleasure and orgasm as a political tool for feminist and queer studies offers a valuable framework. For Beckman (2013), Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation of partial objects as intensive and non-signifying opens the possibility of orgasm beyond lack (p. 141), but this first necessitates rescuing sexuality from its humanist discourse. Beckman (2013) argues Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal offers a powerful tool in this aim (p. 127), through which she formulates a becoming-demonic of sexuality, which ultimately has the capability to produce non-human orgasm free from genitality and consciousness of sexed economy (p. 141). Beckman's (2013) discussions on this topic partially grounds the analysis on *The Untamed* in the fourth chapter of this thesis, and thus will be further elaborated in the analytical chapter.

2.4. Becoming-queer, Becoming-monster

Through his exploration of Guy Hocquenghem's texts, Deleuze (2004) challenges the concept of homosexuality as a fixed sexual identity, asserting that "Nobody is homosexual, it doesn't exist. You treat us like homosexuals, OK, but we're already elsewhere" (p. 287). This statement is not a rejection of homosexuality itself, but rather highlights how the category itself is a product of majoritarian power structures. Thus rather than seeking recognition or rights within the limitations of majoritarian structures, Deleuze (2004) argues for a "micro-politics of desire" where homosexuality becomes a force of deterritorialization capable of escaping both "the heterosexual model" and its localizations in a relationship, as well as "its diffusion in every sector of society" (p. 286). For Deleuze (2004), this is the power of homosexuality: its refusal to be recognized, or take itself as a subject fighting for his rights. "There is no more homosexual subject, but homosexual productions of desire, and homosexual assemblages that produce utterances" (p. 288). This understanding shifts homosexuality from a determined sexual identity to a fluid process of desire that emphasizes the production of novel relations and forms of expression.

During these productions, homosexuality opens itself up to

"all sorts of possible new relations, micrological or micropsychic, essentially reversible, transversal relations, with as many sexes as there are assemblages, not even excluding new relations between men and women...It is no longer about being a man or woman, but inventing sexes, such that a homosexual man can find in a woman those pleasures which a man would give him and vice versa" (Deleuze, 2004, p. 287).

Deleuze and Guattari (2000) further examine this idea through their discussion on Proust, explaining against the exclusive and Oedipal homosexuality with its repression and guilt, this understanding creates a non-oedipal, schizoid and inclusive homosexuality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 70), in which "the homosexual does not stay with the same sex, but discovers innumerable sexes" (Deleuze, 2004, p. 285).

The question of is he gay or not no longer works on him as he is both gay and not; “he does not confine himself inside contradictions; on the contrary, he opens out and, like a spore case inflated with spores, releases them as so many singularities...all affirmed by their new distance” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 77). In this sense, while “homosexuality is nothing”, for Deleuze (2004) homosexual desire is specific; it no longer relates back to gendered binaries or subjectivities, but to an irreducible flow “without origin or goal, a matter of experimentation and not interpretation” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 285). Hence it contains an otherness that is not related to psychoanalytical formulations, but points towards “the progression of a future sexual becoming” (p. 288).

Based on this Conley (2009) argues that in Deleuze and Guattari’s writings, homosexuality liberates itself from identity politics, and is instead encountered as “queering”: “as a becoming and as an ongoing differing of difference” (p. 24). According to Conley (2009), Deleuze and Guattari’s discussions on Proust and Hocquenghem assert queering as a becoming is primarily an issue of “reinstating a vital desire” that is liberated from “reductionist interpretations” based on psychoanalytical scripts” and “experiments with innumerable sexualities” (Conley, 2009, p. 26). Additionally, queering also decimates producing utterances. For Deleuze (2004), the difference of gay writers, as for the case of Hocquenghem, is the production of utterances within a new style: different ways of saying “I” that “do not and must not revolve around homosexuality itself” (p. 285). Grounded on this, Conley (2009) argues that for queering producing utterances means producing “new ways of feeling, perceiving and conceiving” that do not pre-exist (Conley, 2009, p. 26).

Conley's (2009) interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's discussions proposes that queering is essentially an act of experimentation and invention of new possibilities of existence, experiences and relations that are beyond the majoritarian systems of categorization and normativity. Hence queering, or becoming-gay is beyond the concerns about the insertion of a gay subject into the existing structures (Conley, 2009, p. 24). It is a state of permanent sexual and social revolution: "the becoming-revolutionary of the queer" (Conley, 2009, p. 25), which does not concern itself with dichotomies, and goes beyond, although not exclude, the issues of gender and sexual identity. Therefore Conley (2009) argues that Deleuze's discussions about homosexuality on Hocquenghem's work highlights a becoming-gay that is inherently associated with margins and becoming-minoritarian (p. 25) and consequently is not exclusive to homosexuality, but open to all minorities without prior normative rules (Conley, 2009, p. 35). It is a radical move that breaks down all impositions and representatives of state thought, and "produces becomings that go beyond normative couplings to invent new connections be it with humans, animals, vegetables or machines" (Conley, 2009, p. 24).

Starting with the question of what possibilities a Deleuzoguattarian queer theory might entail, Colebrook (2008, 2009) reaches a similar argument to Conley (2009) by proposing the "reversed-platonism" Deleuze adopts generates a new and positive notion of queerness: "not as destabilization or solicitation of norms, but as a creation of differences that are no longer grounded in either the subject or generating life" (Colebrook, 2008, p. 18). Highlighting that for Deleuze, the conditions of queer are the conditions of the new, Colebrook (2009) calls for a "radical and distinct break

from identity politics” (pp. 20-21); a Deleuzoguattarian approach to queer politics which would no longer involve recognition of self or refusal of normativity, but an affirmation of pre-personal, accounting for all encounters that are potential or not yet actualized (Colebrook, 2009, p. 21). Colebrook (2009) suggests that such an approach would have two direct consequences. Firstly, “interrogating a practice according to the potentiality of its encounters” would require approaching practices like gay marriage or gender transition not as “compromised maneuvers in which the queer self repeats and distorts given norms”, but instead involve looking at the positivity of each encounter; asking “How do bodies establish relations in each case, and what powers are opened (or closed) to further encounters and modifications?” (Colebrook, 2009, p. 21) The second consequence Colebrook (2009) proposes is aesthetically, queer art that repeats norms to de-stabilize it from within would shift away from representation or formation of identities to an “attempt to present pure intensities in matter”, bringing along a new distinct Deleuzian model of reading (p. 21), “a positive reading in which temporality in its pure state can be intuited and given form as queer, as a power to create relations, to make a difference, to repeat a power beyond its actual and already constituted forms” (Colebrook, 2009, p.23).

Monsters in horror cinema, with their embodiment of an ontology that defies anthropocentric and heteronormative boundaries thus inherently aligns with such a conceptualization of queerness as becoming. This alignment also bears a political dimension as monster ontology has a historical function as a power apparatus that affirms “the shift of the ‘normal’ from a cultural, arbitrary category to an idealized natural phenomenon” (MacCormack, 2012, p. 256). Monsters as queer-becomings however do not merely deconstruct normative forms of life but reveal the arbitrary

and contingent nature of normative categories by creating new relational possibilities and potentials for existence, enabling a powerful, transformative rethinking of queerness beyond the constraints of identity-based approaches and normative social formations. Showing an awareness to the revolutionary potentials of monstrosity, in Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) discussions monsters such as vampires and werewolves are not myths or allegories but rather exist as molecular intensities. Humans cannot become a vampire or a werewolf in a literal sense, but nonetheless vampires and werewolves exist as "becomings of man" (p. 275). Building on this, several scholars have to different degrees utilized monstrosity and its assigned properties in their discussions on Deleuzoguattarian queer theory, creating the necessary groundwork to approach monstrous transformations as affairs of queer-becoming. While the ideas of these scholars will be discussed in analytical chapters alongside Deleuze and Guattari's own writings, MacCormack's direct conceptualization of queer politics through monstrous, non-human and hybrid becomings is significant for its direct engagement with established tropes of monstrosity in horror cinema, revealing the genre's political importance even without identitarian allegories.

Arguing queer theory does not seek the inversion but a complete rejection of hierarchical binary oppositions constructed within "majoritarian humanist signification," MacCormack (2015) proposes a queer approach to the concept of non-human as a strategic position that enables resistance against anthropocentric oppression (p. 131). While possessing tactical referents such as animals "which are not human and suffer because they aren't so", for MacCormack (2015) the non-human is not the opposition of human but "the ahuman becomings of the human who

wishes to repudiate the isomorphic power structures which facilitate all forms of oppression” (p. 131). The non-human in this conceptualization no longer refers to an evolutionary precursor to the human nor to a failed humanity, but to a route of escape—to “modes of being which are apprehended in their more ‘natural’ state, though nature is not pitted against culture but is, rather, everything in its chaotic state, the pure potentiality of all mechanisms and combinations for action, production, destruction and metamorphosis” (MacCormack, 2015, pp. 120-121). MacCormack’s (2015) approach to non-human becomings is crucial for this thesis as it allows accounting for, rather than negating, the ideological history the horror genre that has situated both the non-humanness and queerness within their feminized and animalized abjection, consequently opening up the possibility to appropriate the same codes to examine queer-monstrosity through non-human becomings.

On a similar line of thought, MacCormack’s engagement with the concepts of becoming-animal, unnatural participations, and hybridity in relation to queer theory and dynamics of oppression also becomes helpful. As MacCormack (2009) explains, monsters are frequently seen as hybrids, nature’s mistakes, in both myth and pop-culture (p.137). Human/inhuman hybrid transformations have been a frequent motif in the horror film genre, their bodily modifications focusing on pointing out the biological and cultural norms they transgress (Powell, 2005, p. 62). In such instances, horror partly depends on coding the monster as against nature (Powell, 2005, p. 77). Yet as MacCormack (2012) explains that since nature cannot produce anything truly unnatural, it is only through the lens of majoritarian discursive systems—shaped by cultural interpretations of nature—that certain phenomena are deemed unnatural, incorrect, or mistaken (p. 261). In this sense fictional monsters are not ever separated

from queer politics. As MacCormack (2009) notes, in Deleuze and Guattari's understanding, hybrids are "not symbolic half-and-halves" but becomings encountered as "melded thresholds" (p. 144). They are examples of unnatural participations involving two entirely heterogeneous terms in combinations that are neither genetic or structural but interkingdom, hence against nature (p. 242). They "repudiate the phantasy of purity of self, of sexuality as subjectivity...of belonging to one kingdom (MacCormack, 2009, p. 146). Yet instead of being regarded as mistakes, Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) ontology affirms unnatural participations, as "the only way Nature operates—against itself" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 242). Hence as MacCormack (2009) argues, Deleuzoguattarian theory of hybridity has significant queer-political importance "born of a need to mobilise majoritarian patterns, not be included within these patterns" (p. 146).

2.5. Queer Horror Aesthetics

In critical identity-based approaches, queer theory seeks to destabilize normative structures by re-reading canonical images of heterosexual desire to reveal moments of instability, deviation, and mobility (Colebrook, 2009, p. 20). Anna Powell (2009) in her own examination of gothic vampire genre raises a critical question that emerges from this tradition: "how can a plot based on perversity and exploitation offer us inspirational Deleuzian becomings of affects, percepts, and concepts?" (p. 93) For Deleuze and Guattari (2003) the answer is not to abandon the formalized majoritarian contents, but "finding a way out, or even a way in, another side, a hallway, an adjacency" (p. 8). Language is not information but prescription, always capable of serving minorities within majoritarian discourse (Deleuze, 2004, p. 286). Horror genre inherently offers a fertile ground for exploring such deterritorialization

of majoritarian codes. As Doty (1993) argues, the central conventions of horror are built on exploiting “the spectacle of the heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry” (p. 15). What is crucial here for a Deleuzoguattarian reading, as Nick Davis (2013) emphasizes for his own study on contemporary queer cinema, is that even if the films themselves relate back to some majoritarian definition of homosexuality, “the goal is never to discard these codes but to illumine each film’s productive estranging of them, launching them into new flows, formally and conceptually, via acts of minor deterritorialization” (p. 26). The same idea, when applied to the conventions of the horror genre creates the possibility for reclaiming queer monstrosity beyond subversive readings on symbolic representations.

Building upon this idea, the framework this thesis proposes allows pointing out queerness in certain films or characters without relying on overt representation or subtextual analysis, partially because for Deleuze and Guattari (2005), there is no difference between what an artwork talks about (content) and how it is made (form). An artwork, as an assemblage, “has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 4). This understanding implicates significant potential transformations in studying and reclaiming queer monstrosity.

First of all, as Shaviro (2008) notes traditional approaches to what is termed as theory assumes a scientific distance from its object of study, which becomes especially problematic for film theory “whose ‘object’ is not just particular films, but the very process of film viewing itself” (p. 9). Challenging this call for aesthetic

detachment, as Powell (2005) notes, Deleuzian film spectatorship calls for a machinic connection between the embodied spectator and the body of the film (p. 4), with the spectator existing in this molecular assemblage along with other bodies that films body mechanically connects to, such as economic or social bodies (p.93). Content in this context no longer refers to what a work of art talks about. Instead it becomes “the states of desire internal and external to the work, and which are composed along with it.” Furthermore, the distinction between form and content is so relative that “a flux of content may even come into the expression, in so far as it enters into an assemblage of enunciation in relation to other fluxes” (Deleuze & Parnet, p. 121). This relational approach offers new avenues for understanding and reclaiming queer monstrosity, as it not only makes the distinction between form and content obsolete but also highlights how content emerges dynamically during the act of viewing. Therefore the established cinematic language and narratives of the mainstream horror genre, through audience participation can produce horror films with queer becomings that transcend distanced cognitive analysis while simultaneously opening up the potential to reclaim queer monstrosity beyond identification through shared transgression.

As the aim of this thesis is to move beyond signified queer practices and subjectivities to examine queer-becomings, what constitutes queer horror and how to approach it radically changes. Here extending Davis’s (2013) definition of queer cinema into horror genre becomes a helpful guide. For Davis (2013) through a Deleuzian approach queer cinema would no longer aim “to express forms of sexuality that are readily classifiable as gay, nor to translate preexisting models of desire into corresponding visual images, nor to characterize only the most prosperous

states of sexual morphology, activity, and identification” (p. 69). Instead queer cinema would be to “detect a strong sexual sensibility, but to remain unsure what kind it is” (Davis, 2013, p.37) — neither be “ ‘just gay,’ nor ‘not gay’,” but only called queer for the sake of being able to talk about it, for it is barely perceptible and “does not yet exist” (Davis, 2013, pp. 24-25). Queer horror cinema in this sense would not be about featuring images of queer monstrous becomings, but would essentially be a queer-monstrous-becoming itself, “producing new concepts of nonheterosexual desire that are not just narrative or character-based but inhere deeply in form and style” (Davis, 2013, p. 37).

The question then becomes how to study, or even point out queer monstrosity beyond visual or narrative decoding from a critical distance. As Shaviro (2008) argues, Lacanian psychoanalysis tends to remain within the Platonic tradition, denouncing “the delusions of the optical system or metaphor and privileges the symbolic order of language in opposition to an imaginary defined primarily in visual terms” (p. 14). For Shaviro (2008) this creates one of the biggest shortcomings of psychoanalytic film theory: its “need for control”, to maintain authority and dominance over the image as an intellectual defense against the potentially destabilizing effects of cinematic pleasure (pp. 10-11). In this sense for Shaviro (2008), semiotic and psychoanalytic film theory is “largely a phobic construct”, aiming to regulate and destroy the affective power of the images by subordinating them “to textuality and the Law of the signifier” (p. 15). A Deleuzoguattarian approach to queer horror cinema however demands both submission to the image and openness to its affective power.

For studying how works of art produce becomings, Deleuze and Guattari (2000) develop schizoanalysis as a method that aims “to overturn the theater of representation into the order of desiring-production” (p. 44). Unlike psychoanalytic readings focused on matters of theme, plot and character, schizoanalysis distances itself from “fixed set of equations for symbolic representation” (Powell, 2005 p. 23), instead blending “detailed description of a complex assemblage with structural accounts of what that assemblage discloses about desire” (Davis, 2013, p. 13). As Powell (2005) notes, while psychoanalytic readings pathologize horror, through Deleuzian schizoanalysis, anomalous states of consciousness are celebrated “both for their stylistic innovations and their affect on the audience who participates in through affective contagion” (p. 23). Examining the monstrous figures within this approach reveals that “rather than the horror of an abject, polarised other, both beauty and terror are located in the transformative condition” (Powell, 2005, p. 78). Even more crucially, “schizoanalysis preserves the anomalies it encounters, without decoding or taxonomizing them as symptoms of a hidden substructure” (Davis, 2013, p. 21). Therefore it “offers a more fluid and inclusive micropolitics of desire in a neo-aesthetic/neo-sexuality outside psychoanalytic myths and theaters of the past” (Powell, 2005 p. 18).

For Deleuze (1986) at any moment there are multiple changing forces operating on an image. The process of perception cannot account for all the forces and their potentialities to perceive a ‘complete image.’ Instead perception “subtracts from the thing whatever does not interest it,” and therefore always remains “incomplete and prejudiced, partial and subjective” (pp. 63-64). In this light Deleuzian film theory demands an affective turn. As it shifts away from plot, theme and characterization to

map aesthetic assemblages involving the viewers own intersected mind/body (Powell, 2005 p.6), “the relationship between spectator and film becomes fundamentally mimetic.” Meaning is no longer solemnly an affair of semiotics, but is produced as experienced in the body (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 149). Therefore encounters that initiate queer becomings in film might not emerge from cognitive evaluation, but from instances when “sounds, textures and rhythms vibrate in the body/text in incorporated, experiential ways as the spectator becomes with the text” (Powell, 2005 p. 10). As Powell (2005) explains, films are experienced as events. Different film techniques “have a direct affect on our mechanisms of perception before they reach a more advanced stage of cognitive processing”, through which “we meld with and become part of the material technology of cinema in its movement, force and intensity” (Powell, 2005 p. 5). In terms of creating queer-becomings through affective power, horror genre is a significant tool. As Shaviri (1993) argues, horror and pornography bombard their audiences with extreme sensory input, which has the capability to produce aesthetic experiences that can transform consciousness on the plane of immanence (p. 65). However simultaneously, bodily and sensuous experiences are to a large degree informed by culture, even the most illegible images are cultural perceptions, not raw sensations (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 145). In this sense, horror genre is under a constant double process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Powell (2005) addresses the problem of following a purely Deleuzoguattarian thought against the inherent socio-political situatedness of the horror genre. She acknowledges that fear, terror and desire operate within a socially learned framework — the existing literature that maps these operations onto the representations of monstrosity has made significant contributions to horror film studies and should not be ignored (p. 204). In this light

Powell (2005) argues that Deleuzoguattarian film theory does not necessitate turning away from socio-political contexts, psycho-sexual responses or economic determinants but to rethink them as a continuum of assemblages connected to the apparatus of cinema (p. 205).

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has functioned as a theoretical guide that brings together the works of Deleuze and Guattari with more contemporary Deleuzian scholars in different fields such as Verena Conley, Patricia MacCormack, Claire Colebrook, Rosi Braidotti, Frida Beckman, Anna Powell, Nick Davis, and such, to build a sufficient framework to study queer horror monstrosity. By examining the intersections of queerness, monstrosity, and minoritarian politics, this chapter has highlighted how a Deleuzoguattarian approach offers new possibilities for understanding queer horror films beyond identity politics and normative frameworks. This framework allows for a deeper engagement with the ways in which horror films can challenge and subvert majoritarian narratives, revealing the revolutionary potential of queer monstrosity as a site of creativity and transformation. Furthermore, by interrogating the aesthetic and affective dimensions of horror, this chapter advocates for a perspective that sees queer monstrosity not merely as a symbolic representation but as an active, generative force that encourages rethinking relationships between bodies, desires, and experiences. The call for an embodied, relational approach to queer horror cinema emphasizes the importance of recognizing the dynamic interplay between form and content, encouraging audiences to engage with films in ways that transcend passive consumption and foster a deeper understanding of queer possibilities. To demonstrate the applications of this framework, the next chapter focuses on how

established queer horror tropes, in this case cannibalism, can be approached from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective, and what this would contribute to the broader studies of the genre.



CHAPTER III

CARNIVOROUS QUEERS: CANNIBALISM AND BECOMING- ANIMAL IN *RAW* AND *BONES* AND *ALL*

3.1 Introduction

Citing a 1984 study on anti-homosexual attitudes, Benshoff (1998) notes their similarities with classic horror tropes; suggesting an inherent link between monstrosity and queer-coding. Based on this observation Benshoff (1998) argues the figure of the monster can be directly equated metaphorically with the homosexual (pp. 2-4). Similar to Benshoff's (1998) example of vampires during the AIDS crisis functioning as direct metaphors for the fear of contagion and moral pollution associated with homosexuality (p. 3), certain horror tropes inherently suggest queerness due to the historical and socio-political contexts of their emergence and evolution within the horror cinema. As contemporary horror films often engage with such tropes through queer-feminist revisions or subversions, finding a way to analyze their core ideological messages remains crucial. With this awareness, this chapter aims to investigate one such trope, cannibalism, to showcase how these tropes can be approached as queer-becomings; thus allowing the discussions to move beyond allegorical associations and identity-based perspectives while maintaining a critical

awareness of the historical and socio-political situatedness of their dominant representations within the genre. In this aim, this chapter engages with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal to frame the queer cannibal as a radical site of potentiality for inventing new modes of dynamic existence outside of majoritarian structures, with no fixed finality.

Reflecting on Deleuze and Guattari's (2003) conceptualization of becoming-animal as an escape route from oppressive anthropocentric structures (p. 12), this chapter re-evaluates the gender-based feminist perspectives on queer horror cinema by demonstrating how the genre's narrative and aesthetic conventions produce new forms of queer desire and expression that no longer adhere to the limits of humanity or the conventional notions of identity and corporeality. Building upon Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) insistence on the inherently political nature of becoming-animal, this chapter investigates the animalized queer cannibal in the films *Raw* (Ducournau, 2016) and *Bones and All* (Guadagnino, 2022) as critiques of heteronormative and anthropocentric societal structures. These films serve as compelling case studies to investigate the complexities and limits of queer identification with monstrous transgression, as they function as queer cinematic narratives that traverse the boundaries between the human and the non-human, desire and taboo without any determinacy in where the boundaries are drawn. The chapter begins with a historical overview of cannibalism and its connection to queer representation, establishing the socio-political context for understanding both the trope and its contemporary revisions. It then introduces Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal, arguing for its potential to illuminate the inherently queer aspects of the cannibal figure without being constrained by the trope's negative historical connotations.

Through an analysis of *Raw*, the chapter demonstrates how the framework of becoming-animal can move beyond problematic elements without erasing them, particularly the trope's racialized history, to arrive at more nuanced and positive queer readings. Lastly, the discussion concludes by examining the overtly representational queer cannibal figures in *Bones and All* to highlight how even the directly identified queer cannibals can move beyond the limitations of their queer coding and express a queer-becoming through cannibalism.

3.2 Queering The Animalized Cannibal Other

Far from being a mere descriptor for the consumption of human flesh, the history of cannibalism reveals the term's primary function as "a medium for nongustatory messages" related to "the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of the cultural order" (Sanday, 1986, p. 3). Anthropologist William Arens (2014) controversially suggests that the assumption of cannibalism towards another community serves to invent a clear difference for establishing cultural boundaries; delineating between "civilized" and "savage" modes of existence, which gets translated into "we" and "they" (p. 145). Complementing Arens' proposition, Jeff Berglund (2006) highlights the early colonial construction of cannibalism as "a classic example of Othering" inherently linked to "notions of Americanness" and systematic dehumanization. Berlung (2006) states the term's first emergence within the Western lexicons coincides with Columbus's encounter with the Carib Indians, whose name was bastardized to signify "man-eating" to justify the exploitation of Native Americans, despite no evidence of such practices (p. 3). Thus from its first emergence, the label of cannibal has served as a way to construct an abject, animalized other to affirm the "civilized" Western subject, whose exploitation and

eradication are justified through being imposed a non-human status based on a moral hierarchy.

Within the post-colonial era horror genre, cannibalism often marks boundaries between the human and the monstrous non-human other. However the act of cannibalism, by functioning as a symbolic initiation into monstrosity within the genre, inherently suggests the idea that the human is not a fixed and biologically determined identity category but a condition predicated on adherence to the cultural and moral standards that are inherently built upon colonial ideologies. Consequently starting with the anti-imperialist writers of the mid-19th century cannibalism as a fictional trope was appropriated “as a way to meditate on perceived differences” (Berlung, 2006, p. 106); evolving beyond its colonial racialization and becoming a tool to critique systems that perpetuate inequity as a whole, including those related to gender, sexuality, and class (Berlung, 2006, p. 10). Simultaneously, influenced by post-colonial and post-humanist thought, the cannibal-other started to appear as the protagonist; no longer just a symbol of abject monstrosity, cannibalism came to reflect the idea of “the non-human as a space of resistance” (Galt & van der Zaag, 2022, p. 282).

Both *Raw* and *Bones and All* continue the narratives of post-colonial cannibal protagonists within a queer-feminist discourse by portraying coming-of-age narratives of outcast characters who, for the first time, are alone in navigating life, intervened with sexual awakening and cannibalistic bloodthirst. *Raw* centers around Justine, a vegetarian first-year veterinary student whose newly emerging cannibalism becomes a resistance against the patriarchal norms, while *Bones and All* follows

Maren, a high school runaway whose cannibalism leads her to a road trip in search for family and acceptance against a society that inherently deems her monstrous. Numerous critiques and scholars have proposed that cannibalism in both films functions as a metaphor for sexual awakening and repressed queerness (McCarty-Simas, 2021, Barber, 2017; Rooney, 2022, Puchko, 2022). However in both films, partially due to the distinct uses of animal imagery associated with their protagonists, cannibalism moves beyond its fixed metaphorical functions and identitarian readings; instead operating as an initiation into a queer-becoming that traverses through becoming-animal.

The historical process of animalization that frames the cannibal as non-human and monstrous is inherently reliant on an anthropocentric hierarchy that imposes the animal as the human's devalued other. The emergence of Cartesian subjectivity, in its aim to establish the exceptionalism of the human subject, has shifted the primary function of the term animal from a conceptualization of all living creatures other than the human subject into criteria that delimits a specific and clear conceptualization of human (Beckman, 2013, p. 123). If animal primarily serves the biopolitical delineation of the human subject, the cannibal other could be reclaimed through the concept of becoming-animal. As briefly discussed in the theoretical chapter, becoming-animal necessitates abandoning the hierarchical evolutionary classification that has haunted the animalized cannibal other, and instead opening self up to anomalous and inorganic alliances with animals (Braidotti, 2009, p. 527) as well as to initiate non-human relations (Braidotti, 2002a, p. 123). Constituting a "unique method that replaces subjectivity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 36), becoming-animal challenges the idea of a fixed human subject; instead embodying a fluid,

indeterminate mode of existence that disrupts social, cultural, and political structures, particularly those related to identity and sexuality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 233). Thus as MacCormack (2009) explains, “becoming-animal is not about colonizing an animal with human perceptions of its nature, but finding an escape route from the human” (p. 140) and all the “humanist transcendental metaphysics and the powers it expresses” (p. 136). Through the concept of becoming-animal, the animalized cannibal would no longer be understood as a reactionary transgression against a marginalized and oppressed condition, nor a negation to humanity, but the expression of a queer-becoming independent from anthropocentric value systems. Both *Raw* and *Bones and All* invite such readings through their use of animal imagery, as while overtly affirming the associations between animality and non-human cannibal, both films deterritorialize this relationship by using the very same majoritarian codes to attack from within.

3.3 Animalized Alterity and Queer-becoming of the White Feminist Cannibal in

Raw

The metaphysics of otherness has traditionally rested on an assumed political anatomy that is inherently anthropocentric, gendered, and racialized. Within this paradigm, the animal has been one of the privileged terms that index the European subjects’ relation to otherness (Braidotti, 2009, p. 526). It has been argued that *Raw* grounds its feminist cannibal narrative on this notion by presenting affirmative juxtapositions between humans and animals as subjects rendered powerless within violently biopolitical systems (Galt & van der Zaag, 2022, p. 280). While queer-feminist reinterpretations of the animal associations surrounding the monstrous feminine can be seen as early as 1942 with Jacques Tourneur’s *Cat People* (Chute,

2022), *Raw* offers a distinct approach that refuses to simply reframe animality as a metaphor for patriarchal oppression or anxieties over uncontrolled female sexuality. Instead, *Raw*'s narrative inherently shows a Deleuzoguattarian sensibility. MacCormack (2005) explains that Deleuze and Guattari's critique rejects the notion of taxonomy as binary opposites, instead suggesting "all alterity as fallen man." This aligns all the subjugated terms, "animal, woman, children and so forth, as necessarily sympathetic to each others' conditions through various mechanisms of power, oppression and resistance" (p. 135). Even before introducing cannibalism into the narrative, *Raw* employs animal imagery to critique power structures. This imagery resists allegorical representations that either maintain strict boundaries between species or dissolve their differences by suggesting equivalence between animals and humans. Instead, the film emphasizes the complex interconnections between species without erasing their distinctions as in the film, animals and humans meet through their shared oppression under heteropatriarchal systems within the setting of a veterinary school, signaling a becoming-other that will sweep both away.

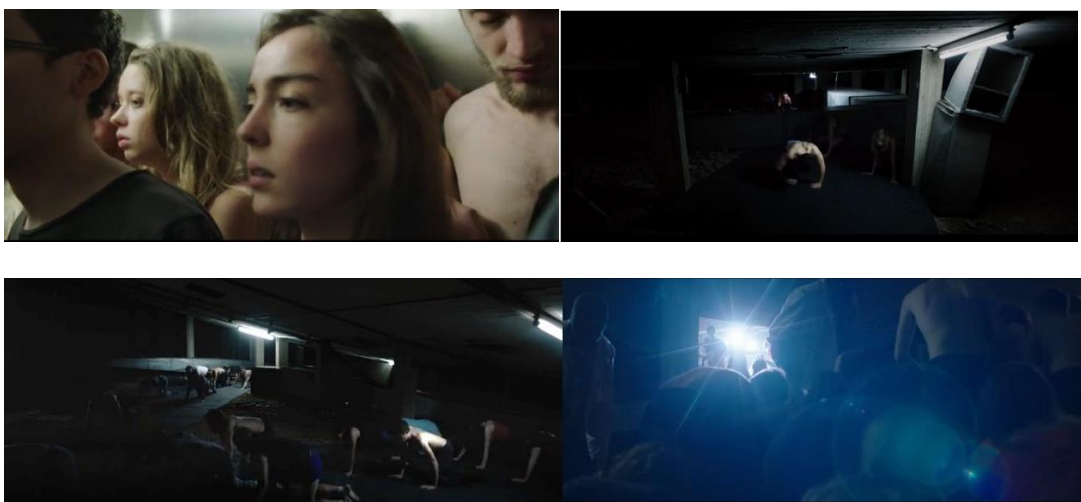




Fig. 1-6: Images from the initiation ritual focusing on sensory affects through framing, flashing lights and obscured objects. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

Justine's first night at the veterinary school. Sounds of shouting and crashing, mattresses thrown out of windows, every single room trashed... The newcomers torn out of their beds, their naked bodies made to crawl on all fours toward a sensory nightmare disguised as a party. Justine constantly fails to escape as her body is pushed around entangled bodies. She wants to sleep, but doing so would mean she failed the initiation ritual. The next morning begins with a horse being constrained through medical anesthesia. The film's veterinary school setting has been discussed as a symbolic representative of systematic heteropatriarchal violence against women and animals (Bacholle, 2023a, p. 2); both subjugated "by an institution that seeks to regulate, control and order its human and animal bodies" (Dooley, 2019, p. 61). Admittedly, the film is less than subtle in its symbolism; however, Ducournau's cinematic style, built upon her insistence on addressing "the bodies of the audience" rather than "their mind" (Stein, 2018) opens these relational analogies to molecular becomings. As exemplified by the initiation ritual, images in *Raw* place emphasis on sensory qualities over straightforward representation, prompting an embodied viewing experience. For Ducournau, the immediate visceral responses function as tools to dissolve ontological distinctions. For instance, Ducournau comments on how the highly detailed bikini waxing scene in *Raw* elicits a universal, embodied response to pain that evades gender categories (Godfrey, 2017). Similarly, her portrayal of

animals in *Raw* moves beyond symbolic meanings, opting to evoke a sense of becoming through the affective power of the image, breaking down the boundaries between the human and the animal.

Like all becomings, becoming-animal is not a question of imitating an animal, identifying with one, nor it has anything to do with resemblance as “an objective analogy between assemblages” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 258). However Deleuze and Guattari (2003) acknowledge imitation and resemblance can have a role in the process of becoming when it is not a mere reproduction of fixed forms or characteristics, but a capture of a fragment of code, a flux of deterritorialization that “overflows imitation which is always territorial” (pp. 13-14). Giving the example of barking and becoming-dog, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain: “You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling”, you emit particles that are dog “as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity of into which they enter.” (pp. 274-275). Similarly, while structural analogies based on relations cannot initiate becomings, they can be approached as expressions of them when they constitute a zone of proximity or indiscernibility between them (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 274); such as the case of shared suffering between humans and animals in *Raw*. Justine’s horse dream sequence, following her non-consensual first taste of meat that unleashes her cannibalistic desire, is one of the most illustrative examples of such a deterritorialization capable of going beyond representational resemblance and symbolic interpretation due to Ducournau’s emphasis on visceral responses.

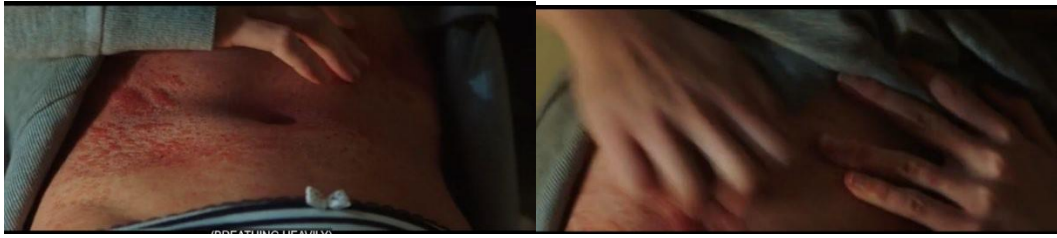


Fig. 7-8: Examples of graphic closeups of Justine scratching her rash. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

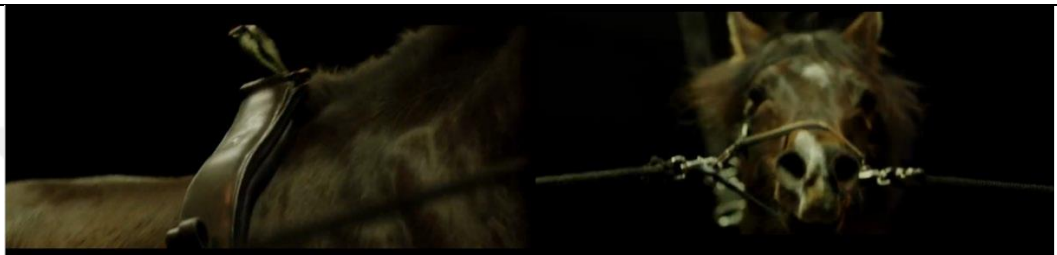


Fig. 9-10: Example images from horse dream sequence. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

The scene depicts the spreading rash over Justine's body with a heightened visceral impact through multiple graphic close-up shots of Justine's hands frantically scratching at her skin, her nails leaving marks as her skin flakes off. These disturbing and intimate images directly engage with the viewer's own tactile memory and disrupt any chance of detached observation, prompting a shared vulnerability (Marks & Polan, 2000, p. 177, pp. 184-185) through which Justine's pain is experienced as an embodied sensation rather than a purely visual spectacle of body horror. As the scene transitions into the horse dream sequence, the fragmented, slow-motion close-ups of the horse's glistening sweat and straining muscles no longer function as mere visual information but tap into the already heightened sense of shared physicality and suffering. Here Deleuze's (2003) readings of Bacon are illuminating. Deleuze (2003) argues the human body in Bacon's paintings, due to being expressed as "meat",

becomes a “zone of indiscernibility” between the human and the animal. Here “meat” refers to the body’s raw, visceral materiality stripped from all societal constructs, symbolic meanings, or idealized representations. The concept of “meat” allows for an understanding of the body as pure flesh: vulnerable, exposed, and open to transformation (p. 22). Citing Bacon’s experiences with slaughterhouses, Deleuze (2003) argues that the zone of indiscernibility constituted by meat comes from a sense of existential vulnerability and awareness of shared suffering Bacon channels into his paintings (p. 24). Yet Bacon does not merely pity animals but rather suggests that “every man who suffers is a piece of meat” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 23). Meat thus becomes the common zone of the human and the animal that goes beyond “sentimental identification”; as Deleuze notes, “the man who suffers is a beast, the beast that suffers is a man. This is the reality of becoming” (p. 25).

In showing both Justine’s and the horse’s suffering through such visceral, fragmented and affective images, Ducournau transforms their signified bodies into meat, breaking down the boundaries between the human and the animal. While the material conditions and experiences of suffering remain distinct for each body, each is drawn into a common but asymmetrical deterritorialization (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 2-3); producing a molecular zone of proximity and indiscernibility “in which woman and animal, animal and man, have become indiscernible” (Powell, 2005, p. 65). Thus, beyond symbolic identification between Justine and the horse, Ducournau’s strategic emphasis on the raw materiality of the body and sensations initiates a process of animal-becoming, which consequently opens up *Raw*’s feminist subversion of the animalized cannibal trope to be examined as a queer-becoming.

Suggesting Justine's cannibalism functions as an emblem of white feminism, Galt and van der Zaag (2022) present a nuanced critique of *Raw*'s feminist ideals and posthumanist themes. They point out an ambivalence regarding the film's feminist potential for its simultaneous embodiment of two tropes: "the cannibal as the non-human (as a celebrated site of resistance in posthumanism) and the inhuman (as colonial animal other)" (p. 278). They contend that while Justine shares an alignment with non-human animals through sharing their victimhood, unlike the non-human she remains capable of transforming her marginalization into "new forms of life" as she is able to retain "all the normative advantages of human status" (p. 290). Thus while the film reverses the binaries that have defined the cannibal ("non-white, non-Western, male and, more recently, as gay") by turning the racialized primitive cannibal into a European white feminist figure (p. 282), it ultimately fails to dismantle the anthropocentric ontological hierarchies; instead folding "white women into the universalist category of the human" (p. 284). While raising crucial concerns, Galt & van der Zaag's (2022) critique primarily relies on their adherence to fixed identity categories, particularly regarding race. However, becoming-animal brings a movement precisely away from such rigid classifications, offering a more nuanced and affirmative portrait.

As Deleuze and Guattari (2003) argue, "To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity... to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs" (p. 13). Thus becoming-animal is not about assuming a fixed animal identity or forming a symbolic alliance, but rather about tapping into a flow

of intensities that dissolves fixed ontological categories like animal or white woman. Justine's alignment with animals, as seen in the horse-dream sequence, is not reliant on her identity as a white woman, nor does it position the animal as a signified other. Instead, it reflects an embrace of non-human intensities, creating a fluid, in-between existence. Furthermore, as Deleuze and Guattari (2003) explain becoming-animal is "a line of escape, even if it takes place in place, or in a cage. A line of escape, and not freedom" (p. 35). This emphasizes that becoming-animal is not about achieving a complete severance from human existence but rather, it is an affirmative process of escaping the confines of human structures and societal norms, even if that escape is limited in its physical manifestation or constrained by external influences. Therefore, even if Justine remains "human passing," her becoming-animal is not negated, nor does it mean she remains static in her humanity. And if Justine can create "new forms of life", that too is an integral part of her animal-becoming, as becoming-animal is all about generating new possibilities and modes of existence outside the confines of pre-determined structures. How these ideas challenge Galt and van der Zaag's (2022) concerns is perhaps best illustrated in the racially charged cafeteria scene in which Adrien, a gay man of color who is also presented as Justine's roommate and arguably love interest, is subjected to racially targeted questioning about monkey rape.



Fig. 11: Adriens response to being asked about AIDS and monkey rape. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

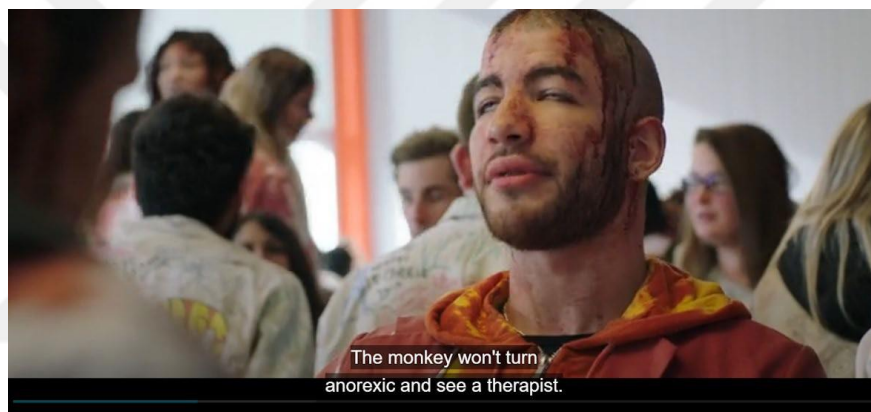


Fig. 12: Adrien explaining why monkey rape does not exist. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]



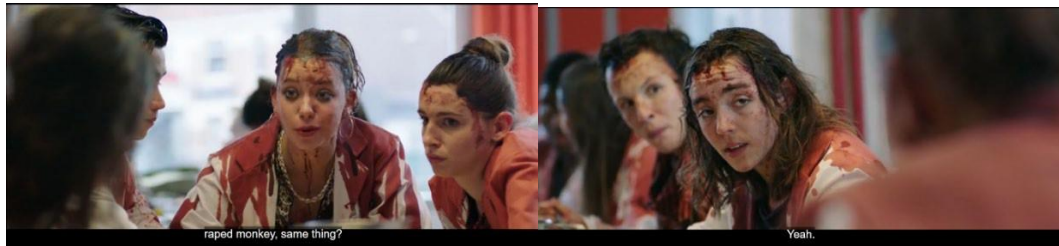


Fig. 13-16: White female classmate questioning Justine. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

Galt & van der Zaag (2022) observe that while Adrien responds to this provocation by “rhetorically embodying his narrative’s black, gay object of disgust”, Justine’s interjection transforms racial dehumanization into “an affirmative affiliation with the non-human as female”, perpetuating white feminism’s erasure of racial and sexual otherness (p. 286). Yet through approaching Justine’s comment from a becoming-animal lens, it could be argued that both Adrien and the white girl illustrate the pitfalls of what Deleuze and Guattari (2005) describe as molar politics tied to rigid structures and identities aligned with dominant power structures. Adrien, in defense of his dehumanization, reacts by asserting himself as a black queer subject oppressed under majoritarian structures. In doing so, he essentially seeks validation within the dominant structures by claiming his humanity, thereby enforcing the very binaries that perpetuate his marginalization. Similarly, the white girl, while acknowledging the suffering and subjugation of women under patriarchal oppression, by trivializing the monkey’s suffering for its supposed ontological inferiority affirms the very system that, for the same reasons, devalues women. In this sense, both characters ultimately perpetuate a system that “gives some minoritarians power as long as they continue to oppress others, thus maintaining majoritarian power...homosexuality is ok but don’t let in the queers” (MacCormack, 2009, p. 144). This act of reterritorialization, as Deleuze and Guattari (2005) assert, closes off the potential for

creating new lines of flight and liberating the flows of molecular becomings (p. 276).

Justine's comments, however, allude to not a mere reactionary stance but to what Deleuze and Guattari (2000) identify as a "revolutionary unconscious investment." This concept describes a desire that, instead of seeking validation within existing power structures, causes flows that break apart "both the segregations and their Oedipal applications." It is to say "No, I am not of your kind, I am the outsider and the deterritorialized...I am of a race inferior for all eternity..." (p. 105). Justine's embrace of her alignment with the monkey is not about elevating the monkey to humanity, nor affirming her own gendered marginalization, but rather about tapping into a revolutionary force of deterritorialization, through which both animal and woman are liberated from being defined in relation to man. In this sense, Justine's approach resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) call for "molecular politics," a strategy that recognizes the need for molar confrontations around minoritarian identities like women for political effectiveness, but nonetheless emphasizes the need to simultaneously acknowledge the limitations of fixed identities and seek out lines of flight that can undermine the very foundations of hegemonic power (p. 276).

This idea is perhaps most clearly seen in how different Adrien and Justine view the raped monkey. For Adrien, the monkey's inability to articulate its suffering through human language or get recognized within its institutions is enough to dismiss its suffering or at least view it as inconsequential compared to a woman's. Against this, Justine's Lacanian argument could be approached as her recognizing that "while non-human animals cannot negotiate through human discourse, they each (not each

species but each animal) emit powers, haecceities, singularities of force with which we and they can enter into a relation” (MacCormack, 2009, p. 135). By recognizing both the monkeys’ and women’s shared suffering beyond anthropocentric systems, Justine enacts a process of becoming-animal that exceeds the limitations of molar identities and disrupts the very foundations of anthropocentric hierarchies that position certain groups, both human and animal, as inferior. In this sense, Justine’s actions are not necessarily bound to white feminism but are concerned with finding new ethical and political possibilities that recognize the inherent worth of all potential modes of existence, regardless of their ability to conform to or be recognized within existing structures.

The concept of becoming-animal also illuminates Justine’s relentless pursuit of Adrien and their eventual sexual relationship, which, from an identitarian perspective, while suggesting a feminist reversal of the patriarchal gaze (Dooley, 2019, p. 63), also embodies a problematic dynamic for the misalignment of a straight woman directing her visual power at a gay man (Galt & van der Zaag, 2022, p. 287). Adrien’s rejection of Justine by reasserting his gay identity and his subsequent murder by her sister Alex further complicates this dynamic by transforming the film’s feminist cannibals into “white European predators of racialized bodies” (Galt & van der Zaag, 2022, p. 287). However such interpretations, while raising valid concerns about the film’s representation of race and sexuality, overlooks the transformative potential embedded within Justine’s becoming-other and its implications for her desires. As previously discussed, becoming-animal evades all interpretation and signification: “It is a creative line of escape that says nothing other than what it is” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 36). Approaching Justine’s actions as

non-signifying byproducts of her own becoming reveals a significantly more affirmative, empowering, and inherently queer relationship between Adrien and Justine. Justine's sexual appetite, intertwined with cannibalistic urges, rather than representing a straightforward predatory action based on hedonistic self-interest, brings a profound shift beyond the limitations of conventional sexuality into a molecular plane where fixed categories of desire can no longer apply. Ducournau herself supports this idea, stating male/female gaze is a social construct and Justine and Adrien mutually share "an unconditional love and desire beyond any gender or any form of sexuality" (Sandoval, 2021). Therefore while Justine's desire for Adrien might initially appear to operate within a heteronormative framework, it aligns closer with Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) concept of desire as inherently revolutionary; for desire "does not 'want' revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as though involuntarily, by wanting what it wants" (p. 116). While the concept of queer sexual desire will be explored in chapter 4 and therefore will not be examined in further detail within this discussion, approaching Justine's sexuality and cannibalism through this perspective allows recontextualizing existing psychoanalytic interpretations of the film, as it doesn't invalidate previous analyses of the connection among sexual awakening, repressed homosexuality, feminism, and cannibalism. Instead, it reframes these themes as interconnected in a way that remains outside the confines of Oedipal scripts and symbolic allegories. With this understanding, examining Justine's relationship with her consumption of meat, both human and animal, also shed light on the inherently queer and affirmative relationship between Adrien and Justine.

It must be emphasized that this thesis does not argue for a utopian, gender-blind ideal, where differences are erased and Justine and Adrien's relationship is liberated from any problematic implications. Instead, echoing Braidotti's (1994) assertion, this analysis recognizes the necessity of grounding feminist theory in the "specificity of the lived, female bodily experience" instead of aiming for "disembodying sexual difference into a new, allegedly postmodern, antiessentialist subject" (pp. 174-175). Acknowledging the historical and lived realities of marginalized groups, Galt & van der Zaag's (2022) critiques arguably highlight crucial real-world issues *Raw* potentially perpetuates. However, this thesis argues that the way *Raw* deals with gender and seemingly feminist themes offers a significantly more nuanced narrative than these critiques suggest.



Fig. 17: Female and male presenting students singing about being a veterinarian. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

As Justine's actions, from her cannibalism to her relationship with Adrien, have often been viewed as feminist reactions to heteropatriarchal oppression within the veterinary school, before continuing the discussion it's essential to examine how labels like woman, animal, human and such operate within the power dynamics of this setting. Aligning with Braidotti's (2009) ideas on how feminist consciousness of

female embodiment is inherently aligned with becoming-animal, as neither has “never made it into full humanity” within phallogocentrism and anthropocentric humanism (p. 531), the misogynistic and dehumanizing elements of the hazing ritual are not based on ontological distinctions or sexual difference but rather on a constructed hierarchy where maleness is equated with subjectivity and humanity and is taken as a status attainable by both male and female students upon initiation. This is evident from the scene in which upperclassmen, both male and female, sing about what it means to be a veterinarian: “being men with their dicks proudly in the air,” ready to “fuck” anyone, followed by a declaration that the freshmen can achieve this status after the initiation. Furthermore, in being denied their subjectivity, the freshman students are not only gendered female but also directly aligned with animals, as highlighted by the previously discussed scene in which the freshmen, all half naked and crawling on all fours, are shot in a way that each loses their subjectivity, gender, or individuation, becoming undifferentiated bodies that are being guided like cattle.

Thus the power dynamics within the school establish a clear binary, not between men and women, but between man and not-man, with the signifiers of both women and animals becoming tools of subjugation that move beyond gender and species binaries. What is seen here, aligning with Braidotti’s (2009) argument, is the deterritorialization of both animal and woman into a zone of indiscernibility, blurring ontological categories and bringing both terms into a shared space of devalued “non-man” status. However, as Deleuze and Guattari (2003) argue, such deterritorialization is always a double process: “a single circuit of the becoming-human of the animal and the becoming-animal of the human.” While the animal is

detrterritorialized to serve man, such is the case for the veterinary school, in return it offers a “means of escape that the human would never have thought of by himself” (p. 35). When viewed through this lens, Justine’s self-aware alignment and subversive reclamation of objectified femininity and animality, rather than referring back to a reactive stance or a symbolic rebellion regarding a determined gender identity, could be read instead as detrterritorializing these categories towards a shared non-human becoming.

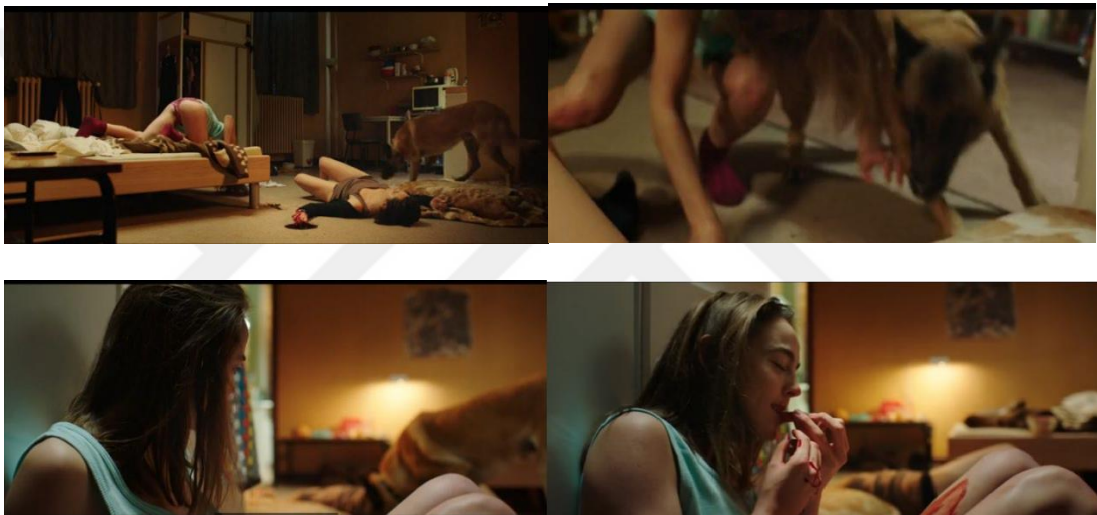


Fig. 18-21: Justine fighting the dog for Alex’s finger and consuming it as the dog licks Alex’s blood. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

Providing an insightful discussion on female cannibal films including *Raw*, Flockhart (2019) suggests tropes of objectification, dehumanization, and cannibalism are often utilized to explore the ambiguities of subjecthood within post-feminist media culture (p. 67). In *Raw*, Justine and Alex might reject victim position and gain power through self-objectification and consumption, but that comes at the cost of being viewed as monstrous and animalistic, highlighting the limits of post-feminist empowerment within patriarchal systems (Flockhart, 2019, p. 79). While insightful,

Flockhart's (2019) analysis adheres to a strictly anthropocentric binary framework that positions animality as a signifier of victimhood and object status. The film's insistence on bringing Justine's feminist embodiment and animality into a zone of indiscernibility however complicates Flockhart's (2019) arguments, particularly in the scene where she consumes her sister Alex's finger. Flockhart (2019) interprets this act as a reassertion of Justine's humanity and subjectivity against Alex's objectification. What is neglected in this reading is the family dog's parallel involvement which complicates a simple reading of the act as a return to human subjectivity through consumptive power, instead suggesting an exploration of empowerment through becoming-animal. As Deleuze and Guattari (2004) explain, becoming-animal is an "absolute deterritorialization"; a profound shift that breaks away from all human-centered structures. It is an "immobile voyage"; a change in how one inhabits and perceives the world on an intensive rather than physical level (p. 35). Initiated by an affective encounter with the dog, Justine's cannibalistic feeding creates a zone of proximity with the animal, operating beyond human moral or cognitive frameworks. Thus, if this scene marks Justine's empowerment, it arises not from reclaiming human subjectivity but from forging new modes of existence through animality.

Returning to the topic of consumption and cannibalism, Cienfuegos & Abril (2021) argue that the act of eating, particularly meat consumption, is deeply entangled with the construction of the superiority of the white European subject as the pinnacle of culture. This subject position is established through a nature/culture binary, which relegates others, animals, women, and racialized individuals, to the realm of nature; thus naturalizes the objectification and exploitation of their bodies as resources to be

consumed (p. 197). Justine's consumption practices however, particularly her cannibalism, disrupt this paradigm by moving beyond a simple reversal of the traditional cannibalistic trope or the constructed power dynamics behind it. MacCormack (2015) argues that those who recognize themselves as human perceive the world through hierarchical structures that separate self and other. Becoming non-human on the other hand involves rejecting and dismantling the binaries of human exceptionalism, instead existing within and experiencing the world as undifferentiated from the world and all other cohabiting organisms (p. 122). From the film's beginning, Justine's relationship with consumption reflects this undifferentiation. Aligning with Deleuze's (2003) arguments on meat, Justine's visceral reaction and her later cognitive judgments to her consumption of both the shawarma and her sister's finger demonstrate a fundamental lack of differentiation, indicating an awareness of body as a common, non-signified materiality between humans and animals. For Deleuze (2003) this awareness of the living human body is just a "mass of ambulating flesh" (p. 24) becomes a catalyst for becoming-animal; bringing a confrontation with the limits of human identity and moving beyond subjectivity to an ethical engagement with life itself that precedes and supersedes anthropocentric concerns. As Deleuze (2003) asserts, "What revolutionary person ... has not felt that extreme moment when he or she was nothing but a beast, and became responsible not for the calves that died, but before the calves that died?" (p. 25). Justine's alignment with this idea is emphasized by her statement on how a raped woman and monkey are the same, highlighting her understanding of consumption as a sign of domination and violation that evades species boundaries. In a sense as long as she is not vegetarian, anything goes in terms of consumption, including her own body. Thus her cannibalism doesn't just invert traditional power

dynamics; it rejects the entire system. She operates outside the established binary, inhabiting a space where the carefully constructed boundaries between human and animal, consumer and consumed, collapse.



Fig. 22-23: Justine watching the girl licking her partner's eyeball in a party fantasy sequence. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

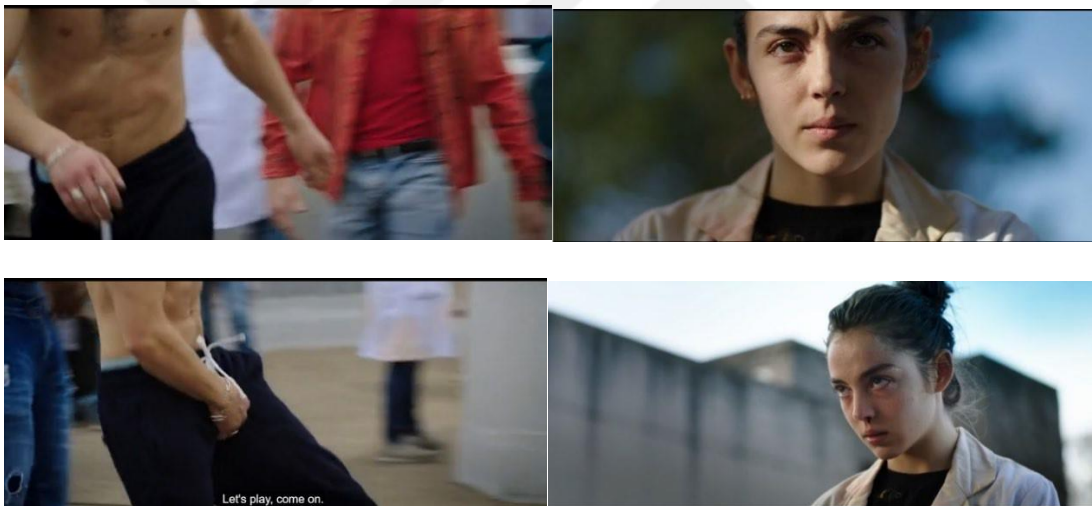


Fig. 24-27: Justine watching Adrien with a hungry expression. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

This understanding also illuminates Justine's newly emerging sexuality. Ducournau states she has intentionally crafted Justine's sexual awakening as a visceral, unapologetic embrace of bodily experience and pleasure, free from the societal anxieties and judgments often imposed on young women (Stein, 2018). This idea of

pure, unadulterated desire, focused on the immediacy of sensation and the pursuit of pleasure aligns with Braidotti's (2009) explanations on how thinking through the concept of becoming-animal requires not only the rejection of conformity and identification with a normative image of thought, but also to go beyond reactive critique to actively engage with a new image of thought that affirms the "enfleshed, erotic, and pleasure- driven" aspects of thinking. (p. 527). Just as Justine does not differentiate between meat, her newly awakening sexuality is also not separated from her cannibalism. This is especially evident in the first party Justine attends after embracing her sexuality and her relationship with Adrien. The party scene, which starts with a dream sequence, features body parts grinding under red light as the camera slowly gets closer to someone licking their partner's eyeball as Justine watches in the background licking her lips. The party continues with Justine dancing with random strangers, kissing a guy and answering his girlfriend's objection by kissing her too. Similarly scenes like Justine's intense sniffing of Adrien's neck, her captivated gaze at his shirtless body, and her later auto-cannibalism during their sexual encounter are all charged with ambiguity in both the action and the end pleasure Justine derives from them; defying easy categorization as purely cannibalistic or sexual, heterosexual or even human. Instead they point towards a deeper, messier reality of desire and pure sexuality that moves beyond signification and interpretation.

With all these considered both Flockhart's (2019) and Galt & van der Zaag's (2022) critiques on the problematic aspects of cannibalistic feminist empowerment ultimately falls short for their imposition of fixed identities and anthropocentric interpretations onto Justine's narrative, misinterpreting her becoming as a series of

conscious decisions and symbolic rebellions. Justine's cannibalism, however, is not a calculated performance but an affect-driven process of becoming. While her simultaneous embrace of dominant feminine signifiers leads others, like Adrien, to misread her behaviors as kinky or desirable, these interpretations, as MacCormack (2009) notes merely "assimilate the animal toward the human" (p. 141). Thus if Justine appears to pass as human at times, it is because the very signifiers she embodies, subjugated femininity, unrestrained desire etc. have already been categorized as acceptably animalistic within the hegemonic system. However, unlike the calculated manipulations of female monsters in similar contemporary films such as *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama, 2009) or *Ginger Snaps* (Fawcett, 2000), Justine does not employ these signifiers strategically. Instead, they are expressions of her non-human-becoming, unmediated by strategic intent, exceeding the limits of fixed identities and anthropocentric interpretations.



Fig. 28: Alex taunting Justine to bite the corpse as recorded by other students
 Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

Thus aligning with Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that "the self is only a threshold... a becoming between two multiplicities" (p. 249), Justine's existence

remains fluid and transitory, her humanity constantly shifting in relation to the hegemonic gaze. Justine's expulsion from the social order around the end of the film, resulting from Alex's humiliation highlights this idea by exposing the arbitrary, fluid, and relational nature of humanity itself. From Justine's perspective, her animalistic behavior in the morgue mirrors her earlier party actions, impulsively latching onto bodies to kiss or grind on, driven by the same insatiable hunger. The film underscores the continuity of her desire, whether aimed at a severed body part or another student. Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) exploration of how European racism operates is very illuminating in explaining this shift in reaction towards Justine's behavior. They argue that racism operates not by designating an absolute "other" but by establishing "degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face." Aligning with their discussion, Justine's "crime" is not her difference itself, but rather her failure to confine that difference to the socially acceptable ghetto of feminine sexuality. Her expulsion demonstrates how the hegemonic order seeks to integrate non-conforming traits only insofar as they can be controlled and contained (p. 178). When Justine's becoming spills beyond these predetermined boundaries, she is violently rejected, revealing the fragility of socially constructed norms and the fluid, constantly negotiated nature of human identity.



Fig. 29: Alex and Justine biting each other during the fight as the camera circles them in a fight that is no longer concerned with remaining legible within the veterinary school's socius. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]



Fig. 30: The classmates breaking up the fight by choking the sisters with scarfs like dog leashes. Julia Ducournau. (2016). *Raw*. [Video]

Justine's expulsion leads to a public cannibalistic fight with Alex, which Flockhart (2019) interprets as a paradoxical duality where both sisters assert their subjectivity while becoming "animalistic objects" their peers feel justified in choking (p. 79).

What Flockhart points out as a paradoxical duality however dissolves when approached through the film's exploration of becoming-animal as a queer-feminist affair. As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) suggest becoming is a process that escapes such dualities, constituting a perpetual middle that "does not designate a localizable

relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away” (p. 25). In this light, Justine and Alex do not oscillate between human subjectivity and animality, nor achieve a fixed hybrid state, but deterritorialize both categories into a creative process of becoming that “produces nothing other than itself” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 238). It is precisely because Justine’s actions are not framed as a calculated feminist statement or assertion of subjectivity that the scene resonates with such power. After the fight, the sisters hug and retreat to their dorm to dress each other’s wounds. With almost no dialogue, no apologies, justifications, or rationalizations, the scene avoids a clean return to humanity. As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain, it is frequently the case that “an individual functions as a line of flight; that group or individual creates the line rather than following it, is itself the living weapon it forges rather than stealing one” (p. 204). The sisters’ cannibalistic acts and their subsequent retreat is not about recognizing each other’s subjectivity but about, perhaps unintentionally, creating a new line of flight and weaponizing it, allowing them to inhabit a liminal space they’ve carved out for themselves based on mutual affirmation of their shared difference and existence beyond human subjectivity. Thus Justine and Alex embody a form of radical becoming, a monstrous, queer-feminist transformation that opens up new non-hierarchical relations with non-human others and modes of existence beyond the possibilities of established thought.

With all these established, the discussion can finally conclude with how instead of aligning with problematic aspects of white feminism as Galt and van der Zaag (2022) argue, Adrien’s relationship with Justine and his eventual consumption reveals a far

more nuanced and subversive commentary on the nature of desire, identity, and what constitutes humanity. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) argue, heterosexuality does not operate between man and woman as binary sexual entities, rather, within each, “several fluxes combine to form a bloc of becoming which makes demands on them both” (p. 102). Adrien’s fascination with Justine does not stem from a heteronormative perception of her womanhood but from his encounter with Justine’s anomalous difference, which disrupts conventional understandings of sexual identity and desire. As MacCormack (2012) explains, encounters based on preconceived notions of the other function as a reification of self through the confirmation of the opposition. Monstrous encounters, however, are inherently queer, as they involve entities that are neither the same nor opposite, collapsing the self-other binary (p. 255). Justine, in her monstrous femininity, does not offer Adrien a reassuring reflection of himself, but a confrontation with an otherness that collapses the usual binaries and opens up a space for radical transformation. MacCormack (2015) further makes the argument that becoming-nonhuman/ahuman “catalyzes an openness to a natural contract, which makes other humans ahuman, and thus even in the most traditionally defined relations between two bodies nonhuman queerness flourishes” (p. 126). Hence Justine and Adrien, with their mutually consensual sexual alliance mixed with cannibalism create a queer-becoming through sexuality. Adrien’s fascination with Justine is powerful enough to temporarily deterritorialize his gay identity and move beyond the limitations of his normative expectations of sex and pleasure. Thus when Justine ends up biting herself during sex and climaxes, all Adrien does is to pet her hair lovingly in acceptance. Even if in the end Adrien reterritorializes by reasserting his gay identity to remain legible within majoritarian structures, his encounter with Justine pulls him into her own becoming-other.

Commenting on Justine, Ducournau explains while her cannibalism conventionally equates to inhumanity, Justine's refusal to consume Adrien is "a real moral choice that makes her inevitably human" (Stein, 2018). However, rather than a return to humanity through conventional morality, Justine's refusal could be read as an affirmative expression of the non-human-queer-becoming she enters with and through Adrien. Barber (2017), in his review of queer themes of the film, writes: "awakening of Justine's desire for flesh – a clear metaphor for her sexual awakening – crosses that boundary and fuses with her desire for pleasure." As discussed in the theoretical chapter, while rejecting subject-object relations and pleasure as an end goal, Deleuze and Guattari (2000) highlight a pleasure specific to desiring-production. Rather than a moral refusal of cannibalistic pleasure, Justine's decision is arguably informed by her encounter with a far more fulfilling pleasure appropriate for desiring production: an auto-erotic pleasure that is "the nuptial celebration of a new alliance" (p. 18). Justine, in choosing to consume herself rather than Adrien, while simultaneously achieving climax through her auto-cannibalism with his non-judgmental acceptance, signifies a rejection of predefined categories of pleasure and sexuality and a radical embrace of experimentation and self-creation. This act, far from signifying a return to humanity, marks the creation, and through Adrien's affirmation, of an alternative fluid way of existing and relating that exists beyond traditional human/monster binaries.

This stands in stark contrast to Alex, whose approach to her own cannibalistic urges remains rigidly fixed. She operates from a place of perceived entitlement, viewing her desires as inherent rights rather than choices. This perspective traps her within a

limited understanding of her own identity, preventing her from experiencing the same transformative potential that Justine embodies. Alex's inability to deviate from her preconceived notions of self and desire ultimately causes Adrien's consumption. His death becomes a consequence of her rigid adherence to ontological hierarchies and a worldview that prioritizes consumption and control over connection and transformation. It is important to note that not only is Adrien not killed in association with any feminist ideology, but also the film punishes Alex for Adrien's consumption by throwing her in jail — while Justine is allowed to go free despite all her previous actions. Through this carefully constructed contrast, *Raw* exceeds the limitations of simplistic moral binaries often imposed on narratives exploring taboo themes. The film doesn't offer easy answers, clear ideological lessons or seek to celebrate feminist monstrosity. Instead, it utilizes cannibalism as a lens through which to explore the complexities of desire, identity, and the arbitrary nature of human; suggesting the possibility of forging alternative ways of existing beyond anthropocentric limitations.

3.4 Queering the Queer Cannibal in Luca Guadagnino's *Bones and All*

Marginalized within a predominantly white, middle-class community due to her race, socioeconomic status and transient lifestyle with her single dad, unlike Justine in *Raw*, *Bones and All* establishes Maren as an outsider even before her cannibalism is revealed. Consequently, unlike Justine, Maren's struggle is not about fighting against the norms but desperately wanting to fit in and failing to do so; leading Maren to succumb to peer pressure and sneaking out for a sleepover that ends with devouring her friend's finger and running away in the middle of the night.



Fig. 31-34: The romantic atmosphere between Maren and her friend shatters as Maren bites the friend's finger. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

Initially, the scene is charged with homoerotic tension; the close-up shots, soft lighting, and their increasing physical proximity as they gaze into each other's eyes allude to a classic teenage romance. As Maren gently holds her friend's hand, the romantic atmosphere gets brutally shattered with Maren violently biting off her friend's finger; the visceral horror is amplified by bone-crunching sounds and flesh tearing. Yet, for Maren, the act remains intertwined with the preceding intimacy, a point emphasized by her blissful expression as she devours the flesh; a moment that has been described as "almost sexual intoxication" (Rooney, 2022). This scene's implications are twofold regarding cannibalism. Firstly, it reintroduces the racialized history of the cannibal myth, positioning Maren, a young woman of color, as a monstrous *other* preying on an innocent white girl within a predominantly white suburban space. Secondly, the scene's homoerotic subtext, culminating in a bite replacing a kiss, evokes the historical trope of cannibalism as a manifestation of

perverse sexuality, particularly queer desire. Thus, *Bones and All*, unlike *Raw*'s subversion, directly engages with the arguably problematic tropes of cannibal fiction in its opening scenes.

Appropriately unlike *Raw*, *Bones and All* overtly asserts a biologically determined non-humanness to Maren's desire for human flesh, suggesting humans and what the film names as eaters as two distinct ontologies. This distinction is emphasized through the film's visual language and narrative which unlike *Raw*'s nuanced use, presents animal associations as a directly representational symbolism that marks eaters as non-human. They eat raw meat on all fours and possess an uncanny ability to find each other by scent, which reinforces a strong us vs. them mentality that shapes their interactions with fellow eaters and humans. This divide is further emphasized through a recurring motif of isolation, whether it is through long shots of empty roads or through direct dialogues between eaters that highlight the perceived incompatibility of their hunger and the desire for human connection. Consequently, unlike Justine, Maren is not afforded to remain human passing once her cannibalism is unleashed. Abandoned by her father for "what" she is, like many queer youth, Maren has to leave behind the normative domesticity she craves to find her own kind for survival in a world she is radically excluded from. While Maren's journey is characterized throughout by the impossibility of her existence within the hegemonic social reality and eventually ends in exclusion and isolation, a purely pessimistic reading would ignore the ways in which she carves out new possibilities for existence and desire within those very constraints. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) warn, the most radical becomings can end in failure or self-destruction "precisely because they are real and in their reality" (p. 140). However the value of becomings

does not lie in their outcomes, but in the journey itself; “they cannot be judged according to their end or their supposed aim, for they exceed them in all dimensions (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 140). Regardless of its outcome, Maren’s becoming is not a passive resignation to societal exclusion. Instead, it designates an active process of seeking connection and intimacy outside the confines of heteronormative expectations, demonstrating that even within the most restrictive conditions, alternative modes of existing and relating can emerge.

Given the resonance between the struggles of eaters and real-life queer experiences, allegorical interpretations of cannibalism in *Bones and All*, whether as symbolism for queer villainization (Gavin, 2023) or pansexual desire (Rooney, 2022), is tempting. However, director Luca Guadagnino himself refutes such direct metaphors, stating all he wanted was “to tell a story of love and reconciliation and impossibility and vulnerability” (Chappell, 2022). Guadagnino’s identity as an openly gay filmmaker undeniably informs the film’s sensitive portrayal of otherness and the search for belonging, endowing the film with an inherent queer sensibility that operates on a deeper level than simple allegory. This queerness manifests most strikingly in the central romance between Maren and her fellow eater Lee. Gavin (2023) commenting on the queer themes of the film argues that while Maren and Lee’s romance is heterosexual, as both characters exhibit clear same-sex attractions, the relationship is not heteronormative and is utilized within the narrative “to negate the false narrative of queer love as wrong.” While insightful, Gavin’s (2023) comments remain limited by its focus on identity-based evaluations and thus cannot account for how Maren and Lee’s relationship, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation, reveals a

profound non-human-queer-becoming through the film's unique approach to the monstrosity and animality of cannibalism.

Questioning the outsider's perspective on the perceived queerness of werewolves in horror cinema, Bernhardt-House (2008) suggests that the behaviors deemed queer (homoeroticism, bestiality, and societal disruption), are likely experienced as normal, even mundane by the werewolf itself (p. 160). If we were to ask the werewolf itself, would it identify as "queer" (pp. 161-162)? Similarly, the queerness of *Bones and All* lies in its embodiment of an eater's perspective in both its visual and narrative framing of cannibalistic existence. Describing the film as "a sincere, sweet indie road movie that happens to feature bloodthirsty serial killers", film critic Nicholas Barber (2022) comments on the film's understated approach to cannibalism, and notes the film's refusal to engage with the metaphorical implications of its premise or offer explanations for the eaters' urges; instead allowing Maren and Lee to talk about cannibalism "as matter-of-factly as they might talk about being lactose intolerant." However, this understated approach is precisely where the film's power lies. By presenting cannibalism as an integral part of daily life, the film avoids sensationalizing or pathologizing it, aligning it with the mundane realities of those living outside the margins. This insider perspective extends to the film's refusal to shy away from the visceral realities of eaters' existence; presenting acts of consumption with unflinching brutality and graphic detail that refuses to sanitize the act for the viewer's comfort. The camera lingers on moments of brutality not to romanticize or horrify, but to document, reminding viewers that what they find horrifying is, for the eaters, a necessary and normal part of their existence.

Through this juxtaposition of graphic imagery and mundane presentation, the film both acknowledges the stereotypical association of cannibalism with animalistic savagery and simultaneously deconstructs this trope by presenting a more nuanced view of both animals and eaters, opening up the possibility to read the film through the concept of becoming-animal. Here, it is crucial to note that becomings are acts of double deterritorialization: “which one becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 305). The trope of animalized cannibalism in *Bones and All* works as an expression of becoming because the film deterritorializes both human and animal to show lines of flight in a closed majoritarian language, especially through its refusal of the anthropocentric hierarchy that created the trope in the first place. Traditionally humans have used animals to define the boundaries between different categories of existence and to establish social hierarchies. Animals serve as points of reference for delineating distinctions between humans and non-humans, resulting in animals becoming metaphorical referents to values, norms, and morals. (Braidotti, 2009, p. 527). Through its approach to images of animals, *Bones and All* adopts what Braidotti refers to as a “neoliteral approach” to animals, which frees animal from being “the signifying system that props up humans’ self-projections and moral aspirations” or the markers of species distinction. Instead, through the film’s nature documentary-like presentation, animals, and thus eaters, are portrayed as “entities framed by code systems of their own”; no longer metaphorized as the other but taken on their own terms (Braidotti, 2009, p. 528); allowing the film to question difference and non-human otherness outside the confines of anthropocentric perspectives. The scene where Maren makes her first conscious decision to eat perfectly embodies this discussion.



Fig. 35-37: Maren sees Sully's feeding and joins him. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]



Fig. 38-40: The old woman's family photos visually juxtaposed with the visceral sounds of gore. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

Having just run away from home, Maren encounters Sully, an older eater who offers help. While initially repulsed by the idea, Maren eventually succumbs to her hunger, joining Sully in devouring an old woman, who Sully insists was already dying. This scene unfolds with a documentary-like realism, devoid of sensationalized gore or

melodrama. The camera's gaze, fixed on Sully on all fours, flesh dripping from his mouth, is unflinching yet strangely neutral, mirroring the objective lens of a nature documentary which extends to the naturalistic color palette and lighting. Maren's reaction, or lack thereof, as she quietly joins Sully further amplifies this sense of detached observation. As Maren joins Sully, the camera finally turns away from the carnage and the sound design takes over, emphasizing the visceral crunching of bones and tearing of flesh, while omitting any non-diegetic music to shape the audience's emotional response. The juxtaposition of the grotesque feeding frenzy with the mundane normalcy of the old woman's home is jarring: her family photos covering the screen serving as a haunting reminder of her humanity and denying any comfortable distance or intellectual framework through which to sanitize the rawness of what is being witnessed. Sully's nonchalance in the aftermath as he is talking to Maren in his blood stained underwear, alongside the persistent buzzing of flies, further reinforces both the mundanity and the animalistic nature of their consumption. Through this unflinching yet strangely neutral portrayal, *Bones and All* avoids both demonizing Maren and Sully as one-dimensional monsters and romanticizing their gruesome means of survival. Instead, echoing Braidotti's (2009) discussion, by presenting the unsettling realities of their existence through its documentary-like naturalism that decenters human perspective, *Bones and All* allows Maren and Sully to exist as they are, complex beings operating within their own internal logic.

Bones and All further dismantles the anthropocentric hierarchy and the nature/culture binary by confronting the audience with the often obscured reality of consumption, eradicating the boundaries that dictates which lives are deemed worthy of empathy

and whose bodies are viewed as mere commodities. As Braidotti (2011) notes Western culture often engages with animals through a “mock taxonomy,” categorizing them based on their utility and familiarity to humans. This hierarchy, rooted in a sense of “supreme ontological entitlement” of the masculine human subject allows for the free exploitation and consumption of animal and other bodies (pp. 81-82). *Bones and All*, however, disrupts this paradigm, not by simply reversing the roles or elevating the consumed, but by blurring the lines between these categories, presenting both human and animal bodies as complex entities existing as assemblages of familiarity, utility, danger, and experience. The film achieves this through juxtaposing the consumption of animals and humans, highlighting the hypocrisy of human food practices and the cultural constructs that regulates them. For example, when Sully prepares chicken for the starving Maren, the snapping of bones echoes Maren’s earlier consumption of her friend’s finger; as emphasized by her visible discomfort. This deliberate mirroring forces the viewer to confront the uncomfortable reality that the act of preparing flesh for consumption, regardless of the kind of being, is strikingly similar. The comparison becomes more unsettling when Sully and Maren eat the old woman, visceral sounds echoing the earlier chicken preparation. The film questions what truly separates these moments: both are found dead and are potential meals. Does cooking the chicken make the act more human than consuming the old woman raw? Anthropologist Sidney Mintz (2008) asserts human food practices and rituals, especially the act of cooking, set humans apart from the rest of the animal world (p. 513). *Bones and All* suggests this cultural significance doesn’t erase the fundamental act of consumption, utilizing this sequence to challenge the culturally constructed hierarchies imposed on consumption and the nature/culture binary that separates humans from all else.



Fig. 41: Maren sees the old woman's body. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

Thus the film constantly emphasizes that while the bodies eaters and humans feast on might have harbored life, they are also, ultimately, meat. This perspective is best exemplified in the scene where Maren, after washing up following her first willing consumption of a human, observes the old woman's body through the doorway, her mauled body sprawled on a plastic tarp, blood and viscera pooling around her. This image, reminiscent of a slaughterhouse, stands in stark contrast to the earlier depiction of her consumption where her body was obscured and her life as an individual was emphasized. This awareness aligns with Deleuze's (2003) discussions on meat being the common fact of human and animal, their zone of indiscernibility, which the film alludes to by posing the same uncomfortable questions about connection, suffering, and the value of life, not just to those who consume human flesh, but also to those who partake in the consumption of animals. This is highlighted by scenes such as Sully's casual remark about the chicken "looking like it had a good life", or Maren's questioning of whether the cattle in the slaughterhouse

had families and loved ones. In the context of the film's exploration of cannibalism, these remarks highlight the dissonance between the care and consideration often afforded to human life and the casual disregard for the lives of animals raised for consumption. The responding chorus of moos from the cattle serves as a stark reminder of their capacity for connection and suffering, shattering the illusion of a purely transactional relationship between humans and the animals they consume. Yet *Bones and All* refrains from offering easy answers or resorting to simplistic moral judgments on meat consumption or veganism. Instead, by forcing a confrontation with the raw reality of consuming another being, regardless of species, the film itself expresses an animal-becoming grounded on the recognition of the commonality between human and animal existence based on the non-signifying materiality and vulnerability of the body as meat.

While all this suggests a queer sensibility within the film itself, the film constantly depicts various instances of cannibalism that, despite inviting queer readings, ultimately remains closed off to initiating becomings. Becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation but a radical deterritorialization, a line of flight that moves beyond pre-existing categories and binaries (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 2) like human and eater. Initially, Maren's journey reflects a yearning for belonging within established identities, a reterritorialization rather than a deterritorializing becoming. Leaving her human upbringing behind, she seeks connection within the eater community. Her attempts to find a father figure in Sully, her pursuit of her estranged mother, and her clinging to Lee right after smelling him are all driven by a desire to fit within a predefined minority group, echoing Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) distinction between "minoritarian" as a process of becoming and "minority"

as a sedentary state of being. At this point, Maren negotiates her identity position between human and eater rather than embracing the deterritorializing potential of becoming.

After telling the story of his first murder and subsequent ostracization from the society, his actions blamed on animals, Sully invited Maren to join him, expressing a desire for connection within their shared difference. However Maren, even if embracing her eater nature, refuses to accept this identity position as perpetually animalized and marginalized, clinging to the possibility of a life within the accepted boundaries of human society, which remains her main struggle throughout the movie. Thus even when Maren rejects the rigid eater identity Sully proposes and leaves, she still remains closed off to transformative becomings. This idea strikingly manifests in her desire for domestic normalcy with Lee moments after their mutual confessions of love and monstrosity. Answering the question of what is next for them, “Let’s be people,” Maren suggests, envisioning a future with jobs and a settled life. Lee echoes this sentiment: “Let’s be them for a while.” This impulse towards assimilation, normalcy, and towards a hidden or palpable alterity within existing societal structures runs counter to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming. As they argue becoming-animal concerns minoritarian groups that exist outside the confines of family, religion, and the State and is grounded on “a rupture with the central institutions that have established themselves or seek to become established” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 247). Thus while rejecting one form of reterritorialization, Maren ultimately remains bound to a desire for acceptance within a system that inherently rejects her.

Although Maren and Lee's relationship initially appears promising in its "us against the world" stance, from their first encounter, their bond is founded on the recognition of a mutual humanitarian morality and an unwillingness to relinquish human connection and thus cannot express a queer-becoming. Queer encounters, as Colebrook (2008) argues are not about affirmations of self through the recognition of shared otherness, but about entering "into relations where the mode of relation cannot be determined in advance" (p. 30). In this sense, they are defined by a radical openness to becoming-other-than-onese. Thus, while Maren and Lee's blurring of both their eater and human alignment might initially appear as markers of queerness, their connection based on recognition of commonality lacks the non-anchored, unpredictable nature of a queer-becoming. Furthermore, their bond is grounded on a desire for inclusion within the perceived superior and moral human sphere. MacCormack (2015) argues "the commonality between humans as humans" prevents inter-human relations from being truly queer. In any aspect of desire, if those involved are primarily defined by their aspiration to fulfill the societal template of human, even if they fail to fully embody it, their interactions remain confined within the realm of human desire and cannot be considered truly queer (p. 126). Therefore Maren and Lee's initial relationship, characterized by their shared otherness and desire for human belonging, cannot fully embody a process of becoming-queer, as it lacks the complete liberation from pre-defined identities and the embrace of possibilities outside of established categories.

While Maren and Lee's relationship initially remains bound to rigid humanitarian ideas on identity and morality, Deleuze and Guattari (2000) argue even the most rigid structure is rhizomatic and includes multiple lines of flight. "The line of flight

does not come afterward; it is there from the beginning, even if it awaits its hour, and waits for the others to explode (pp. 204-205). This idea illuminates how *Bones and All* uses its unique cinematic style to highlight moments of radical potential in Maren and Lee's journey, imbuing their intimate scenes with a queer sensibility. While centered on cannibalism, the perceived monstrosity of these moments is deterritorialized by the mundanity brought by the film's insider perspective, opening new forms of connection and intimacy that lie outside human normativity.



Fig. 42-43: Maren and Lee having a romantic moment by the waterfall. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]



Fig. 44: Maren smiling as they share their first kill stories. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

One instance occurs right after Maren and Lee's first kiss, initially mirroring a classic teenage romance with warm colors, soft music, and intimate framing as they share a tender moment by a waterfall. However, this romantic atmosphere shifts abruptly as the camera pans, transitioning to a wider shot with muted, realistic colors. Similar to Maren and Sully's consumption of the old woman, non-diegetic sounds slowly fade away. With only the sounds of nature remaining, When Maren asks Lee about his "first time," the typical implication of the question is subverted; instead of recalling their first kiss or sexual experience, they discuss their first acts of cannibalism. The images adopt a detached realistic style devoid of any of the warmth or sensual dramatics of the earlier sequence. Yet to Lee's answer of eating his babysitter, Maren replies with enthusiasm and a fond smile on her face. This stark juxtaposition creates two distinct effects. The audience, now observing Maren and Lee from an objective outside perspective, is suddenly taken out of the romance and confronted with the raw unvarnished reality of Maren and Lee's existence. Yet for Maren and Lee, the romantic atmosphere remains. The unflinching gaze of the camera, devoid of any attempt to make this conversation more palatable, nonetheless reveals how an act perceived as horrific by societal standards is, for them, a moment of genuine connection. With this juxtaposition pattern, such scenes derive their power not from shock value, but from their quiet dismantling of normative legibility and moralism, revealing the potential for connection and love in the most taboo places. This, ultimately, is where the film's queer sensibility truly shines through. However, while this pattern is utilized to highlight the moments of revolutionary potential within Maren and Lee's relationship, it is the rare moments when this pattern is broken that illuminate the undeniable queer-becoming it flourishes. Therefore, the following

discussion will analyze two distinct cases: the two sequences that attribute a traditional, human-defined monstrosity to cannibalism, and one where the film finally queers Maren and Lee's queer cannibalism.



Fig. 45-46: Jake and Brad laughing creepily as they talk about Brad's unnecessary participation in cannibalism. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

The campfire scene, with the introduction of Jake and Brad, marks a significant departure from the film's established pattern, directly confronting the audience with a traditionally monstrous representation of cannibalism. While Jake embodies the hillbilly cannibal trope, Brad is "kind of a groupie", participating in cannibalism solely for the pure pleasure of the act. In addition to the already unsettling visual atmosphere, a horror-infused ambient track takes over the diegetic soundscape as Maren questions Brad about his cannibalism. This scene deliberately frames Brad's cannibalism as monstrous, not because of the act itself, but because it is driven solely by a desire for transgression and pleasure, a reterritorialization of desire into perversion. As MacCormack (2005) explains, such hybrids based on the fetishization of experimental subjectivity and transgressive behaviors are cautioned against by both Deleuze and Foucault for remaining reactive rather than becoming an active, creative force. Transgressive subjectivity MacCormack (2005) warns is an "enunciation of identity" which compels the repetition of an explicit set of acts to

maintain the transgression (p.138). Brad embodies this reactive transgression. He attempts to become an eater, evident in his eagerness to learn how to smell them, adopting their practices and lifestyle to claim membership in a community he doesn't inherently belong to. However, this mimicry both relies on and maintains the symbolic signifiers of both categories, human and eater. Imitation of such physical qualities "spatialises subjectivity", while becomings are about movement and force, not space and form (MacCormack, 2005, p.139). Thus Brad's performance of cannibalism remains a superficial act, a far cry from the deterritorialized flows of becoming that the film ultimately champions.

Deleuze and Parnet (2007) assert a clear disdain for the self-proclaimed transgressive subject, those who revel in their marginality as a performance rather than an authentic engagement with the process of becoming-other (p. 139), an idea that finds its reflection in the film's portrayal of Brad and Jake's monstrosity. The campfire scene deliberately shifts away from earlier animalistic associations with cannibalism, further dismantling the notion of animality as inherently monstrous and instead suggesting the human perversion of natural instincts, the imposition of societal power structures onto primal urges, that breeds true monstrosity. As MacCormack (2005) observes, speciesist language often relies on animalistic euphemisms to explain away offensive or transgressive human behavior. Terms like "animalistic" or phrases like "behaving like an animal" are deployed to distance humans from their own capacity for cruelty and violence, creating a symbolic hybridity that relegates the monstrous to the realm of the non-human. However, these hybrids are merely projections of human constructs onto animals, reinforcing human dominance and upholding a flawed sense of human exceptionalism (p. 137). *Bones and All* directly

challenges this anthropocentric worldview by presenting Brad and Jake's cannibalism devoid of any direct animalistic association. Their gleeful recounting of their acts stands in stark opposition to Sully's melancholic necessity, highlighting the purely human-driven perversion of their desires.

Witnessing Brad and Jake's perverse transgression triggers a reactive shift within Maren that perpetuates the power structures she had aimed to escape. Instead of rejecting the monstrous associations thrust upon her, she embraces the predatory role eaters are supposed to occupy within the system. Braidotti (2011) explains the "beast within" narrative of humans, something both simultaneously unveiled and disavowed calls for containment and control within society. The mechanisms of discipline for it however are highly gendered and racialized, often serving as justifications for the control and subjugation of marginalized groups (p. 82). Maren's internalization of the beast within narrative, while subverting the existing hierarchy of consumption and otherness does not dismantle it but only seizes control: turning humans into objects of consumption and perpetuating a cycle of violence. The film visually reinforces this idea through the chilling predator-prey imagery in the scene where Maren and Lee hunt and consume the carnival worker.



Fig. 47: Lee's predatory stare as he lures the carnival worker.

Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

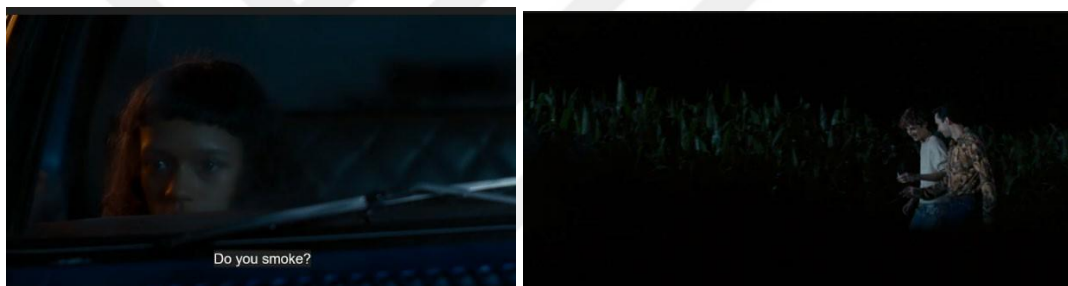


Fig. 48-49: Maren as she watches Lee and the carnival worker. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

Close-ups of Lee's intense gaze as he lures the unsuspecting man with promises of intimacy highlight the calculated nature of their actions. The shots from Maren's point of view, framed by darkness at the top and bottom of the frame evoke the focused vision of a predator stalking its prey, further amplified by the unsettling horror soundtrack. Observing Lee's brutal attack and consumption of the carnival worker from the shadows, Maren calmly joins Lee. Her hungry expression mirroring Lee's visually underscores her embrace of a monstrous identity, but more importantly, the suppression of her desire for empathy and humanity. This act, meant

to be an act of liberation by taking control of the monstrous narrative imposed on her, ironically traps her further. Parallel to Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) arguments on revolutionary and subjugated groups, by establishing these internal limits and repressing parts of her desires accordingly, Maren's revolutionary potential as an eater is transformed into an embrace of subjugation that mimics and perpetuates the existing power dynamics she suffers under (p. 348).

The next event that assigns a horror-monstrosity to one of the eaters happens when Sully tracks Maren and Lee down, shattering the fragile domestic bliss they have constructed. Sully, driven by a desperate yearning for "someone that understands", tracks Maren down, mirroring her earlier pursuit of Lee. Having pinned Maren to the bed with a knife, Sully drools over Maren, his head resting on her face, stroking her hair before he finally asks "You know what I mean?" before kissing her cheek. The film is quick to remind us, Maren indeed knows as the camera turns to Lee entering the room, with horror ambiance music slowly filling the soundscape. The difference between Sully and Maren however highlights the queerness of Maren and Lee's relationship and frames the queerness of the film's ending in which Maren ends up consuming Lee. Sully, in his desperate plea for understanding, embodies the antithesis of Deleuze and Parnet's (2007) vision of love as a liberated flux "without remembering, without phantasm and without interpretation" (p. 47). Sully does not seek a transformative encounter with difference but a confirmation of his own preconceived notions of what it means to be an eater. His love is chained by the weight of shared history, of assumed commonality, and the suffocating expectation that Maren will fulfill a role he has already scripted for her. Yet in love as an agent of becoming, "on lines of flight there can no longer be but one thing, life-

experimentation. One never knows in advance, since one no longer has either future or past.” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 47). This unknowable experimentation, constant transformation, and openness to difference is what characterizes the difference between Sully and Maren’s relationship with Lee.

Examining the scenes where cannibalism is framed as traditionally monstrous versus those between Lee and Maren where cannibalism flourishes connection, love, and moments of queer potential, reveals a clear distinction: the former is marked by rigid identities, Oedipal desires, and preconceived notions about the other, while the latter embraces fluidity, openness, and experimental relationships. The film deliberately orchestrates parallels between these contrasting narratives. Maren and Sully’s actions and motivations mirror each other, while the film’s ending directly builds upon Maren and Lee’s encounter with Jake and Brad. Thus looking into two key scenes highlighted by these parallels is crucial to conclude this section and understand how Maren and Lee’s relationship eventually moves towards a queer-becoming through cannibalism.



Fig. 50: Maren and Lee sitting apart as Lee explains how he killed his father. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]



Fig. 51: Maren surprisingly right after Lee confesses how great it felt. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

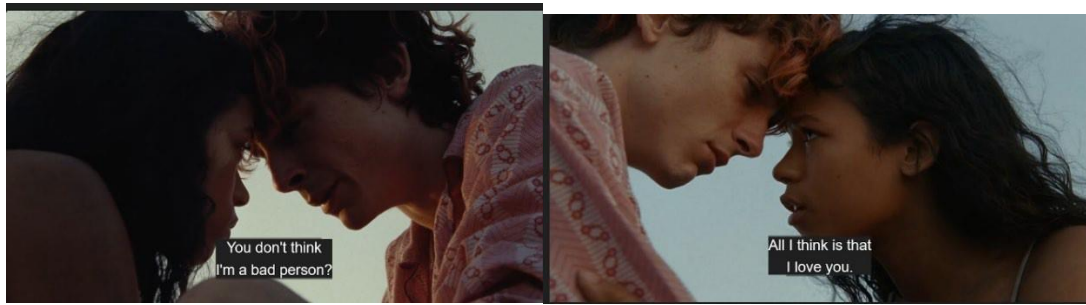


Fig. 52-53: Maren and Lee forming a connection and confessing their love through cannibalism. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

After reuniting and facing the indeterminacy of their future, Maren and Lee decide to drive west, prioritizing the journey over the destination. As they sit on an open hill, Lee confesses the violent way he locked his abusive father in a shed for days and later “ate him the fuck up”; describing the act with a mixture of shame and euphoria marked by the fact that “it felt great.” With the confession of his pleasure, the music that had been melancholic and romantic turns into an atmospheric horror track in a seamless transition. Conditioned by the pattern the film has built with the soundtrack and moralism, the expectation is set for either Maren’s judgmental reaction or a tonal shift into horror. Instead, the music softens as rather than reacting to Lee’s inhumane confession in horror, Maren draws him closer, confessing “I would have done the same thing. I would have done it *my way*, but I would have done the same thing.” When Lee questions if she thinks he’s a bad person, the camera shifts to a revealing close-up of their faces, both open and vulnerable, devoid of shame. “All I think is that I love you” Maren responds.

In encountering and opening herself up to Lee’s true monstrosity, Maren and Lee’s relationship takes on a truly queer turn. As MacCormack (2012) explains, Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas encourage the relinquishing of reliance on pre-existing

signifiers, allowing for an openness to the alterity of the other, where commonality is reduced to the pure potential of openness itself (p. 256). In such cases, encounters with monstrosity, with an entity that is neither the same nor opposite and thus collapsing the other in on the self, can be both positively and revolutionarily queer, “an imperative in forming relations which enter subjects into becomings” (p. 255). What is important to note here is that as Deleuze and Parnet (2007) assert: “An encounter is perhaps the same thing as a becoming, or nuptials....You encounter people but also movements, ideas, events, entities. All these things have proper names, but the proper name does not designate a person or a subject. It designates an effect, a zigzag, something which passes or happens between two as though under a potential difference” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 6-7). Unlike Sully, Lee is not Maren’s object of desire, but rather an encounter with whom she finds the connection beyond what she was looking for. If queerness is to find new ways of feeling and desiring that do not pre-exist (Conley, 2009, p. 26), in finding a new way to love and accept both herself and Lee that has never existed before, their relationship finally becomes truly queer beyond any symbolism. The scene then cuts to the camera panning upon a vast open field with a voiceover from Maren asking where to go next. Their car sits on the hill, looking out at the vast openness, appearing small in the huge world. “Anywhere,” Lee says. They decide to drive, pick somewhere and stay, at least for a while, further emphasizing the openness and fluidity of their future, a future that prioritizes experimentation and the journey itself.



Fig. 54: Maren stabbing Sully after their confrontation. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

Further emphasizing the queerness of this relationship, for the director Guadagnino the love Maren and Lee share is based on:

“The possibility in the impossibility. The possibility of finding yourself in the gaze of the other, in the impossibility of the conditions these people are going through and being acted out by, which is what love is. To love someone means that you have to kind of find the way to be recognized by the other in your actor nature” (Chappell, 2022).

Yet the theme of impossibility that has haunted every step of Maren’s journey also denies her a happy ending within a world that shuns and demonizes their very existence. This inherent conflict between their yearning for connection and the impossibility of its fulfillment within existing structures is brutally depicted in the aftermath of their confrontation with Sully. In a jarring cut, the sounds of Maren’s frenzied stabbing gets replaced by the mundane noises of the city outside their apartment window as calm, flat images of everyday life that cut between the shots of terror. This juxtaposition emphasizes how the world has no place for the necessities of Maren and Lee’s existence. While the couple manages to kill Sully, during the process Lee is mortally wounded and Maren is once again left with the impossibility

of her marginalized existence: they cannot call for help; the very institutions meant to protect would either fail or condemn them.

Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain in terms of becoming-animal, majoritarian systems “have always appropriated these becomings in order to break them”, either allowing them under certain conditions as long as they can be controlled, reterritorializing them to integrate them or if neither works, destroying them. In any case, these mark the “the death of becoming” (p. 248). Maren’s journey throughout the film has been marked by this very struggle, constantly oscillating between assimilation into either a human or eater identity, with temporary moments of escape through her relationship with Lee. However, their existence remains precarious, constantly threatened by the possibility of absolute destruction based on the impossibility of their existence and love within established structures; a destruction they are finally facing. Yet instead of resignation and death, Maren and Lee somehow manage to transform their destruction into a powerful act of creation, deterritorializing their love and cannibalism further into a queer-becoming. Here Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) analysis of Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s relationship becomes strangely illuminating. Conventional interpretations, bound by binary structures, often reduce their relationship to a causal narrative of mutual destruction: Zelda’s “madness” fueling Fitzgerald’s alcoholism, or vice versa, ultimately concluding that they would have been better off apart. For the couple, however, their relationship evaded these binary judgments. “She loves the alcohol on my lips. I cherish her most extravagant hallucinations.” It is their destruction however that paradoxically leads to creation: “nothing has importance any longer, now that everything can begin anew, since they have been destroyed but not by each

other.” Their destruction allows Zelda and Fitzgerald to form a relationship that exists beyond all outside impositions and judgments, becoming “only a line of flight forever in the process of being drawn, toward a new acceptance, the opposite of renunciation or resignation—a new happiness?” (pp. 206-207).



Fig. 55-56: Examples of images on screen as Lee begs Maren to eat him bones and all. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

As learned from Jake and Brad, consuming someone “bones and all” functions as an initiation ritual into being an eater: shedding any remaining humanity and embracing the monstrous identity thrust upon them. Lee, recognizing the finality of his situation, begs Maren to eat him, bones and all. As Maren tries to find any other way, her speech, filled with desperation and a yearning for an impossible alternative, is juxtaposed with still images of the house they had been living in, echoing the earlier scene with the old woman.



Fig. 57: Warm colors and romantic soundtrack continues as Maren first kisses Lee and then starts to bite chunks out of his body. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]



Fig. 58: Example of empty rooms from Maren and Lees house. Luca Guadagnino. (2022). *Bones and All*. [Video]

As Maren's kisses turn to bites, the romantic tone of the scene continues, accompanied by the soundtrack. The scene then transitions to a series of still images, devoid of sound, showcasing first a puddle of blood, a stark reminder of the act that has transpired, followed by images of empty rooms with empty furniture,

highlighting the temporality of their domestic bliss. The film finally concludes by cutting to Maren and Lee, half naked and cuddling on the same hill where they had confessed their darkness and love. Their existence, their love, their cannibalism, all deemed impossible within the confines of established society, finds a strange, unsettling beauty in its final form. Through the very monstrosity that has isolated them, Maren and Lee invent a new way to connect, not just with each other, but also with the monstrous aspect of themselves they have struggled against. This act of radical acceptance, of finding love and connection through destruction and the impossible mirrors Colebrook's (2009) definition of queerness as "a power to create relations, to make a difference, to repeat a power beyond its actual and already constituted forms" (p. 23). Maren, in consuming Lee, "bones and all," doesn't simply conform to a pre-existing, monstrous ritual. Instead, she deterritorialized the act of cannibalism, transforming it from a grotesque initiation into a positive force of desire capable of bringing new forms of love and connection, ultimately queering cannibalism.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores the trope of cannibalism in queer horror through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal, illustrating how this framework can transform conventional readings of queer-coded monsters. Through becoming-animal, the queer cannibal moves beyond simplistic metaphors and emerges as a figure of nonhuman sexuality and desire, challenging not only the limits of humanity but also the conventions of queerness itself. While this chapter focuses specifically on the trope of cannibalism, the analytical lens of becoming-animal extends far beyond this single trope. Cannibalism in this chapter serves as an example of how

established queer horror tropes filled with their own symbolism and cinematic conventions can be approached through this framework. As demonstrated, this project can reveal new, more radical associations between queerness and monstrosity without erasing the sociopolitical histories that have shaped these tropes. This chapter has also highlighted that this approach does not necessitate a radical departure from existing scholarship. Instead, it allows for the integration of previous psychoanalytic readings and allegorical interpretations; utilizing these perspectives to point out monsters not as metaphors for marginalized identities but as participants in processes of becoming that subvert normative conceptions of identity, desire, and sexuality. Building on this discussion, continuing to apply the lens of becoming and its attendant set of vocabularies to different aspects of queer horror has the potential to uncover new ways to understand the genre that moves beyond the limits of identity politics and towards more expansive, fluid, and revolutionary ways of theorizing about queer monstrosity. Thus moving beyond generalized tropes, the next chapter focuses on another fundamental convention of the genre and demonstrates how the application of this framework to explicitly representational and identitarian images of same-sex and human-monster sexual desire can be studied as potential sites of queer-becoming.

CHAPTER IV

QUEER DESIRE AND AESTHETICS OF DEMONIC SEXUALITY IN *THE UNTAMED* AND *THE LURE*

4.1. Introduction

As the concept of desiring-production reframes sexuality as merely “one flux among others” in assemblages of desire (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 101), it allows the discussions on queer monstrous desires in horror films to no longer primarily be confined within sexuality. Yet the fact that societal views around non-normative sexual desires and practices have historically both grounded and guided the associations between queerness and monstrosity in horror cinema cannot be negated. Furthermore the influential yet admittedly few instances where different cycles or traditions within the horror genre have focused on overt and self-admitted queerness, such as the recurring tradition of lesbian-vampires, the focus majorly remained on sexuality, its scope ranging from the negative sensationalization of perceived sexual deviancy to patriarchal exploitations of the achievements of sexual liberation politics. Additionally, a remaining tradition from the days of heavy censorship, Freudian psycho-sexual themes and subtextual codings have persistently been utilized by horror filmmakers to simultaneously indicate both queerness and monstrous

abjection to the point they have arguably become fundamental to the genre's conventions. Consequently, the distinction between queer and monstrous sexual desire became significantly blurred to the point of complete eradication. Therefore the alternative framework this thesis proposes would be incomplete without also establishing a method to transpose the representational and recognizable images of non-normative and identifiably non-heterosexual erotic desires, sexual practices, and psycho-sexual thematic codings onto a Deleuzoguattarian framework. Deleuze and Guattari's critique of sexuality is essentially a prompt to approach sexuality within the realm of desiring-production; to seek out a "sexuality for itself" away from "all idealizing sublimation" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 1102) which would open up "an entire field of multiple, molecular sexualities, of radical differences that are irreducible to the binary code of sexual opposition, and that explode...the hypocritical requirements of social morality" (Shaviro, 2008, p. 69). Far from arguing for a relationship between queerness and monstrosity that does not rely on sexuality, approaching sexuality within the concept of desiring-production highlights representational images of erotic desire and couplings as productive zones of potentiality in creating queer-monstrous becomings that extend beyond binary regulations of gender and sexuality, as well as essentialist oppositions of human/non-human, organic/inorganic and such.

With this aim and framework, this chapter focuses on two movies: *The Untamed* (Escalante, 2016) and *The Lure* (Smoczynska, 2015), examining how these films utilize innovative visual and narrative strategies to explore the complexities of queer erotics and destabilize traditional understandings of gender, embodiment, and desire. Consisting of two main analytical sections, the first section focuses on *The Untamed*

and its nuanced look into queer desire and domestic dynamics that exposes the restrictive nature of conforming to their hegemonic conceptualizations for acceptance. Against this, the film proposes sexual intimacy with an unexplained monster as a potential line of flight. This section utilizes Beckman's (2013) concept of demonic sexuality alongside Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) discussions on contagion, unnatural alliances and demonic pacts to examine the monstrous coupling in *The Untamed's* narrative as a deterritorialization of sexuality towards becoming-queer. The second section focuses on *The Lure* and its exploration of human-non/human erotics through its diverse portrayal of mermaid/human attraction and sexual acts, revealing underlying tensions between human desire and the desire to tame the monstrous.

For queers, desexualization is often a condition for mainstream social acceptance (Bernhardt-House, 2008, pp. 171-172). As queer horror film criticism moves into celebrating post-modern and post-human queer monstrosity as a socio-political weapon, explicit images of queer sexuality should be renegotiated and reclaimed. In this aim, each section concludes with discussing how by constructing different visual approaches to heteronormative intimacy and instances where human/non-human couplings are seen as transgressive fetishes in contrast to those where this binary is lifted, both films aesthetically capture queer sexuality as a radical force to initiate relations with both human and non-human entities beyond anthro-phallogocentric limitations.

4.2 Domestic Dynamics and Becoming-Demonic of Female Sexuality in *The Untamed*

Amat Escalante's 2016 Spanish sci-fi horror film *The Untamed* creates an unsettling yet oddly familiar world of heterosexual societal roles, domestic dynamics, and alien tentacle sex. Described as a strange stew of socially conscious domestic drama and tentacular sci-fi erotica by film critic Guy Lodge (2016), the film explores the allure of the monstrous as a catalyst for sexual and existential liberation. Inspired by real-life tragedies fueled by homophobia and conservative sexual attitudes in Mexican society (Walker, 2017), Escalante constructs a narrative that reflects the violence inflicted upon visible marginalized identities. The film exposes the performativity and oppression inherent in adhering to societal expectations of heterosexual family structures and highlights how these expectations, when internalized as essentialist truths, lead to either submission or outright destruction for queer individuals. However, *The Untamed* offers more than critique; it presents a line of flight, an escape from the rigid expectations of the society, through the liberation of sexual desire from phallo-anthropocentric definitions. This liberation, achieved through an encounter with the monstrous, is not only personal but profoundly social. The influence of Libido on the social sphere is not something Deleuze and Guattari (2005) reject. For them, libido as a force of desire is not confined to the individual psyche but permeates all aspects of life, including social structures and power dynamics (p. 35). They challenge the Freudian notion of Thanatos, the death drive, as a counterforce to Eros, arguing that this binary ultimately limits the revolutionary potential of desire. Instead, they, like Wilhelm Reich, see the libido as a socio-political force capable of disrupting and transforming societal structures (Powell, 2007, p. 118). When characters in *The Untamed* engage with the monstrous, they tap into this uncontainable energy, disrupting their own understanding of desire and challenging the very foundation upon which societal norms are built.

In *The Untamed*, a heterosexual marriage between Ale and Angel is complicated by Angel's affair with Ale's brother, Fabian. The tangled web of desire and dissatisfaction spread over the family echoes the concept of molar identities as tools of societal oppression and control. Deleuze and Parnet (2007) argue that molar identities, characterized by rigid categorization and fixed attributes, function as "segments" within the larger assemblage of society (p. 128). Despite the dissatisfaction and constraint they feel, Ale, Angel, and Fabian remain trapped within their roles: Ale as the dutiful wife, Angel as the successful patriarch, and Fabian as the closeted other. These segments or identities, while seemingly natural and inevitable, are in fact arbitrarily defined and imposed (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 128). The character's adherence to these roles highlights the fear of exclusion and societal condemnation that necessitates such conformity, sacrificing genuine connection for the appearance of normalcy. Deleuze and Parnet (2007) argue that such control is not solely imposed by a top-down state apparatus but through a complex interplay of discourses, institutions, and internalized beliefs that gets organized and overcoded by the State; making them pervasive across different segments of society. Angels internalized homophobia and the need to maintain a facade of heteronormative success, and Ale's struggle to reconcile her desires with her prescribed role as a wife all speak to the pervasiveness of these dominant utterances and established order (pp. 128-129).

All of this changes with Veronica; a mysterious woman whose arrival disrupts the established order and offers a radical possibility for liberation through the monstrous. Veronica introduces Ale and Fabian to an unexplained alien monster with "almost

comically phallic protuberances” (Walker, 2017), suggesting intercourse with this tentacle monster as the solution to their problems. The potential liberation this monstrous coupling brings aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s (2000) assertion that desire, even when channeled through sexuality, can be a catalyst for broader social transformation. As Powell (2007) summarizes from Deleuze and Guattari (2000), “desiring machines are pre-eminently social... and the social plane is permeated by the erotic motive.” However, the force of desire is not inherently revolutionary or reactionary. Rather its potential for liberation depends on its ability to dismantle existing power dynamics (p. 130). Veronica and the creature, therefore, become encounters with a line of escape, disrupting the libidinal investments that maintain oppressive structures but also not guaranteeing success. Thus how this encounter affects different characters is worth discussing.

Angel’s trajectory in *The Untamed* exemplifies the complex interplay of desire and oppression. Rather than deriving any masochistic pleasure from his repression, Angel’s closeted queerness and internalized homophobia align with Deleuze and Guattari’s (2003) notion that power itself operates as a form of desire, rather than being imposed on desire (p. 56). As both a product and participant of a societal segment with its own “sort of power, its personnel, its clients, its machines” that dictates acceptable forms of expression and connection (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 57), Angel performs hypermasculinity and heterosexual domesticity to maintain his position within this system. The consequences of his performance manifests in strained, emotionally distant relationships with his wife and children, and oscillates between violent threats and crude sexual advances in his interactions with Fabian. Even his employment at a construction site, with its homoerotic undertones and toxic

masculinity, reinforces this dynamic; all pointing out his inability to accept and express his desires within the rigid dictates of his adopted persona. Yet unlike other characters who engage with the creature's disruptive potential, Angel clings to the perceived stability of oppressive structures, yearning for the familiar as evidenced by his plea for reconciliation with Ale right after she accuses him of Fabian's murder. Angel's arc, therefore highlights Deleuze and Guattari's (2003) assertion that divisions of oppressor and oppressed stem from the machinery of the system itself, not from external forces (p. 57).

While Angel seeks solace in the familiar, Ale's journey reflects feminist discourses in addressing the deeply ingrained domestic societal structures that confine women. Initially, Ale appears trapped in her prescribed role as a wife, enduring an inattentive husband, a hostile mother-in-law, and her children's preference for their father. Her frustrations are dismissed as inevitable consequences of her gendered role, reflecting a system that not only dictates her current behavior but also her very "past and future" as a woman (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 2). Ale's liberation arises not from escaping societal and domestic roles but from her sexual encounter with the monster, a being outside human constructs, which catalyzes genuine transformation. Indeed lines of flight are not escapes from life but rather radical acts of creation that "produce the real" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 49). The monster, with its non-human sexuality and its capacity to shatter preconceived notions of desire and pleasure, becomes a catalyst for Ale's own process of becoming, shedding the constraints of her past and embracing new possibilities of existence (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 2). Opening herself up to a realm of experience that allows her to rewrite the very rules

that have governed her life, Ale's liberation exceeds the personal and becomes deeply political.

Fabian's story on the other hand presents a nuanced exploration of queer masculinity within a heteronormative and patriarchal society. Unlike Angel's rigid and performative heteronormativity, Fabian's anxieties stem from societal judgment, not internalized shame. He navigates a semi-closeted existence; his sexuality an open secret tolerated only when carefully managed. This becomes a strategic performance that allows survival but does not equate to acceptance, as evident by reactions to his death: Angel's mother frames Fabian's coma as divine punishment, while his coworkers express affection even as the media headlines his sexuality with slurs. The film further complicates Fabian's position by juxtaposing his journey with Ale's. While the monster is predominantly associated with female desire, its sexual interaction with Fabian suggests a failed alignment of Fabian with the feminine as a privileged metaphor for the crisis of masculine values (Braidotti, 1994, p. 173). His occupation as a nurse and his tendency towards a more passive sexual role, often coded as "female" within binary gender frameworks (Kemp, 2005, p. 150), further associate him with feminine signifiers. The anxiety surrounding the penetrated male body for Kemp (2005), reveals a desperate attempt to maintain the pre-established hierarchy where masculinity reigns supreme (p. 150). Fabian, by embracing a failed masculinity, avoids directly challenging this hierarchy, thus carving out a space for survival in a system that would otherwise seek to erase him.

Fabian's death by the monster, juxtaposed with Ale's liberation, underscores the uneven landscape of oppression within marginalized communities. As Braidotti

(2011) argues becoming requires freeing “the process of subject formation from the normative vision of the self” and embracing “open-ended, interrelational, multisexed, and transspecies flows of becoming through interactions with multiple others (p. 83). While Ale, through her interactions with the monster, embodies this radical transformation, Fabian’s attempt to carve out a similar space for his queerness proves fatal. This tragic outcome highlights the unequal distribution of power and risk within and among marginalized groups, reminding that the fight for liberation is not monolithic and that even within oppressed communities, hierarchies of privilege exist. His death at the hands of the monster suggests that while society may tolerate, even celebrate, a woman’s deviation from the norm, a gay man’s attempt to exist outside the confines of prescribed masculinity is met with harsher, often fatal, consequences. Fabian’s fate becomes a stark reminder of the high cost of seeking freedom in a world that demands conformity, even in its rebellion.

Against all these characters, Veronica emerges as an enigmatic and disruptive force within the film’s carefully constructed social order. Unlike other characters burdened with backstories and motivations, Veronica simply exists without explanation; remaining a mystery like the film’s creature. As Nordine (2017) observes, she is almost an “otherworldly being,” unfazed by her singularity and operating on a different frequency than those around her. This detachment from societal norms is evident in her fluid, pansexual approach to relationships which exposes the fragility of fixed sexual identities, as seen in Angel’s homophobic jealousy when he learns Fabian is with her: “A girlfriend? Isn’t he a super faggot?” This reveals how, even within the system, fixed sexual identities are not trusted. Veronica, in stark contrast, embodies a fluid, unfixed, rhizomatic sexuality that is liberated from both

reproduction and genitality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p 18). She accepts Fabian's sexuality without question, flirts openly with both him and Ale, and discusses the creature's gender in ambiguous terms, stating, "I'm not sure if it's a he or a she," without a hint of shame or self-consciousness. As Conley (2009) argues, the dominant order through its institutions, stifles desire by attempting to normalize individuals, reducing their complexities to an Oedipal scenario and limiting their creative potential. Veronica, in contrast, embodies a "queering as becoming," a state of being in constant flux, experimenting with "innumerable sexualities" and existing outside the limitations of fixed categories (p. 26). She embodies the Deleuzoguattarian ideal of "knowing how to love" without being confined by traditional gender roles or sexual identities, extracting from her being "n sexes" that defy categorization; an affair of becoming-girl that comes alongside such sexuality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 277). Becoming-girl, as Colebrook (2000) clarifies, is not about being a woman as the opposite of man, but rather about embodying the "becoming of man's other." (p. 2). This constant state of queer-becoming through sexuality allows Veronica to disrupt the established order and act as a catalyst for others to launch their own lines of flight.

Shrouded in mystery, Veronica could be argued as a Deleuzoguattarian vampiric figure. As briefly discussed in the theoretical chapter the vampires and werewolves that populate Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) discussions are not fictional myths but rather they exist as "becomings of man" (p. 275). Mirroring Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) conceptualization of vampires, Veronica is not a singular, determined individual but a "band of intensity" (p. 241); an encounter with a pack, a multiplicity brimming with its own unique affects (p. 239). Fluid and ever-shifting, she defies

categorization, existing instead as a force of infection that draws others into her orbit. For Deleuze and Guattari (2005) this is precisely how becomings proliferate: not through filiation or any evolutionary progression/regression but instead, they form, develop, and are transformed by contagion (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 242); “a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time” through unnatural participations (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 241). Like the previously discussed example of wasp and the orchid, the concepts of contagion and unnatural participations allow “monstrous and heterogeneous couplings between different forms of life.” Cutting across taxonomical boundaries through open-ended transversal communications between differentiated bodies, each term creatively influences the other to engage in a process of becoming-other (Thanem, 2006, pp. 183-184). As a vampiric figure, already infected and capable of infecting, Veronica brings the other characters into her relationship with the monster, inviting them into transformative, open-ended relations that destabilize normative boundaries of identity, gender, sexuality, and species.

As MacCormack (2009) explains, vampires possess a unique queerness, as their victims desire not necessarily the vampire as a creature, but the infection itself. They recruit those who desire differently into a pack and infect their victims so the victims “can deterritorialize their own molar sexuality toward molecular desires and pleasures” In this way “vampires invoke queer as an inflection or dissipation of desiring self before and beyond act or object” (MacCormack, 2009, p. 142). Veronica embodies this queer potential, acting as a catalyst for those seeking to escape the limitations of their socially constructed identities. Those drawn to her, like Ale and Fabian, are not merely seduced by her as an individual but by the “infection” she

carries, the promise of the unknown and potential liberation she brings. In this sense beyond acting as a narrative catalyst, Veronica becomes the exceptional individual, the demon head that occupies an anomalous position which the characters enter into an alliance with (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 244). Since becomings involve “beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation”, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain that becomings concern alliances, such as the symbiotic relationship between the wasp and the orchid that deterritorializes both terms, producing a single bloc of becoming (p. 238). As they argue through becoming-whale of Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, the process of becoming-other can “operate directly through a monstrous alliance with the Unique” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 243). Veronica, already in such an alliance with her monstrous sexual partner occupies this unique position. As MacCormack (2009) explains, “the demon head is a queer entity in reference to gender and sexual activity, a monster who makes its partner a monster” (p. 146). The demon head, not necessarily an individual but a moment, an encounter, or an infection, elicits fascination, creating fascinating unnatural alliances and strange relations born from “desiring a relation with the power(s) of an irreducible other” (p. 136). Alluring, unsettling, and unexplained, Veronica draws others into these “unnatural alliances” that challenge the very foundation of conventional relationships and desires, each entering a sexual becoming she embodies and inspires in others.

Similar to Veronica, the creature in *The Untamed* defies categorization, particularly within traditional symbolic frameworks that attempt to pin it down as a representation of the phallus. Its allure stems from a primal connection to nature in its chaotic state, evidenced by the animals drawn to the crater the creature’s arrival

has left on Earth. In this weird animal orgy, even different species are shown together, all animated by a sexuality that no longer aims for reproduction and exists beyond human construction and limitations. In this sense the creature, similarly remaining a mystery throughout the movie, embodies Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) ideas on Lovecraft's "Outsider" as the anomalous entity: "the Thing, which arrives and passes at the edge, which is linear yet multiple, 'teeming, seething, swelling, foaming, spreading like an infectious disease, this nameless horror'." (p. 245). As the anomalous entity, the monster in *The Untamed* is not a fixed being but rather only possesses affects that designate pure deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 242). Each encounter with this entity "teems with new nodes and pulsations as various intensities cross each other for the first time, or the next time, where different molecules meet familiarly or as strange combinations" (MacCormack, 2005, p. 143). Therefore, the act of having sex with the monster in *The Untamed* not only exceeds the limitations of traditional sexual paradigms but also initiates a process of becoming-monstrous that moves beyond the realm of sexuality, "opening up the range of differences beyond those preferred by humanist morality" (Thanem, 2006, p. 184).

Comparisons of *The Untamed* with Żuławski's 1981 film *Possession* have been made by numerous critics and audiences. Lodge (2016), for example, notes the similarities between films' monstrous figures and their roles in becoming "unlikely instruments of sexual agency and self-realization." Indeed both films use the monstrous to liberate female desire from patriarchal constraints and trigger a broader queer-becoming in their protagonists through this deterritorialization of sexual desire. But how does this process unfold? As Davis (2013) stresses, viewing anomalous

character behaviors as symptoms of known structures can limit the very deterritorializations that makes the films so compelling for queering operations (p. 39). Thus, the question becomes: how does this becoming-monstrous through sexuality operate outside the familiar framework of lack and fulfillment? Deleuze and Guattari (2000) argue desire is not born from lack, but rather, lack is a product of societal forces that seek to codify and control the fluid creativity of desire (p. 28). Desire, in their framework, originates on a realm of pure potentiality, a chaotic field of forces not tied to pre-existing needs or drives (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 90). The monster, not a determined being but rather existing as an anomalous encounter, disrupts the very notion of lack. It doesn't satisfy pre-existing desires; it explodes them, creating a space for new desires to emerge: desires not dictated by societal norms or Oedipal structures.

Yet how can such a revolutionary queer-becoming like Ale and Veronica enter emerge through sexuality and pleasure when Deleuze and Guattari are so skeptical of it? Beckman (2013) explains their skepticism stems from viewing sexuality not as a response to "the possible worlds of sexual experience and pleasure", but rather as a construct imposed by societal forces seeking control (pp. 121-122). Against this, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) distinction between individuated animals, state animals, and demonic animals (pp. 240-241), Beckman (2013) contrasts domesticated, state-sanctioned sexuality with the untamed, chaotic energy of the demonic pack. Demonic sexuality refuses categorization, existing as a fluid, collective force. It resists the individualizing, normalizing tendencies of biopolitical control, instead allowing desire to flow freely, unburdened by pre-existing structures or the illusion of lack (Beckman, 2013, pp. 136-137). In such demonic couplings,

pleasure exceeds the purely sexual, as encounters with the monstrous embody “being on the lookout,” a heightened awareness that disrupts the rigidity of human desire. This experience, described as a “nonhuman orgasm,” brings the creation of new sensations and connections outside the traditional genital-focused sexuality (Beckman, 2013, p. 141). Similarly, the liberating pleasure Ale and Veronica derive from the monster stems not from the fulfillment of pre-existing desires, but from the exhilarating creation of something entirely new, a shared experience of queer-becoming through sexuality that dismantles the boundaries between self and other, allowing the characters to experience existence through open-ended, novel connections that exceed beyond the sexual realm.

As previously mentioned, the monster in *The Untamed* is specifically associated with female sexuality. However this is not a biologically determined gendering but rather constitutes all forms of desire that is not appropriate for the masculine heterosexual subject, as evident from Fabian’s relationship with the monster. Here MacCormack’s (2010) analysis of *Possession* as an expression of monstrous female desire further helps understanding this idea in *The Untamed*. MacCormack (2010) argues the monster in *Possession* is a literal externalization of unbound female desire (p. 99). Female desire for MacCormack (2010) is inherently monstrous, not for its failure to be equal to male desire but for being a site of “undifferentiated monstrous merging” away from heterocentric ideals of difference constituted from lack and phallus; collapsing the binary machines and engaging in a “becoming-more-than-one without subsuming difference” (MacCormack, 2010, p. 96). While the monster in *Possession* elicits both disgust and fascination, MacCormack (2010) argues that the protagonist, Anna’s, disgust is not directed at the monster itself, but at the “rigidity of

phallogentric male sexual paradigms.” Those who cling to these norms, in turn, are disgusted by the liberated, unconventional relationship Anna shares with the creature (p. 100). This dynamic almost verbatim parallels Ale’s journey in *The Untamed*. In both films, monstrous sex is not about achieving satisfaction within a pre-defined system of desire, but about shattering that system entirely. As MacCormack (2010) states, the monstrous coupling leads to production, not reproduction; it necessitates creation because it operates outside of pre-existing dialectics (p. 96). The “in-between-ness” of the encounters in terms of “gender and finitude”, the fluid and undefinable nature of the monster, creates an “open space, a pure potentiality of feminine desire” (MacCormack, 2010, p. 101). This reframing of female desire as a mode of becoming allows the relationship between female desire and the monster in *The Untamed* to move beyond psychoanalytic allegories or gendered categorization, becoming a dynamic site of queer potentiality.

As MacCormack (2010) continues, the monster in *Possession*, and in this case *The Untamed* is not depicted as an external threat or a separate entity but rather it functions as part of a “liminal relation.” It is not a determined being but a “verb-affect”, a mucosal event of desire opening onto infinity rather than reinforcing distance and othering (p. 100). With this understanding the focus in engaging with the monstrous in *The Untamed* shifts from “what it means” within existing structures to “how it works” as a force of deterritorialization, opening up possibilities for new becomings and expressions of desire that operate outside the restrictive framework of lack and fulfillment (Colebrook, 2008, p. 18). Just as the creature in *Possession*, the creature in *The Untamed* offers Ale a pathway to escape the limitations of her relationship and prescribed social roles. This encounter with the monstrous facilitates

a shift from object-oriented desire, fixated on the husband or the brother, to a molecular flow of intensities that affirm connections based on openness to difference. Having participated and unleashed a demonic sexuality, Ale's desire is no longer directed towards fixed objects or fulfilling lack, but becomes dispersed, fluid, and open to new possibilities for connection and becoming, even beyond the sexual realm, through an embrace of the unknown, the anomalous and demonic, the unnatural alliances that dismantle the structures of phallogocentric social order.

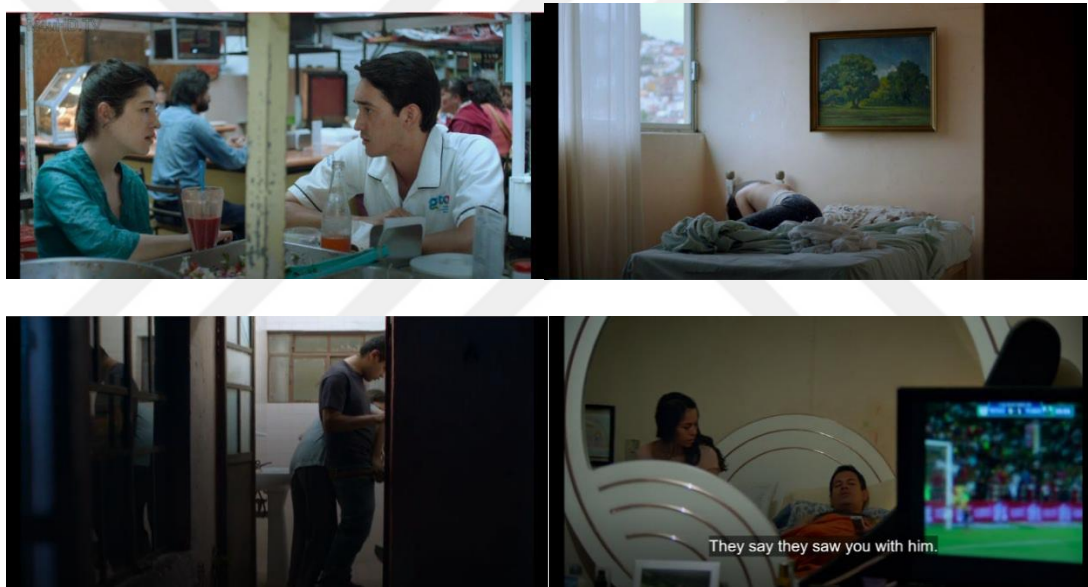


Fig. 59-62: Examples of framing the film utilizes to create a detached, entrapped sensation.

Amat Escalante.(2016). *The Untamed*. [Video]

As Powell (2005) explains, drawing upon Deleuze's reading of Bergson, mise-en-scène transcends mere symbolic representation, functioning as a potent "affective and aesthetic process" that directly engages the viewer's embodied consciousness (p. 110), prompting an experiential encounter with images rather than passive decoding (Powell, 2005, p. 115). *The Untamed* expertly uses its mise-en-scène to create an

affective expression of the characters' entrapment within societal expectations. Lingering shots, often framed by rigid, symmetrical compositions and sharp lines affectively imprison the characters within a cold, artificial properness; evoking a sense of claustrophobia and separation. It is the juxtaposition between the presentation of different scenes of intimacy however that reveals how the film aesthetically captures the deterritorialized sexuality and the queer-becoming it brings along.



Fig. 63: Angel and Fabian. Amat Escalante. (2016). *The Untamed*. [Video]



Fig. 64: Angel and Ale. Amat Escalante. (2016). *The Untamed*. [Video]

Looking at the sex scenes between Angel-Fabian and Angel-Ale reveals how the film utilizes the same cinematographic language to present normative sexuality, whether heterosexual or same-sex, with a distanced gaze that reduces intimacy to mere observation. Shot primarily from outside the room with half the frame obscured, the scene between Angel and Fabian visually reinforces their confinement within a rigid, heteronormative framework, emphasized by an uncanny coldness pervading the scene. Yet as Deleuze and Guattari (2005) argue, “there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight” (p. 204). This whole scene between Angel and Fabian appears almost as a direct manifestation of this idea. A moment of disruption occurs when Angel assumes a more submissive sexual role, briefly going against the normative regulations of his masculinity. In this instance the camera pushes into a close-up of the penetration, obscuring Angel’s face. Yet, this moment of potential is immediately cut off by a jarring transition to an ominous shot of an empty street, the camera slowly moving through as if an unseen danger approaches. This transition functions as a dual reminder: a terrifying embodiment of societal repression awaiting Angel the moment his transgression becomes public and the expression of the desolate, impersonal existence sacrificed for societal approval. Already operating appropriately to the heteronormative sexual organization of *socius*, Ale’s intimacy with Angel is anchored in the mundane and performative. A close-up of her disinterested face under natural lighting as Angel thrusts upon her from behind highlights the dutiful, almost mechanical nature of sex within their domestic life.



Fig. 65: Ale masturbating in the shower. Amat Escalante. (2016). *The Untamed*. [Video]

Leaving dissatisfied, Ale's subsequent attempt at masturbation is framed with a focus solely on her genitalia through the shower curtain, reinforcing the reductive, genital-centric nature of normative sexuality presented in the film, endowing it with a sense of detached necessity.

Against these claustrophobic images, the film adorns its instances of monstrous couplings with surreal cinematography, giving each sequence an intensive, affective power to express the queer-becoming monstrous sex brings. These images draw the viewer into a realm of heightened sensation and shared experience which becomes most clear in the film's opening scenes featuring Veronica, as juxtaposed with Ale's scene that comes right after. This stylistic difference between Veronica and Ale's first on-screen sexual encounters reveals the very difference between sexuality as critiques by Deleuze and Guattari and the demonic sexuality Beckman (2013) argues for.



Fig. 66: Veronica's sex scene with the creature. Amat Escalante. (2016). *The Untamed*. [Video]

Veronica, enveloped in a black void, embodies an alluring and uncanny eroticism. The non-determinacy of the space, combined with ambiguous, dramatic light source becomes the physical manifestation of inhabiting a space that has been liberated from all forms of bio-political organization and regulation; a space created from and that allows Veronica to enter a relationship with the creature characterized by a complete openness to the affective power of this encounter. As her expression becomes increasingly ecstatic, the camera slowly zooms out, revealing the tentacles slowly creeping into her vagina, yet never making them the central focus. The eroticism of the scene does not stem from the content of the images but rather from a mysterious, uncanny sense of sexuality imbued within the image itself. In this sense it aligns with Davis's (2013) understanding of queer cinema that moves beyond signified sexual paradigms while linking intensities of desire directly to sensations and expanding models of relations; provoking audiences to produce new desires with the image that exists outside of hetero/homo grid (p. 16). Thus arguably this whole sequence showcases both narratively and affectively what queer sexuality could be; an

imperative for forming non-human relations and producing many uncontrollable becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 278).

4.3 On Screen Queer Erotics in *The Lure*

Unlike *The Untamed*'s more conventional narrative-driven imagery, Agnieszka Smoczynska's twisted *The Little Mermaid* adaptation is better described as a series of music videos and experimental cinematography strung together with a loose narrative plot. Smoczynska (2017) herself describes the film as a "story about two teenage mermaids who become the city nightclub life sensation. There is a love story, fantasy, sex and blood", while film critic Jonathan Romney (2017) appropriately calls it a parody of 80's Polish music videos; "a retro horror musical with a satirical thrust, buckets of blood, and a lurid, morbid eroticism." Regardless the film's vibrant musical surrealism mirrors the very essence of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic desire: fluid, productive, and resistant to linear interpretation. With this deliberate prioritization of affect and intensity, *The Lure* embeds queer desire within its very fabric rather than simply depicting it through imagery. Music and cinematography become primary storytelling tools, crafting a visceral experience that moves beyond traditional narrative logic. Smoczynska emphasizes this, stating the first impulse with the film was the music and sound design, and she was treating the whole movie as music, as a ballad (KVIFF TV, 2017). While the role of music in unleashing the film's queer sensibility will be further briefly discussed, for the purposes of this thesis it is sufficient to note that Deleuze and Guattari (2005) give a privileged emphasis to music amongst other art forms; as beyond themes and motifs, music for Deleuze and Guattari is traversed by multiple becomings, especially becoming-woman and becoming-animal, moving into a becoming-molecular (p.

272). Thus while a strict lyrical analysis is restricted by translation inaccuracies, a Deleuzoguattarian lens allows appreciating how the interplay of music and visuals generates a powerful affective experience, capturing a molecular, schizoid sexuality that explodes simplistic understandings of desire. *The Lure* becomes a mermaid song itself, drawing the audience into a world of fluid identities, unbound desires, and the intoxicating power of a sexual becoming.



Fig. 67: Example from the club's interior, establishing the general atmosphere of the film. Agnieszka Smoczynska. (2015).

The Lure. [Video]

Sexuality plays a central role in the film's narrative, emphasized by its adult cabaret club setting that becomes a microcosm of societal attitudes towards desire; a space where objectification and performance intersect to both liberate and confine. Explaining the film is about girlhood, femininity and sexual discovery, Smoczynska places her mermaids, Gold and Silver, in a world inspired by her own childhood within the "kitschy world" of communist-era dance halls; a land of "warm vodka and glamour among poverty" (SeeThroughFlicks, 2017). As teenagers newly arriving to a human world primed for exploitation, they are immediately thrust into a system of sexualization; their bodies, particularly their tails, becoming objects of fascination

and fetishization. While their willing participation for the sake of discovering the human world, such as playing up incestuous fantasies and emphasizing their non-human otherness, might be argued as empowering, film critic Simon Abrams (2017) notes the inherent limitations of such agency within the roles determined by a male-dominated society, calling out the films “generally uninspired take on female sexuality.” Yet although the metaphorical associations of two teenage girls entering an adult world through sexualization is glaring, the film’s experimental style allows for more nuanced, non-representational and significantly more positive readings. The nightclub, in a Deleuzoguattarian sense, becomes a manifestation of the operations of the societal structures that “codifies the flows of desire,” channeling them into acceptable and ultimately restrictive forms” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 33). The mermaids’ exploration of non-normative desires through their performances ultimately become reterritorialized within the exploitative setting of the club through self-objectification and self-imposed beastiality, evident in instances such as the suggestive lyrics urging the audience to “discover the flavor of all that’s denied you” while engaging in an incestuous kiss. These acts, while provocative and seemingly liberatory, ultimately reinforce a fetishistic, object-oriented approach to sexuality, which do not excite becomings but ‘tame’ them (MacCormack, 2005, p. 141), as the molecular flows of desire, which hold the potential for revolutionary deterritorialization, are confined within anthropocentric configurations of desire. The club thus becomes a stage where the revolutionary non-human potential of mermaids are continually pulled back into predefined roles dictated by a system that seeks to control and commodify their otherness.



Fig. 68: The mermaids gleefully participating in their own objectification and animalization. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

While *The Lure* embraces the objectification of the mermaid sisters, the film's unique blend of cinematography and synth-wave musical aesthetic highlights a queerness that overflows the rigid socius the club embodies. Rather than confining desire to an Oedipal framework, as critiqued by Deleuze and Guattari (2000), the film "schizophrenizes" the unconscious, revealing the true productive force of desire (p. 24). By shifting from symbolic representation to affect and sensation, *The Lure* portrays desire as a pure, unmediated flow unburdened by societal norms or psychoanalytic constraints (p. 53). Initially, the mermaids' visually provocative performances elicit a predictable, voyeuristic response from the clubgoers, all erupting in applause for their mermaid tails in giant martini glasses; captivated by an fetishistic desire for the spectacle of the other. However as the film progresses, their songs begin to operate less as objects of sexual attraction and more as affective experiences that break down the boundaries of traditional eroticism, mirroring Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) assertion that desire "does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses" (p. 292). As Davis's (2013) discussions on queer cinema argues in a corresponding model of cinema, sexuality orients itself toward people but equally toward objects, ideas, or sensations,

or to no stable site whatsoever (p. 15). The film embodies this concept through the mermaids' performances which allows Gold and Silver to deterritorialize the sexual objectification they face into a molecular realm of desire. Despite the continued nudity, the source of eroticism becomes increasingly blurred and difficult to determine. It is no longer solely based on the spectacle of mermaids' bodies or a sexual attraction to them. Instead, like the irresistible allure of the sirens in Greek mythology, in the mermaids' performances, desire operates on an almost inexplicable level; unburdened by representation and existing as a force in itself.

As a consequence, these performances and the mermaids themselves, rather than pornographic spectacles, transform into affective encounters that can initiate queer-becomings in others. As outlined in the theoretical chapter, Braidotti (2002a), drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, conceptualizes embodied subjectivity as a dynamic assemblage of forces under constant yet necessarily contained transformations (p. 9). This re-imagining of embodiment as an active site of becoming-other-than-itself no longer concerns itself with stable identities but rather each body's "capacity to affect and be affected, to inter-relate" (Braidotti, 2002b, p. 12). Thus there is a primacy of desire for Braidotti (2002b), but only when desire and affectivity is understood as external, intensive and away from reproductive genitality. Such affective forces of desire "happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects not all of them human, who are joined in the sameness of the forces that propel them" (p. 12). Reflecting on this role of desire in initiating non-human connections and becomings, in the mermaids' performances sexuality becomes deterritorialized, no longer concerned with object-subject dynamics, gender binaries, genitalia, and species distinctions. Instead it transforms into an affective encounter that has the

ability to initiate non-human becomings in the listeners, drawing them into a realm where new modes of relation open up beyond the limits of anthropocentric thought.

While how this process operates and is aesthetically expressed in the film will be further discussed, what should be noted here is the film's diversity regarding the type of desire emitted through the mermaids. *The Lure* masterfully illustrates the slippery, multifaceted nature of desire, capable of both shattering societal norms and reinforcing them. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) argue, desire does not concern fixed objects or identities, but the dynamic interplay of "territorialities, reterritorializations and movements of deterritorialization" ([p. 99]). The film embodies this concept, allowing the mermaids to both exceed and be confined by the club's hypersexualized environment, often simultaneously. This dynamic becomes strikingly evident in the portrayal of mermaid bodies, which become a site of both revolutionary potential and societal constraint. For queer and trans media scholar Diego Semerene (2017) the mermaid bodies can be read as trans allegories, suggesting their mermaid forms as a "psychosomatic response to Poland's gender-based oppressions," where "escape can only be imagined if they morph into a barely-human body." Yet beyond allegory, the transformative quality of these bodies, shifting between a fishtail with a vaginal-appearing slit and human legs devoid of orifices, challenges the very foundation of human-centric eroticism. Their existence disrupts the established order, prompting both voyeuristic fascination and a desperate need for categorization.



Fig. 69-72: The mermaid sisters getting introduced to the club owner, who immediately wonders how/if the mermaids can have penetrative sex. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

As Braidotti (1994) argues the body of a subject transcends biological and sociological categorizations, instead being a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological (p. 4). Examining how this idea manifests within larger socio-economic systems, Braidotti (2005) suggests that global capitalism, built on “multiplying and distributing differences for the sake of profit” transforms traditional dialectical notions of Otherness into fluid, profit-driven categories, leading to the production of “ever-shifting waves of genderisation and sexualisation, racialisation and naturalisation of multiple others” (para. 4). The exploitation of mermaids embodies this complex dynamic by presenting a strictly anthropocentric yet paradoxical interplay of human and non-human sexualities shaped by signification and commodification of their bodies. The mermaids’ non-genitalized legs become a curious point of fixation. They are perceived as a simulacrum of womanhood, “smooth as Barbie dolls” as described by the club worker, generating desire through a combination of resemblance and lack.

Conversely, the fishtail's orifice, while undeniably non-human, becomes anthropomorphized for the combination of human-enough upper body and genital-like penetrability, further blurring the lines between human and animal, attraction and repulsion. Yet outside of the erotic gaze, comments like "to me you'll always be a fish, an animal" directed at Silver after refusing her invitation for coupling or "next you will be growing a tail" directed at Silvers's sexual partner right after the act exposes the limitations of this desire as intertwined with disgust, fear, and a need to categorize and control.

The sexual commodification of their difference thus positions the mermaids in a fluid in-between zone in terms of gender and species that is no longer based on the biological qualities of their hybrid bodies. Instead in each various encounter with humans through sexuality, the mermaids constantly shift between different degrees of proximity between no-longer-animal and not-yet-woman, all mobilized by desire that "traces the possible patterns of becoming" (Braidotti in Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012, p. 32). However, despite the potentials of their hybrid bodies in inspiring non-gendered, non-genitalized and non-human forms of sexual desire, the club clientele's engagement with the mermaids remains closed off to becomings. Becoming requires a radical reconfiguration of existing elements, a dismantling of pre-conceived notions of what constitutes a body and its capabilities. Instead of comparing two organs, such as the mermaid tail's slit and a human vagina, becoming must "place elements or materials in a relation that uproots the organ from its specificity. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 258-259). By failing to embrace this transformative process, the human characters reterritorialize the mermaids' bodies, confining them within pre-existing frameworks of sexuality and gender.

While the restrictive context of the nightclub makes revolutionary queer/feminist empowerment nearly impossible, *The Lure* offers a more nuanced perspective on Gold and Silver's sexual agency than critics like Abrams (2017) suggest. This becomes particularly evident in the scenes depicting their sexual encounters outside the performative realm of the nightclub. No longer driven by the desire to understand humanity, both mermaids engage in sexual acts fueled by their own desires. Silver falls for Mietek, a club worker, while Gold, the more sexually liberated sister indifferent to humanity pursues a relationship with a policewoman. These encounters, while yielding different outcomes, embody a queer sensibility that resists any Oedipal or strictly human framework of sexuality and move beyond simple categorizations of same-sex or human-monster couplings. Such instances of non-human erotics in *The Lure* utilize the affective power of images, heightened by their focus on sensations and not objects. Consequently, these semi-pornographic sequences no longer operate through normative erotizations of the body, opening up to new intensities, sensations and trajectories of desire that exceed anthropocentric organizations of sexuality. Thus the film reveals that beyond the confines of the nightclub, where their performances are limited by acceptable forms of sexualized femininity, the mermaids can and do exercise their agency in exploring and producing deterritorialized forms of sexuality and pleasure in novel and unique ways.

The film's ability to evoke new forms of desire hinges on its use of surreal cinematography alongside fragmented shots of bodies and environments that prioritize sensory qualities over identifiable subjects and organs. As Powell (2007) suggests within a Deleuzoguattarian approach, erotic images attain maximum impact

when they act on the senses directly. “This ‘pornological’ language subverts the symbolic order and its restrictive codes by using a style that !confronts language with its own limits”” (p. 117). Both Silver and Gold’s sex scenes utilize this approach to craft an affective experience, albeit in distinct ways and to different results that the film emphasizes by juxtaposing them within the narrative. Although filled with potential, the scene between Mietek and Silver ultimately remains representative of a more traditional, fetishistic, and ultimately Oedipal dynamic. Central to the analysis is the notion of failed becomings, as articulated by MacCormack (2005), whereby human sexual practices involving animals domesticate desire rather than create transformative processes. Silver’s narrative journey oscillates between moments of openness to fluidity and non-human relations and reassertion of normative hegemony, reducing the mermaids back into bestiality fetishism. However as previously discussed, desire is about movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This is a dynamic flux that resists dualism, with both movements intertwined and shaped by the assemblage (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 73). Therefore, even within Silver’s “failed becoming,” new lines of flight emerge, offering possibilities for alternative trajectories of sexual desire and potential queer-becomings they can inspire.

The sex scene between Mietek and Silver, though initially framed as a non-normative and rebellious seduction, ultimately lays bare the restrictive confines of human-defined sexuality and its limitations in fostering queer relations. The scene unfolds with Silver, naked in her human form, attempting to seduce Mietek. As he follows, Silver gets into a bathtub, her mermaid tail on full display. To Mieteks rejection, Silver asks “You want me to be a girl?” to which Mietek answers “To me you will

always be a fish, an animal.” This statement reveals his perception of Silver’s human form as a mere facade, a simulacrum that cannot erase her fundamental “animal” nature, exposing his inability to reconcile Silver’s transitional nature with his preconceived notions of human sexual acceptability. He can only desire her within the spectacle of the nightclub, where her otherness is safely commodified.



Fig. 73-74: Mietek willingly kissing Silver on stage moments before calling her an animal and rejecting her. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

The fact that their encounter then retreats to the backrooms of the stage further emphasizes how the club dictates the boundaries of acceptable engagement with the mermaids, relegating their allure to a discrete transaction. Silver, refusing to accept this rejection, sings a siren song, her lyrics a powerful plea for Mietek to join her and embrace a new form of desire, one “not bound up with virtue.” The scene melts into the empty club, the spotlight now obscuring rather than highlighting their bodies. They are blurry, almost indistinguishable, momentarily unified in a space devoid of the club’s usual voyeuristic gaze.





Fig. 75-77: Silver with Mietek on the stage of the empty nightclub, their bodies blurred together. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

This fleeting moment of potential connection, however, is quickly extinguished as the scene transitions to the bathtub underwater. Here, in the environment Mietek associates with Silver's perceived animal nature, the encounter becomes strikingly conventional, even fetishistic. They kiss underwater with Silver's naked body on display, and Silver slowly lowers herself down for Mietek's pleasure.



Fig. 78: Silver and Mietek underwater. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

The very act of submerging himself in water, an attempt to meet Silver on her terms, ironically leads to a reinforcement of the power dynamics he initially sought to escape due to his recognition of Silver as a non-human mermaid, which Silver answers by presenting him with a distinctly human sexual experience. Their adoption

of a rigid framework of human sexuality transforms a potentially transformative encounter into a mere transgression, a fleeting act that ultimately reinforces the boundaries it attempts to breach. This failure aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) assertion that desire moves rhizomatically, and once obstructed, it dissipates, leaving no trace of its revolutionary potential (p. 14). Mietek and Silver's sexual encounter, clinging to preconceived notions of Silver as "animal" and remaining firmly rooted in human-centric eroticism ultimately cannot initiate the queer-non-human-becoming it embodies the potential for, which requires a surrendering to affect, a dissolution of boundaries and a radical embrace of desire's fluid potential (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 259), just as the empty nightclub sequence has shown glimpses of.

In stark contrast to the transactional nature of Mietek and Silver's relationship, Gold's encounter with the policewoman outside the club provides a powerful illustration of how a molecular, schizoid, and queer sexuality can be expressed cinematically beyond same-sex acts. The film initially emphasizes the policewoman's detachment during Silver and Gold's performance. While others are captivated by the song about Silver's experience with Mietek and all the others in the club who see them as animals and thus cannot have actual connections with them, she remains impassive, lighting a cigarette and averting her gaze. This indifference is shattered when she encounters Gold outside the club and reveals herself to be an undercover police officer investigating the murder Gold has committed. Gold starts singing to get out of the situation and the lyrics, expressing a yearning for "warmth and comfort," take on a new meaning as she playfully skips around the policewoman, who finds herself drawn into Gold's spell. Throughout the song, the policewoman

makes imaginary guns with her hands which Gold mimics, pointing right back at her. This mirroring, repeated throughout the song, highlights a sense of equality and mutual recognition absent from other interactions combined with a sexual power play. The scene culminates in a charged moment in the policewoman's car. The once cool, blue lighting gives way to warmer tones as the policewoman joins Gold's song. Their voices intertwine, first with the policewoman taking the lead, then transitioning into a duet. Unlike Mietek and Silver's relationship, this sequence highlights Gold and the policewoman's encounter as being built upon a mutual openness to each other's affective power and interactions that do not hierarchically or territorially separate human/animal/whatever; allowing non-human relationships to emerge (Braidotti, 2002a, p. 123). BDSM undertones of the scene escalate as the policewoman takes control of the song again, slowly lowering herself right before assertively pushing Gold into the bed and giving her a glass of water to reveal her tail. This act, imbued with care and performed with Gold's full consent, dismantles any notion of predatory behavior. While some might interpret the policewoman's dominance as an attempt to control the monstrous, the subsequent sex scene suggests otherwise while showing how queer sexuality as a becoming can be expressed in cinema.

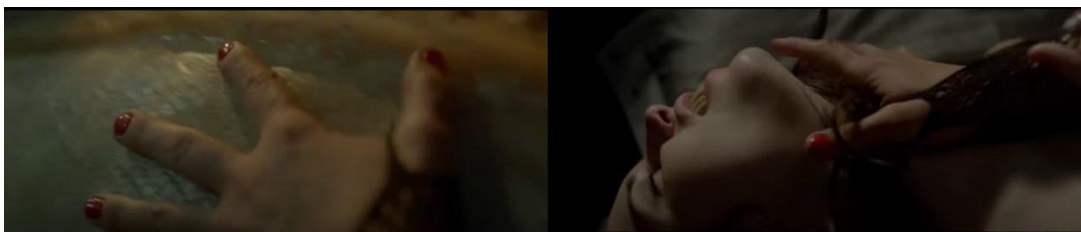




Fig. 79-81: The sex scene between the policewoman and Gold, a stark difference from the pornographic portrayals of the mermaids within the club. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

While the sequence begins with the camera panning over Gold's tail and the policewoman's assertive, even dominatrix-like, demeanor, the scene deliberately avoids objectification or dehumanization. The close-up fragmented shots of Gold's tail, teeth, and spikes, rather than being voyeuristic, center on the sensations and experiences they evoke. These sensations are novel and unfamiliar, and while directly stemming from Gold's mermaid form, they refrain from drawing simplistic comparisons between her tail and human genitalia or any kind of recognizable analogy. Instead, these images create an encounter with Gold's body as a series of affective exchanges of intensities, mirroring Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) ideas on partial objects that are fragmentary in nature, made out of non-personal flows and constantly coupled by desire (p. 5). They are not representative, they do not refer back to a whole or a unified, sexed subject, instead concerning non-familial and non-human relations of desiring-production (p. 48, 60). This stands in stark contrast to the film's earlier portrayal of Silver's body with Mietek, which is subjected to a more traditional, gendered gaze.

The scene becomes a testament to the body's potential for experiencing pleasure beyond pre-conceived notions of human/non-human or normative sexual acts,

suggesting a Deleuzoguattarian reimagining of sexual pleasure itself. Beckman (2013) argues that when partial objects are allowed “to fill up the intensity of space without signifying,” the possibility of an “orgasm beyond lack” opens up: a non-human orgasm that goes through becoming-animal (p. 141). This is precisely what the scene accomplishes. It dismantles the traditional, phallogocentric view of sexuality, where pleasure is contingent upon specific organs and their prescribed functions (Braidotti, 2002a, p. 124). Gold’s tail, teeth, and spikes are not fetishized as stand-ins for human genitalia; instead, they become sites of unique sensations and affective exchanges. Such an approach to the body liberates it from the “myth of the human” (MacCormack, 2015, p. 123). This “becoming-animal” experience Beckman (2013) argues, based on Braidotti’s (2002a) ideas, allows for a pleasure that is not dictated by “prescribed pleasures or acceptable behavior” or the traditional mapping of “certain organs onto specific functions (p. 142). This is what defines the queer non-human sexuality and pleasure of the scene. It’s not simply because it features a mermaid or a same-sex couple; it’s because it breaks free from the confines of “sexuality in its existing familial structures,” as Beckman puts it (2013), instead highlighting a sexuality of “positive connections,” of exploration and experimentation, where pleasure is derived from the immediacy of sensation and the fluidity of desire (p. 139), thus showcasing a non-representative queer sexuality and sexual pleasure that is as liberating as it is transformative.

While the film explores non-human desire through the lens of erotic encounters, it also subtly weaves this theme into Silver and Gold’s yearning for human experiences. Both Gold and Silver work in the nightclub for their fascination with humanity, however, their approaches diverge significantly, highlighting the complex

interplay of desire, societal norms, and the constructed nature of womanhood. Gold's engagement with humanity remains rooted in experimentation and creation: she doesn't seek to become fixed as *human*, but rather to explore what kind of experiences can be created through her engagement with humanity. Silver, on the other hand, becomes fixated on achieving a specific, idealized version of human existence, primarily through a romantic relationship with Mietek. Her desire becomes intertwined with lack, with the belief that possessing a "real" vagina will be the key to acceptance and love, ultimately aligning with Semerene's (2017) reading of the film as a trans allegory, highlighting the societal pressures and impossible standards often imposed on trans bodies. However, Silver's desire for these signifiers of womanhood is ultimately a form of reterritorialization. She attempts to conform to a rigid normativity, striving to embody the molar entity of woman, with all its prescribed organs, functions, and expectations (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 275). Becomings on the other hand require a radical dismantling of fixed molar identities. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) assert "the question 'What are you becomin?' is particularly stupid", as becoming never refers to "conforming to a model." It is not a transition between a fixed origin point and another finalized state but rather a continuous, molecular process that occurs as each term is launched into a common but asymmetrical deterritorialization (p. 2). This pursuit of a fixed identity, of transforming into a *woman* rather than engaging in the open-ended process of becoming-woman, ultimately traps Silver within the very system she seeks to join. Even after acquiring a vagina through giving up her mermaid tail and voice, Mietek still leaves her for someone else, highlighting how Silver was just a fetish object for her otherness.

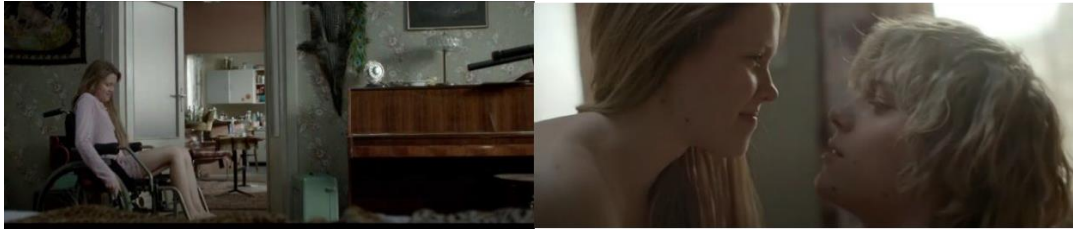


Fig. 82-83: The muted, stable cinematographic shift right after Gold sacrifices her mermaid tail and voice for a human vagina. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

Mirroring Silver's own reterritorialization, the film's cinematography radically shifts from its usual sensory cacophony, highlighting the loss of creative potential and the crippling conformity that accompanies her pursuit of a fixed human identity. As Silver medically transitions from mermaid to human, the camera becomes more stable, muted, and conventional. The vibrant, fluid energy that characterized her earlier scenes, full of experimentation and moments of queer expressions, gives way to a more static and predictable visual language. Even the song she sings becomes diegetic, her words echoing the song coming from the radio.

Returning back to the point about the film's music-video aesthetic and queerness, although both Silver and Gold's narrative end closed off to becomings and with destruction, the film itself is potent with queer sensibility beyond its narrative limitations. As Powell (2005) explains within Deleuzoguattarian film theory, which prioritizes mapping "aesthetic assemblages" over traditional narrative analysis, the distinction between content and expression gets demolished (p. 6). This approach finds resonance in Davis's (2013) discussions of a Deleuzian queer cinema, which he argues that these films, rather than explicitly defining or representing queer desire, evoke a "strong sexual sensibility" that remains ambiguous over "what kind it is"; "producing new concepts of nonheterosexual desire that are not just narrative or

character-based but which inhere deeply in form and style” (p. 37). *The Lure* similarly embraces this ambiguity, using its blend of musical and cinematic experimentation to create a space where liberated flows of desire can be viscerally encountered and explored. The nightclub performance where the audience falls into a Dionysian frenzy offers a compelling example of this idea. Unlike their previous performances that adhere to traditional dynamics of sexual objectification, this scene is characterized by an aggressive energy created through the scene’s punk-rock aesthetics and almost overwhelming filmmaking style with rapid cuts, time stretches, bold colors, and dreamlike sequences. As Powell (2005) notes, such emphasis on “oversaturated colors, distorted sounds and hallucinatory images” generates a visceral impact, tapping into the affective power of film to exceed symbolic properties and resonate on a purely sensory, intensive level (p. 11). Through this disruption of the familiar language of cinematic representation the camera’s gaze, often lingering on bodies and movements in a way that could be interpreted as objectifying, instead becomes a tool for deterritorializing fixed categories of sexuality; embodying an ambiguous sense of desire that is reflected to both the audience and the characters, which no longer comes from the erotic images on the stage/screen.



Fig. 84-85: Bright flashing lights and the aggressive energy of the performance. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

This resonates with the idea that molecular, queer desire can only be attained when “someone no longer searches for or grasps an object any more than he grasps himself as subject” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 89), instead allowing desire to operate through a-signifying signs (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 78). Covered in blue and green spotlights, the Mermaids’ bodies become less defined, shifting between shadows and overwhelming light. This visual ambiguity adds a layer of surrealism, pushing the mermaids beyond being subjects on erotic display. The lyrics of their song adorns a curious tonal dissonance that further deterritorializes the mermaids away from being the objects of the audiences desires. Their song mainly addresses the objectification the mermaids suffer from (lyrics such as “You come in and look me over, you are picky and you are choosy...”), with moments such as when they crowd surf while singing “someone spiked our drink” adding a layer of ambiguous sarcasm. Their performance becomes a rebellion against the passive role expected of them, yet the critical undertones of the song seem to not resonate with the club clientele.



Fig. 86-87: Bright flashing lights and the aggressive energy of the performance.

Agnieszka Smoczynska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

Instead, as the song progresses their behavior transforms from captivated observation to a chaotic, frenzied dance. No longer fixated on the mermaids, they jerk on the floor, jump and almost melt onto each other, their bodies overtaken by an unexplainable erotic force that defies categorization. The audience is no longer simply consuming the mermaids' performance; they are swept away by a desire that exceeds individual bodies and intentions. The visual language emphasizes this dissolution of individual desires into a collective, intensive experience. The framing and editing no longer serves to capture a whole, clear object but instead animate non-specific fragments of the collective assemblage the mermaids, their audience, and the club itself has formed.

The lyrics, the visuals, and the clientele's reaction come together to show a moment where within the club's confines, pure sexuality, away from any human sexual frame, emerges as a force of queer-becoming. For the mermaids, this sarcastic angry fast paced song, with non-sensical lyrics like "holy moly" becomes point where they no longer perform for the club clientele's gaze, but to unleash the true power of their siren song. Following Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) discussions, the mermaids at this moment cease to be individuals defined by their mermaid-ness or their status as objects of desire. Instead, they become individuations as embodiments of pure affect (p. 261). Affect is not a personal feeling, "it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel"; breaking down the boundaries of the human subject and opening up new possibilities "toward unheard-of becomings" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 240).



Fig. 88: End of the song as mermaids stare directly at the camera. Agnieszka Smoczyńska. (2015). *The Lure*. [Video]

Towards the end of the performance, the mermaids' song shift into a melancholic, almost mournful tone. The mermaids, no longer dancing, stand motionless amongst the frenzied crowd, their expressions unreadable and bodies almost immaterial as they gaze directly at the camera. During this sequence as the clubgoers reach for the mermaids, almost as if worshipping, it is no longer for purely sexual purposes. They do not want to sleep with the mermaids or to possess them, but instead to be possessed, to be swept away by their affective power and deterritorialize their own subjectivities and desires towards a collective non-human becoming.

With this considered it is justified to argue approaching the films erotics solely through a human-centric lens of signification and difference would remain insufficient in exploring how sexuality operates within the film in general. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) argue any regime of signs “refer simultaneously to two systems of co-ordinates”: either becoming “a principal component as organization of power” or caught in a movement, creating new lines of flight, new connotations (p. 118). The film's use of objectification and hetero-centric sexuality plays into this dynamic. *The Lure* doesn't shy away from the visual language of exploitation

cinema, but it deploys it in a way that takes away all its usual signifying power, creating a “materially intense expression” that transcends the limitations of language and representation (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 19). The melancholic song Gold sings about shared sadness and emptiness exemplifies this idea. On the surface, it appears to be a textbook example of the male gaze: a beautiful, naked woman singing directly to the camera. However, the film disrupts this expectation by giving the scene a surreal sense of unease and uncanniness. Gold’s nudity, rather than being celebratory or pornographic, carries an air of vulnerability and sadness while the seductive delivery of lyrics about entrapment and longing, paired with her suggestive gaze undermine any straightforward reading of the scene as simply erotic through objectification, yet simultaneously gives the scene an undeniable erotic charge. This mirrors MacCormack’s (2008) discussion on cinesexuality, explaining “beyond dialectics, cinema can be thought as involuting self and image on a libidinal plateau, twisting textures of intensity including, but not limited to, vague notions of visceral, genital, and cerebral pleasure. *The Lure*, mirroring MacCormack’s (2008) arguments, pushes cinema beyond the limitations of representation and into the realm of pure affect, creating a “libidinal plateau” where the viewer encounters an anomalous “cinesexuality” that is “a-signifiable and beyond objectification, identification, and recognition” (pp. 1-2). Through its cinematography, the film seems to argue that desire, in its purest form, cannot be contained within the rigid boundaries of human-centric sexual signification. Through its strategic deterritorialization of erotic visuals, *The Lure* doesn’t just critique existing power structures; it offers a glimpse into a world where desire operates according to entirely different logics, a world where non-human sensations and monstrous couplings give rise to new intensities and unforeseen trajectories of becoming.

4.4 Conclusion

As this chapter argues, queer monstrosity should not be separated from sexuality, but instead should be re-examined through the lens of desiring-production. This approach enables the reclamation of queer desire and eroticism from the constraints of essentialist frameworks. This chapter demonstrates how the concept of desiring-production as a force of becoming provides critical alternatives to psycho-sexual and identitarian readings on monstrous queer sexuality based on deviance and perversion. Examining *The Untamed* and *The Lure* as case studies has revealed how queer horror can destabilize traditional understandings of gender, embodiment, and desire through its portrayal of non-normative sexual relationships. Both films highlight how queer sexualities can be expressed outside the limitations of identity based representations, moving instead into the realm of molecular sexualities that resist binary regulation. In doing so, both films challenge the conventional binaries of human/non-human or normative and queer desires through innovative narrative and visual strategies, transforming monstrous eroticism into a space of queer potentiality. In continuing this exploration, the next chapter will shift its focus to the monstrous queer body itself. Moving beyond psycho-pathological readings or frameworks based on gendered difference, the next chapter discusses *Hellraiser* (Bruckner, 2022) and *Titane* (Ducournau, 2021); engaging with the materiality of the monstrous queer body to examine new possibilities for understanding queer embodiment and desire within the genre.

CHAPTER V

FLESH, GORE AND BODY WITHOUT ORGANS: QUEER- MONSTROUS BODIES IN *HELLRAISER* (2022) AND *TITANE* (2021)

5.1. Introduction

Coming from a psychoanalytical feminist perspective, Wills and Roberts (2017) explain that from the first time cameras rolled for *Le Manoir du Diable* (Méliès, 1896), horror films have been exhibiting demons, ghosts, oozing monsters — distorted uncanny bodies that blur the line between the visual signs of human and non-human materiality. The monstrous body demonstrates the gap between the *properly* self-contained human body and the compromised, therefore monstrous, human form. They describe the monster's body as “an emblem and exemplar of troubled boundaries,” simultaneously “static and shifting,” it is understood as “a literal embodiment of difference” (p. 1). The ontology of becoming rejects the notion of difference as a negative deviation from a normative ideal, instead framing difference as a force of pure potential: unpredictable, open-ended, and detached from predetermined outcomes, driven solely by the process of transformation and relationality itself. This view enables the investigation of monstrous bodies not as

failures but as dynamic, hybridized entities in a process capable of escaping rigid gender and biological definitions. Deleuze and Guattari's reimagining of the body as a dynamic assemblage and the concept of Body without Organs (BwO) is crucial for the principle of becoming. Rejecting the idea that bodies can be defined by genus, species, organs, or their functions (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 60), their philosophy views bodies as "an assemblage of forces with spatio-temporal materiality," allowing studying embodiment as intensive and dynamic without any chance of biological determinism (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). This view allows approaching the indeterminate, liminal, and mutating monstrous bodies and the monstrous transformation processes beyond just viewing them as failures within anthropocentric and patriarchal values. This chapter embraces the subversive power of horror cinema as a vehicle for political critique and social transformation by challenging dominant narratives and envisioning new possibilities for queer embodiment.

For this chapter two films are selected: David Bruckner's 2022 reboot *Hellraiser* and Julia Ducournau's 2021 *Titane*. Through visceral scenes of bodily penetration and metamorphosis, these films interrogate the fragility of boundaries between human and non-human alongside the social constructions of gender and the institutions that uphold them. *Hellraiser* offers a compelling exploration of the fluid materiality of the body as a site of queer-becoming through the bodies of the cenobites. This chapter begins by exploring the queer legacy of the Cenobites design, tracing how the *Hellraiser* series has consistently resonated with the concept of BwO. While earlier films present cenobite bodies as well-defined, organized, and identitarian beings despite their displaced organs and sadomasochism (S/M) inspired modifications, David Bruckner's 2022 reboot redesigns the flesh itself, aligning more

closely with Deleuze and Guattari's vision of the unorganized, unformed and unstructured body capable of fluid and open-ended transformations. This chapter examines how Bruckner's vision offers an alternative interpretation of the series' queer legacy, exploring the Cenobites as figures with radical potential for queer becoming as embodiments of BwO. Following this, the discussion moves to *Titane*. In *Titane*, the intersection of gender, reproduction, and horror takes center stage as the film follows Alexia's transformation through her pregnancy with a car-human offspring, challenging conventional notions of motherhood and the birthing body. The film's fusion of flesh and metal disrupts normative conceptions and erotization of the body, inviting audiences to reconsider their assumptions about gender, reproduction, and the monstrous. The continuum of both organic and inorganic elements embodied by Cenobites and Alexia will be discussed through the Deleuzoguattarian concept of assemblage in both sections, offering an affirmative framework to examine the hybridity of their bodies without relegating them to a fixed, finalized state.

5.2 Becoming-queer of Bruckner's *Hellraiser*: The Reimagined Cenobites as BwOs and Assemblages

Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* franchise, beginning in 1987 with his self-adaptation of the novella *The Hellbound Heart*, has long secured its place within the canon of horror cinema. Spanning three decades and eleven films, the franchise's enduring appeal hinges on the Cenobites, extra-dimensional beings summoned from their hellish plane by an enigmatic puzzle box. The design of Cenobites has always been deeply unsettling and strangely alluring. Barker's creative vision for the Cenobites embodies a blend of extreme body modifications, S/M aesthetics and practices alongside "a

taste for graphic violence” which Giorgio Paolo Campi (2022) notes are all influences deeply rooted in the UK sociocultural context, specifically Barker’s experiences as a gay man in London from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s (p. 75). David Bruckner’s 2022 reboot, also marking Clive Barker’s first direct involvement with the franchise in over three decades, consciously builds upon the franchise’s queer legacy (Keogan, 2022) while simultaneously navigating the evolving cultural attitudes towards transgression and desire. While the casting of trans actress Jamie Clayton as Pinhead and the inclusion of an openly gay couple as main characters reflects a clear commitment to LGBTQIA+ representation, the film’s noticeable shift away from the overt sexuality and kink that had defined earlier installments has led to criticism for stripping the series of its subversive edge and diluting its queerness into a more marketable form, resulting in a “Disneyfied” version of *Hellraiser* (Dry, 2022). Bruckner however expresses he aimed to create a film as “transgressive as the original” by pushing beyond the confines of BDSM aesthetics and examining “extremity in all forms of human experience” (Keogan, 2022). This shift is most evident in the redesigned Cenobites. Stripped of their iconic leather attire, designer Keith Thompson and Bruckner’s redesigns push all the influences that had shaped the original designs further into unfamiliar territories, adorning cenobites with a queerness that is no longer confined to the realm of sexuality. The redesign of Pinhead is especially aligned with Barker’s source material: “more androgynous and ethereal, a being who exists outside of more binaries than just pain and pleasure” (Smith, 2022). These new Cenobite bodies, stripped of their former signifiers, become ideal figures through which to explore Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of assemblage and the Body without Organs and their potential for studying the queer monstrous body in horror cinema.

Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of BwO embodies an intrinsic queer sensibility. As Colebrook (2011) explains, thinking of the body in terms of identity and gender necessarily assumes the body "as a whole that is then given identity and selfhood through normativity" (p. 12). Against this imposition of fixed categories, hierarchies, and predetermined roles, BwO reimagines the materiality of the body as a fluid and dynamic space of potentiality that stands in direct opposition to what Deleuze and Guattari (2005) point out as "the three great strata that most directly bind us: the organism, significance and subjectification" (p. 159). BwO resists the signifying structures and biological determinism that seek to define and limit the body's potentials. Rather than signifying an empty body devoid of organs, BwO, for Deleuze and Guattari (2005) is a creative involution where organs are distributed independently of the form of the organism, each functioning as nothing but "intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients" (pp. 164-165). Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) call to "dismantle the organism" to reach BwO thus is a call to "opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity" (p. 159). BwO therefore rejects the idea of a body as a unified, coherent, organic whole, opening it up to affective new connections with organic and inorganic others in an unorganized, unstructured fashion that prioritizes "disarticulation", "experimentation" and "nomadism" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 159). Thus exceeding the fixed organization and organic wholeness, BwO disrupts the assumed naturalness of the gendered and socially coded body.

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, Deleuze and Guattari (2000) do not disregard the realities of embodiment but rather offer a different perspective, explaining the organism and subject are produced as stratum on the BwO as a “phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation” (p. 159). Yet this process does not produce a fixed, finalized, and well-determined organism understood as a unified and identitarian experience. BwO “remains fluid and slippery” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 15), allowing the subject to “consume and consummate each of the states through which it passes, and is born of each of them anew, continuously emerging from them as a part made up of parts” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 41). On the BwO, markers such as sex, race, etc. no longer signify well-determined, unified identities but rather each become zones of intensities produced on the BwO. Accordingly, one always remains in a constant state of flux, constantly migrating between these intensities; becoming “other individuals as well as other sexes” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 85). This constant state of becoming stretches the body beyond “the codes of phallogocentric functions of identity” (Braidotti 2002a, p. 124) and opens it “to multiple becomings-other” (Powell, 2005 p.79).

From its literary origins, *Hellraiser's* approach to the body has been closely aligned with BwO and its implications for queer embodiment. Sautman (2020) argues that within *Hellraiser's* narrative, body horror functions as a sociocultural critique, exposing how “domestic spaces that adhere to heteronormative patriarchal ontologies” produce bodies that defy dominant notions of fixed bodily functions and presentations (p. 67). Cenobite bodies, with their gaping wounds, displaced organs, and grotesque, exaggerated forms of desire, pain, and pleasure, completely reject the

normative anatomy of the body and its fixed and appropriate functions. They share their gifts with those who seek them, drawing human bodies into a similar transformation where they are constantly deterritorialized and reterritorialized in unfamiliar configurations, opening up to potentials and capabilities beyond the limits of the organized human body. In this sense, the body in *Hellraiser* series, regardless of ontological origin, gets reimagined as fluid, open to change, as well as outside heteronormative limitations. Badley (1996) argues that Barker's work offers a confrontation with "the body as a process, as incessant transformation." Badley (1996) further notes how Barker himself echoes this sentiment, describing his work as a celebration of the transformative unpredictability of the flesh and its power over us, where the "rearrangements of the flesh," reveal the body as being in a constant state of flux (p. 98), "free from any cultural matrix, and from any allegorical or metaphorical superstructure" (Campi, 2022, p. 86).

Consequently, this thesis is not the first to approach *Hellraiser* through the concept of BwO. Powell (2005) argues that by externalizing the body's internal processes and fragmenting its well-defined form, *Hellraiser* replaces the conventional map of the body with "a flux of incomplete parts" while also deconstructing the idea of subjective wholeness dependent on the idea of a unified body. Consequently in *Hellraiser* "Bodies-without-organs are made horrible", giving the franchise its unique horror (p. 88). However, Powell (2005) further notes that in the 1987 film, in this process the body with its violently displaced organs becomes "nothing but its own fragmented components", and thus remains far from becoming a full BwO (pp. 83-84). For Powell (2005) Cenobites similarly "operate an infernal version of becoming" (p. 86). Although organically connected to their body, their outfits made

out of “reversed and externalized organs” function like a second skin, as if the Cenobites “are becoming their victims by the possessive appropriation of stolen organs” (p. 87).



Fig. 89: Cenobites in 1987 film. Clive Barker. (1987).

Hellraiser. [Video]





Fig. 90-93: Examples of Cenobite designs from 2022. David Bruckner.

(2022). *Hellraiser*. [Video]

However, this thesis argues that Bruckner’s 2022 adaptation takes a significant step closer to embodying the BwO through its radical reimagining of the Cenobites. Instead of their body modifications and BDSM aesthetics being external attachments, as Bruckner explains, the new Cenobites are “their own leather;” their flesh itself becoming a living material that continuously metamorphose. In Bruckner’s words:

“What is leather but a representation of flesh? And this idea that anybody could tailor their own flesh and that all of their wounds would be eternally fresh, and they would be feeling everything all at once, but they would have this kind of elevated Zen attitude about the sensations, that they were able to ride on” (Gilchrist, 2022).

Thus the 2022 film arguably embodies a more radical interpretation of Barker’s vision of the body as a mere arrangement of flesh. While the 1987 film maps the body through violent disassembling, Bruckner’s film presents the body and flesh as a fluid assemblage continuously in a process of change. Emphasizing heterogeneity and relationality, assemblages are characterized by “transversal associations and conjunctions between potentially innumerable domains, whether organic forms or manufactured artefacts, human or non-human, animate or inanimate registers” (Baykan, 2021, p. 201). No longer taken as external additions but rather mutations

of the flesh itself, Bruckner's reimagining opens the materiality of the human body to both organic and inorganic non-human couplings. The Cenobites no longer rely on external additions or symbols of transgression, but instead, their indeterminate bodies themselves become sites of continuous transformation and pure potential, embodying the becomings and movements of deterritorialization that define and compose the BwO (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 269-270). Building upon this, the rest of this section examines how Bruckner's reimagining builds upon the themes and aesthetics of its predecessors, revealing a film that is radically queer through its embrace of BwO in different ways.

Body modifications are one of the central influences in Cenobites' designs, with Barker himself labeling Pinhead as the "patron saint of piercing" (Winter 2002, p. 271). As Campi (2022) highlights, drawing upon Pitts' (2003) research, body modifications, from piercings to scarification, have served as powerful tools for marginalized communities, particularly within S/M, queer, and LGBT+ subcultures since the 1960s. However, body modifications possess a queer potential that goes beyond its socio-historical signification as a marker of marginalized identities. As MacCormack (2012) argues extreme body modifications create "signifying punctums on the flesh", disrupting the body's conventional legibility and demanding new modes of perception as an encounter (pp. 257-258). Extreme body modifications challenge the sociological impulse to decode and interpret such modifications, rejecting the notion that these acts must be tethered to a pre-existing symbolic language. Instead, the heavily modified body becomes a queer-monstrous encounter, a question posed to the viewer, disrupting the very framework through which difference is normatively understood and categorized (MacCormack, 2012, p. 258).

In Bruckner's reboot body modifications are not external additions but represent a radical reconfiguration of the flesh itself, resisting sociological or psychoanalytical decoding. Organs are not simply displaced and/or pierced, rather, pierced organs are created from flesh and distributed intensively "inside an assemblage, and according to machinic connections operating on a BwO" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 165). Pinhead's flesh isn't simply adorned with leather; it becomes his attire. The whole throat becomes a pierced vagina, intestines and veins become the body's own bondage. Flesh and metal, inside and outside, natural body and external modifications all blur together, eliminating the possibility of external symbolic representation. Instead all these elements in an assemblage that is the Cenobite body "combine their affective capacities to function and interact with one another in a becoming" (Baykan, 2021, p. 201).



Fig. 94: Old design. Clive Barker. (1987). *Hellraiser*. [Video]



Fig. 95: 2022 redesign. David Bruckner. (2022). *Hellraiser*. [Video]

In the 1987 film, Powell (2005) genders one of the Cenobites as female due to the vaginal opening in her throat (p. 87). The fan base similarly for years has gendered Pinhead as male. In the 2022 reboot, flesh melts into metal, creating a continuum where the pierced throat and head themselves become a vaginal organ. As Braidotti (2002a) notes, the BwO “knows nothing of the indexing of certain organs on to specific functions so as to produce operational sequences: eye/ vision/ sign/ reading/ scopic verification; ear/ voice/ acoustic signification; desire/ object/ appropriation/ pleasure” (p. 123). Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explain the Body without Organs as an intense egg before “the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 19), only defined by what occurs on and in it: “continuums of intensity, blocs of becoming, emissions of particles, combinations of fluxes” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 99). Nothing on the Body without Organs is representative, “rather, it is all life and lived experience” where intensities and potentials exist without representation or resemblance to predetermined forms or functions (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 19). BwO thus rejects all pre-determined significations, including but not limited to gender. In Bruckner’s *Hellraiser*, the

intestines are no longer solely for digestion, the throat is no longer simply for breathing or speaking nor it has been replaced with a human vagina seeking orgasm. Instead, each organ is transformed and distributed in a non-signifying, affective process of becoming, defying normative anatomical understanding and resisting societal pressures to categorize. Thus, the Cenobites in Bruckner's reboot, as BwOs, remain unclassified, resisting gendering and other forms of normative signification.

In the series origins, Cenobites have functioned as visual puns for sadomasochism (Badley, 1996, p. 96). S/M influences within the series however have always gone beyond just an "aestheticization of pain and excess", instead appearing as its core narrative element (Campi, 2022, p. 81). Consequently, the series' exploration of the boundaries of sensation has been confined within the pleasure/pain binary inherent in S/M practices. Bruckner however explains in his reimagining he wanted to expand the possibilities cenobites offer and move beyond the pleasure/pain threshold, instead focusing on "extremity in all forms of human experience" (Keogan, 2022).



Fig. 96: Voight's body with metal parts after liminal configuration. David Bruckner. (2022). *Hellraiser*. [Video]

This shift is evident in the film's antagonist Voight. Believing he has exhausted earthly pleasures, Voight seeks *liminal configuration* from Cenobites, which the film describes as choosing sensation. The Cenobites subsequently transform his body, offering him a perpetual, randomized stimulation of his nervous system that never allows him to go numb. Voight initially frames this experience in terms of a frustrated pursuit of pleasure yielding only pain. However at the end of the movie learning he cannot give their gifts back, Voight asks Cenobites to become one of them.



Fig. 97-100: Voight's gruesome angelic cenobite transformation. David Bruckner. (2022). *Hellraiser*. [Video]

As his skin gets ripped open, stretched, and hung in an angelic form, his expression becomes almost euphoric in a way that cannot be classified as neither pure pleasure or agony. In the 2022 film *Cenobites*, as Voight too has become, leave behind pleasure and other human limitations in their pursuit of pure sensation. In this sense exceeding the original S/M influences, *Cenobites* in Bruckner's reboot align closely

with Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) discussions on masochism in relation to BwO. Deleuze and Guattari (2005) argue against a simplistic understanding of masochism as the pursuit of pleasure through pain. Instead for them, the masochist constructs a specific BwO that "can no longer be populated by anything but intensities of pain" (p. 152). "The masochist's suffering is the price he must pay, not to achieve pleasure, but to untie the pseudobond between desire and pleasure as an extrinsic measure" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 155). Pleasure, in the conventional sense, becomes a disruptive force for the masochist, as it interrupts the "continuous process of desire" on the BwO constituted by the masochist's experiences (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 101). Similarly, the 2022 *Hellraiser* moves beyond its S/M, pain/pleasure themes, offering a visceral exploration of the masochistic BwO where the pursuit of new intensities moves beyond conventional understandings and external pleasure gets replaced with the ongoing process of desire itself.

Body horror and splatterpunk are the last key influences in shaping *Hellraiser's* distinct visual style, yet, as Campi (2022) notes, Clive Barker's relationship with splatterpunk deviates from the genre's norms. Rather than simply exploiting body's physicality for shock value, Barker places corporeality at the center of his work, exploring the expressive potential of body horror's linguistic codes. Barker's graphic depictions embody "metamorphosis processes, physical deterioration, and spontaneous or induced alterations", creating a liminal narrative that defies social and assumed natural boundaries of the body. Consequently, the body becomes unfamiliar, "a fluid and flowing entity, metamorphic and perpetually transformable" (pp. 85-86). Bruckner's reboot pushes this idea further, liberating body horror from any symbolic coding or finalized state. Instead in being perpetually torn apart,

rearranged, transformed, and hybridized, each configuration of the body in the 2022 film becomes a new expression of the movements of “multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events” constituting and circulating within the assemblage (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 51). As “the concept of assemblage refers to an active state of interconnectivity”, assemblages cannot be defined by “the representative sum of its parts” which “eventually rigidifies into a site of completeness by acquiring stasis and positionality” (Baykan, 2021, p. 202). Because each material form of the body becomes a durational process of relation, appropriate to Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) conceptualization of BwO, in Bruckner’s reboot the cenobite bodies can no longer be defined by their form, organs, or functions. In this context, Badley (1996) suggests the body in the original *Hellraiser* becomes a text that does not convey a manufactured meaning, but rather “merely enunciates the reality of experience as a part of the tale, unfolding of differentiation and complexity” (p. 103). Building upon this notion, in Bruckner’s reimagining, the body is no longer a passive witness to the “reality of experience” but rather becomes an active, dynamic force of transformation and becoming, embodying a radical dismantling of structured existence and creation of novel experiences and possibilities.

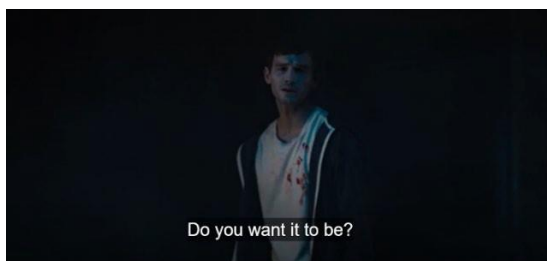




Fig. 101-104: Riley hugging Matt. David Bruckner. (2022). *Hellraiser*. [Video]

As Braidotti (1994) argues in Deleuze and Guattari's reimagining of the body, the embodied subject becomes a form of bodily materiality that is not a biological substance but rather "a play of forces, a surface of intensities; pure simulacra without originals" (p. 112). Challenging the traditional notions of embodied subjectivity, the body becomes "a mobile entity, an enfleshed type of memory," capable of "lasting through sets of discontinuous variations, while remaining faithful to itself." This faithfulness, however, is not tied to a fixed identity or an ego but rather to the "repetition of the expression of one's continuing and structuring adherence to certain dynamic spatio-temporal coordinates" (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). The Deleuzian body is an assemblage of forces that form an "individual," not as the expression of an inner essence but as a stable "portion of forces" capable of undergoing and sustaining constant fluxes of transformations through encounters with other forces and affects (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). This reimagining the body as a dynamic assemblage through BwO necessitates a "recoding of the normative political anatomy" to disrupt the power structures that shape subjectivity (Braidotti, 2011, pp. 83-84), as assemblages rather being "unified into a sedentary organisational structure", keep their "constituent parts together without reducing their dynamic differing to a fixed totality," thus rejecting any "identitarian conclusion" (Baykan, 2021, p. 201). *Hellraiser's* depiction of body horror embodies this idea through a violent rejection

of legible anatomy and the body's role as a marker of individual identity. In one of the haunting scenes, film protagonist Riley finds her seemingly resurrected brother, Matt. To Riley's question, "Is it really you?", Matt's response, "Do you want it to be?" is enough for Riley to embrace Matt's body, only to discover his skinless form reflected on the mirror, revealing the raw, undifferentiated materiality beneath. Riley's horrified reaction and flight highlights the destabilization of identity when the body is deprived of its recognizable surface, making Riley question whether it is even *Matt* at all and thus disrupting the conventional understanding of the body as a stable container of identity. Against the illusion of a rigid, identity-bound body, the Cenobites, along with those who encounter them (such as Voight), exist in a state of perpetual transformation. Their bodies, in constant flux, become sites of radical becomings, often yielding utterly unrecognizable forms. This fluidity highlights a continual and adaptive process of becoming that rejects the notion of a static, essentialized self. They embody a non-identitarian, non-subjective state, liberated from conventional markers of identity such as gender, species, and even organic/inorganic distinctions, reflecting the BwO's challenge to normative anatomical and subjective boundaries.

5.3 Monstrous Pregnancy Beyond Sexual Difference: Human-Machine

Hybridization in *Titane*

Following the story of Alexia, a female serial killer masquerading as a complete stranger Vincent's long-lost son while simultaneously carrying the monstrous offspring of her sexual encounter with a car, Julia Ducournau's 2021 *Titane* is a bizarre film that engages with the longstanding trope of monstrous femininity in relation to reproduction. As Barbara Creed (2023) notes, representations of the

female reproductive anatomy as monstrous date back at least to classical and Renaissance art (p. 43), finding its contemporary expression in horror movies through depictions of women birthing physical monsters from their own body. This motif, as Creed (2023) argues, frames the female womb itself as a site of horror, an anxiety now heightened by advances in reproductive technologies (p. 56). Creed's (2023) psychoanalytic perspective posits that while traditional psychoanalysis focuses on the castrated female genitalia as the primary signifier of sexual difference and thus the source of horror, the female reproductive anatomy and birthing capability constitutes a far more radical and threatening site of difference, eliciting complex and contradictory responses from awe to horror in man (p. 57). Constituting a destabilizing *other* within the male symbolic order, this perceived threat confines femininity through hetero-patriarchal ideals of motherhood, as Hawkins (2020) notes, which rely on "sameness of women's bodies: bodies defined by the category Woman", in return dictating the boundaries of the category woman through reproductive potential (p. 3). This restrictive framework excludes diverse embodiments of femininity and reproductive anatomy, from trans individuals to cisgender women unable to bear children. Hawkins (2020) further notes that egalitarian feminism, in its pursuit of equality within existing patriarchal structures often rejects embodiment, viewing bodily functions like menstruation and pregnancy as emphasizing difference from the male body (p. 9).

However, this only applies when difference is framed within a negative binary, where female is seen as which that is not male. Thus, thinking beyond binary frameworks, markers such as menstruation and pregnancy, which signify the body as non-male, can also reveal molecular lines of flight that disrupt traditional gender

systems. Hawkins (2020) already suggests how Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of difference enables a theorization of "sexual difference in ways that do not treat difference as negative" (p. 18), offering a solution to the persistent issues plaguing feminist discourse on female embodiment, especially regarding reproduction. Following this perspective, this section examines how Deleuze and Guattari's concept of BwO offers a way to approach sexual difference, embracing female reproductive anatomy and processes not as markers of lack, but as sites of radical difference and transformative potential. Deleuze and Guattari (2005) describe the BwO as "nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0; but there is nothing negative about that zero, there are no negative or opposite intensities...Production of the real as an intensive magnitude starting at zero" (p. 153). BwO is not a site of absence or negativity, but rather a field of pure potentiality and affirmative production in which "No organ is constant as regards either function or position" and, "sex organs sprout anywhere" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 153). Thus by shifting the focus from lack to potentiality, BwO redefines gendered embodiment beyond binary anatomy; bodily differences, including those linked to female reproduction, lose their social markers and become unique expressions of positive production. This fosters an affirmative view of gender diversity and embodiment, particularly for queer experiences. Reflecting this discussion *Titane's* exploration of gender, erotics, human/machine relations, and especially Alexia's non-human pregnancy, strongly resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on difference, body, and becoming.



Fig. 105-106: Alexia at the beginning of the movie vs Alexia hiding as Vincent's son Adrien. Julia Ducournau. (2021). *Titane*. [Video]

One of *Titane*'s central themes is the exploration of gender and the gendered body, with particular scenes directly resonating with trans experiences and traditional cinematic representations of trans embodiment. In one such sequence Alexia conceals her identity from the police by attempting to pass as male by cutting her hair and binding her chest and pregnant belly; even breaking her nose to achieve a masculine appearance. This intense process emphasizes the physical and emotional lengths often navigated by trans individuals to *pass* within a society bound by rigid gender norms. Writing on the film's trans themes, Holzmann (2022) critiques *Titane*'s portrayal of genderqueer fluidity as superficial, arguing that it ultimately reinforces homonormativity by relying on "modes of passing that concretize existing sex and gender polemics" (p. 119). However, this thesis contends that *Titane*'s exploration of gender is more nuanced than Holzmann (2022) suggests. *Titane* deliberately overcodes gender to expose the artificiality of these molar constructs and to emphasize the inherent diversity of embodiment. The film highlights how even individuals who conventionally conform to their assigned gender often experience a sense of inadequacy or dissonance with idealized representations. Vincent, the hypermasculine fire captain, exemplifies this struggle with his reliance on steroids, leaving nasty bruises and needle marks on his body in order to maintain his

masculine image. However, as Pelous (2022) notes, it is significantly Alexia's pregnancy that highlights how *Titane* "takes up the task of delegitimizing gender as a means of identification". Despite her visibly pregnant body, an undeniable marker of femininity within hegemonic gender constructs, Alexia successfully *passes* as male to all those she encounters, while the audience retains the knowledge of her female identity. Pelous (2022) argues this duality challenges the effectiveness of gender categorization, whether binary or otherwise, in conveying identity. Hawkins (2020), in her exploration of Deleuzian perspectives on female reproduction and monstrosity, proposes a crucial distinction between films that perpetuate a negative essentialist view of motherhood as defining female difference and those that embrace an ethical model of "difference-in-itself" (p. 22). *Titane* firmly aligns with the latter category. As Pelous (2022) agreeably contends *Titane* operates "beneath, above, through and beyond gender." While seemingly embodying a "cisgender female positionality", Alexia's body evades conventional gender categorizations and "expands birth-giving beyond womanhood" (Pelous, 2022). What is more crucial in this however is the film's incorporation of the non-human through machines, which, as Pelous (2022) also notes, further functions in going beyond trans rights and generating new gender categories outside of the traditional taxonomy.



Fig. 107-108: Example shots from the opening. Julia Ducournau. (2021). *Titane*.

[Video]

Pelous (2022) insightfully argues that “*Titane* liberates bodies from social codes and enables the viewer to interpret them beyond these confines” partially due to Ducournau’s deliberate deconstruction of the body; alienating it from its human dimension and defamiliarizing its connection to a given gender (Pelous, 2022). This can most overtly be seen in the film’s depiction of metal in relation to flesh, creating what Holzmann (2022) aptly points out as an “alien phenomenology” which focuses on how the subject-object tensions within human-non-human relationships both restrict social possibilities and create space for new genderqueer imaginaries (p. 115). *Titane*’s framing of non-human, inorganic others strongly resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005) concept of the body, defined not by organs or species characteristics, but by its affects; “What can a body do?” (p. 256). In *Titane*, metal exceeds its inert materiality and takes on an organic, almost vital quality, imbued with its own unique affects over others, including humans. Resonating with Ducournau’s stated intention of portraying metal as “something alive” (Saperstein, 2021), the film’s opening sequence directly begins with the close-up camera moving through a metallic structure; its oil-dripping rusted parts that embody an almost fleshy quality bending and crossing each other in organic, tangled shapes. This imagery then transitions to the smooth, cold surfaces of a running engine, the mechanical hum filling the soundscape. Finally, the scene shifts to young Alexia, who mimics the engine’s sound, forging a direct connection between human and machine. At this moment, Alexia’s connection to the machine is not about a mechanistic imitation but an embodied amalgamation where boundaries blur and bodies are defined through their transitory passages rather than fixed identitarian categories. Thus this visceral and intimate portrayal of machine interiors, ultimately linked to Alexia, demonstrates the becoming-machinic of the organic and the

becoming-organic of the machinic, blurring the human-machine boundary and echoing Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) discussions of the wasp and orchid drawn into a mutual state of veritable becoming-other.

Such a hybridization of metal with the organic human body allows *Titane* to achieve what Bacholle (2023b) observes as “staging a ‘sexual script’ outside hetero- and homonormative limits” (p. 19). By uniquely framing metal in a way that eradicates organic/inorganic and human/machine binaries, *Titane* taps into a queer eroticization of desire, unbound by humanist categories or gendered attraction. This is perhaps most visible in the film's treatment of cars, not only as Alexia's preferred sexual partners but as components within a broader erotic economy. Paszkiewicz (2023) notes the socio-cultural history between car cultures and masculinity, explaining that car cultures often reinforce hegemonic petrocultural identities, with cars becoming symbols for white hypermasculinity (p. 9). However, *Titane* subverts this association, presenting cars as “demilitarized zones of kinship” (Paszkiewicz, 2023, p. 34) that exist beyond heteronormativity and even humanity, effectively queering conventional car culture (Paszkiewicz, 2023, p. 3).

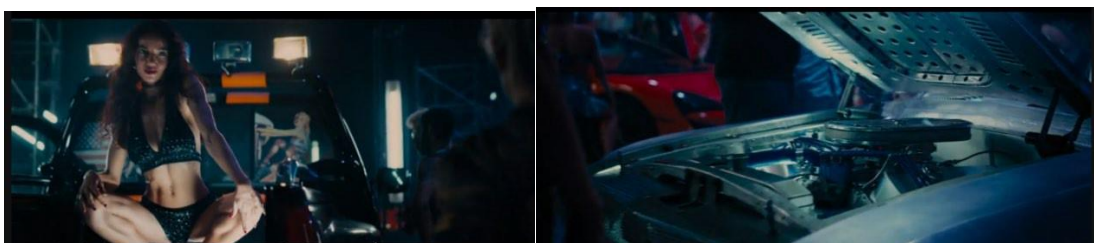


Fig. 109-110: Girl opens her legs as the car opens its hood in the car show. Julia Ducournau. (2021). *Titane*. [Video]



Fig. 111: Cars and woman blurring together. Julia Ducournau.
(2021). *Titane*. [Video]



Fig. 112: Alexia's car show. Julia Ducournau. (2021). *Titane*. [Video]

This queering is overtly seen in the opening car show sequence, where cars and female bodies are objectified through a common gaze that blurs the line between metal and flesh. On the surface this scene reflects Paszkiewicz's (2023) observations on how woman have historically been depicted as "petrocultural commodities": from advertisements to music videos women and cars have been presented as "interchangeable fetishized objects of desire" (p. 10). Just as it does with gender markers, *Titane* engages with this interchangeable objectification to break down the systems that create and perpetuate it. Women in the show strike seductive poses alongside vehicles, with shots of a woman provocatively opening her legs followed

by a car with its hood open. The camera's lingering, dynamic angles treat the bodies of women and cars with an identical, almost fetishistic focus. As the camera follows Alexia around the show, both women's bodies in sparkling costumes and cars with their vivid paint jobs shimmer and gleam, merging visually through their glossy surfaces. The camera's fluid movements make the cars themselves appear to dance alongside the woman. As Bacholle (2023b) perfectly articulates in regard to Alexia's performance within the sequence, "Ducournau shows what male-gazing is, yet she does not practice it" (p. 21). In this sequence, the camera's erotic gaze treats women's bodies and cars with such parity that distinctions between subject and object, human and machine dissolve.

This dissolution of boundaries and the resulting indeterminacy of the erotic desire aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) imagining of desiring-production on the BwO. As desire flows through BwO, it does not link bodies through a fixed identity or a structured subject but through a molecular connectivity: "The only subject is desire itself on the body without organs inasmuch as it machines partial objects and flows, selecting and cutting the one with the other, passing from one body to another, following connections and appropriations that each time destroy the factitious unity of a possessive or proprietary ego" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 72). Ducournau's eroticization of metal reflects this model, showing that metal can act not as a static, inorganic and inferior object, but as a body with the capacity to interact and affect other bodies, releasing flows of desire unanchored to specific identities. The film strategically employs established misogynistic cinematic codes to queer the eroticization of car culture. In doing so, it moves beyond object/subject and machine/human distinctions, operating instead through molecular flows of becoming.

As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) argue in affective relations that initiate becomings, “it is necessary to annul the organs, to shut them away so that their liberated elements can enter into the new relations” that drive becomings and circulation of affective flows within a machinic assemblage; such as how in a fetish scenario, a women’s legs that have an effect on me” (p. 260). Just as the boots of the dominatrix deterritorialize the leg as a human organ, the cinematic framing in *Titane* deterritorializes the components of both cars and women. The attraction is no longer directed towards cars or women as signified entities, but rather towards the molecular flows of desire they emit, which grip all surrounding bodies.



Fig. 113-115: Car sex sequence. Julia Ducournau. (2021). *Titane*. [Video]

Titane’s reframing of cars as agents of desire reveals new possibilities for genderless intimacy, exemplified in Alexia’s sexual encounter with her car. The scene, set after Alexia’s first on-screen murder, begins with her in the shower, the car’s headlights beckoning her. Alexia approaches, her touch tracing the car’s contours with suggestive familiarity. Entering the vehicle, she initiates a rhythmic movement, the car responding with a reciprocal bouncing. While the positioning and movements mimic heterosexual intercourse, the scene arguably engages with a more nuanced and

queer dynamic. This sequence reframes the car as a co-participant in an assemblage of desire, where intimacy is not limited to human, gendered, or organic terms. As the car bounces up and down and its lights flash rhythmically with Alexia's moans, forming a symbiotic unit, where pleasure arises from the fusion of metal, flesh, light, and sound, freed from typical representations of penetration or gender-based sexuality. As Beckman (2013) explains, "sexuality associated with stratified systems of interpretation and organization" limits the body's potential by remaining "a human construct caught up in negativity." In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize desire as opening "towards the imperceptible, the machinic and the nonhuman" (p. 120). Reflecting this idea, in Alexia's attraction to her car, the car neither symbolizes nor substitutes for human masculinity or the phallus. Rather, it embodies an affirmative form of desire that embraces openness to connection and difference. Though the positioning and the car's movements imply a penetrative act, these elements are deterritorialized, becoming non-gendered flows of intensity. Similarly, pleasure is instead expressed through a constant exchange of affects between the machine and the human, making it difficult to discern where Alexia's experience ends and the car's begins. As Pelous (2022) also points out, this scene "disrupts heteronormative schemas," "representing a non-normative sexual arrangement that equalizes man and machine...An exchange of properties occurs that liberates each object from rigid conceptual boxes" (para. 6). The resulting queer kinship between Alexia and the car exposes a new mode of intimacy that defies categorization, revealing how desire, stripped of all preconceptions, can proliferate through any assemblage that consists of human, machine, or otherwise, expanding the boundaries of human intimacy and imagining new forms of non-gendered, posthuman connections.

Alexia's engagement with the car goes deeper than a singular act of transgression; rather from the beginning her affections consistently resist normative erotic schemas, imbuing even seemingly conventional sexual encounters with a distinctly queer sensibility. Alexia's relationship with her female coworker Justine at the beginning of the movie highlights this idea. Alexia encounters Justine in the shower and gets her hair tangled in Justine's nipple piercing, starting a sexual relationship between the two women. Alexia's immediate interest in the piercing, with questions like "Do you beep at the security?" almost functioning as foreplay highlights her fascination is not with Justine as a discrete entity, nor with the piercing as a fetish object, but with the metallic element's intersection within her flesh. Assemblages are multiplicities, they do not unify the heterogeneous elements they consist of but rather "establishes aberrant paths of communication" between these heterogeneous elements while retaining all their differences (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, pp. 42-43). In the later post-car-sex intimacy with Justine, Alexia's visible boredom with conventional sexual performances and her aggressive focus on the piercing further showcases how Alexia does not engage with Justine as a complete, coherent individual but with a continuous flow of desire that circulates through an assemblage of heterogeneous elements: organic and inorganic, human and metallic, among which the piercing becomes a privileged zone of intensity.

Reflecting Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) arguments, in this dynamic sexuality is redefined as "the molecular energy that places molecules-partial objects in connection" and "distributes states of being and becoming according to domains of presence or zones of intensity" (p. 183). As Justine keeps yanking and biting the

piercing, the scene constantly cuts between close-ups of Justine's uncomfortable face, Alexia, and the piercing, positioning Justine almost as a third in a strange, triadic alliance that could have otherwise been a human-to-human encounter. Alexia's fixation on Justine's nipple piercing bypasses Justine as a person, focusing instead on the piercing as a partial object operating independently within the assemblage of Justine's body.

As discussed in previous chapters, Deleuze and Guattari's (2000) definition of partial objects are not fragmentary components of a whole, never signifying a subject or belonging to one; instead, they exist as "nonpersonal flows that pass from one person to another" (p. 71). Positioned on the body without organs, partial objects do not belong to subjects but rather they are drives that form desiring-machines, entering into connections and relations with other partial objects (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000, p. 60). This partial-object relationship within the scene defies conventional subject-object dichotomies by treating desire as a distributed phenomenon that cuts across bodies and things, human and non-human alike, highlighting how even in encounters between more conventionally defined bodies, both the body and desire remains fluid and open to connection outside of established frames.

With all these connections considered, it can be argued that in Alexia's pregnancy, the car is not positioned as the male but rather the whole process resists patriarchal reproductive norms by entirely removing the need for a male paternal figure. This narrative choice subverts the notion that male intervention is central to conception, aligning with Hawkins' (2020) discussion of patriarchal anxieties surrounding the female body's reproductive autonomy. As Hawkins (2020) notes the birthing

capability of the female body has long marked an ultimate sexual difference that male bodies cannot replicate, prompting heteropatriarchal systems to regulate and control the womb by dictating “when (after marriage) and by whom (the husband) a woman could be impregnated.” In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, advances in reproductive technology have furthered this autonomy, enabling conception without direct male involvement and reducing the phallus into a passive source of genetic material which has resulted in the rise of recent debates over women’s reproductive rights (p. 3). *Titane*’s framing of Alexia’s pregnancy and human/car offspring engages with these same cultural anxieties in a queer-feminist subversion. In its engagement with the established codes of the monstrous pregnancy trope, the horror in *Titane* does not simply come from the abnormality of Alexia’s pregnancy but rather from the nature of pregnancy itself as a transformative and destabilizing force of becoming.

In horror cinema, pregnancy is frequently portrayed as monstrous, an embodiment of patriarchal anxieties about female reproduction and its inherent alignment with nature. As Creed (2023) argues through Kristeva (1982), the pregnant body elicits horror within patriarchal discourses due to its perceived impurity and disruption of the symbolic order, which demands “clean and proper” bodies that bear “no trace of debt to nature” (Creed, 2023, p. 47). The womb, with its functions of housing an alien life, altering the body, and culminating in the act of birth however reveals the female body’s “mutable nature”, challenging the notion of the self-contained, stable body. Thus while the male body holds the symbolic order by signifying form and integrity as well as being clearly differentiated from the world, the pregnant female body gets aligned with the realm of nature and abjection (Creed, 2023, pp. 49-50).

Titane amplifies these anxieties by layering them with contemporary concerns surrounding technological advancements and increasing female sexual and reproductive autonomy. Alexia's pregnant body, resulting from her copulation with a car rejects any attempt to place it within the symbolic order. Her womb leaks motor oil rather than blood, and her body continuously transforms in response to the mechanical life growing within her, mutating and fusing with metal in unpredictable ways. This ever-shifting ambiguity extends to the nature of the fetus itself, with both Alexia's body and the body that will be born out of it becoming sites of curiosity, horror, and anticipation. Alexia's capability of reproducing with a car and the resulting machine/human transformations effectively shatter the nature/artifice binary in terms of both bodies and reproduction. In this sense, Alexia's pregnancy aligns her with ontology as Deleuze and Guattari (2005) conceptualize: rejecting fixed forms, functions, or divine designs, and instead reimagined as "a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities" which together form a continuum where inanimate and animate, natural and artificial co-exist as non-hierarchical and non-determinate multiplicities "entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations" (p. 257). Rather than imposing distinctions, this ontological continuity they envision embraces all forms and functions as part of a single, immanent field where bodies and entities are interconnected by the intensities they produce and the relations they form, which allows novel assemblages to emerge independent of any essence or purpose. *Titane* aligns Alexia with such a conceptualization of existence, as her attraction to and coupling with machines, along with the hybrid transformations of her pregnant body, exemplify "unnatural participations" between human and machine. While monstrous and unimaginable within an anthropocentric worldview, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) argue that "the plane of Nature is precisely for

participations of this kind, and continually makes and unmakes their assemblages, employing every artifice” (p. 258). Through Alexia, *Titane* thus redefines monstrosity and reproduction, aligning with Deleuze and Guattari’s vision of nature as a plane of perpetual, boundary-defying becomings.

One of the key ways *Titane* rejects framing Alexia’s pregnancy as *unnatural* is through the film’s ambiguous presentation of horror by refusing to solely locate the horror in the machinic hybridizations of Alexia’s condition and instead focusing on the unsettling nature of pregnancy itself. According to Creed (2023), horror films depicting pregnancy emphasize the grotesque potential of bodily change as the representation of monstrous, especially the pregnant body’s expansion, transformation, vulnerability, and the “loss of boundaries” that make it seem as if it could “tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths” (pp. 50-58). *Titane* mirrors this tradition by showing how Alexia’s body swells and cracks as the pregnancy progresses, with her skin stretching to accommodate the mechanical fetus. Yet as Hawkins (2020) articulates “the pregnant body is visibly in the process of becoming different from itself” (p. 14), thus challenging the notion of a fixed, stable bodily identity and embodying a monstrous process of becoming (Braidotti, 2000, p. 162). Building on this, in *Titane* the physical changes Alexia undergoes becomes grotesque not necessarily because they are inhuman, but because they represent a loss of control and a surrender to the body as a site of constant, uncontrollable metamorphosis. When Alexia first notices her swelling belly and her vagina leaking motor oil, or when she takes a pregnancy test and subsequently tries to abort the baby with her hairpin, her anxiety and reactions remain, unclear whether she is disturbed by the presence of the fetus or its non-human nature. The film’s focus on the shared

anxieties of pregnancy, regardless of its origin, allows *Titane* to explore a more universal horror of bodily metamorphosis and the inherent vulnerability of embodied subjectivity. In highlighting how bodily transformation itself can provoke horror without being attributed to any fixed identity or ontological mistake, *Titane* aligns with Braidotti's (2000) argument on how Deleuze and Guattari's reimagining of the body is a call to consider the "deep, dense materiality of bodies-in-time" in order to "dis-engage them from the liberal bourgeois definition of the self" (2000, p. 161). Alexia's pregnancy, regardless of its origin, forces a confrontation with the materiality of the body as under a constant process of change, disrupting any fixed notion of self. Thus by utilizing the inherent horror of pregnancy to merge the natural and the unnatural in Alexia's body, *Titane* challenges the traditional association of monstrous pregnancy with the abject feminine. The horrors of the pregnant body evade questions of gender or species. Instead in *Titane*, pregnancy becomes monstrous for its destabilizing potential rather than its deviation from the ideal.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how *Hellraiser* (2022) and *Titane* (2021) use the concept of the Body without Organs (BwO) and assemblage to reframe the monstrous body as a dynamic force of becoming. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming-other, these films illustrate how bodies, in their fluidity and openness to transformation, reject fixed identities and boundaries, offering a model for queer embodiment that resists the constraints of both biological determinism and societal expectations. The Cenobites in *Hellraiser*, with their destratified, fluid flesh, embody the BwO as they exist beyond traditional categories of gender, sex, and human anatomy, illustrating the potential for a body that is always in the process of

becoming-other-than-what-they-are. Similarly, *Titane* disrupts conventional notions of gender and reproduction, blurring flesh and metal to exemplify how queer bodies can move beyond what it means to be human. Both films deconstruct conventional understandings of embodiment, rendering gender and sexual attraction indeterminate and unpredictable within their narrative frameworks. Through these films, the monstrous body emerges not as a failure but as a radical force for reimagining embodiment, identity, and desire. It challenges heteronormative frameworks that regulate and confine bodies, envisioning a future where queer bodies, much like the BwO, are liberated from fixed definitions, existing in a perpetual state of flux and becoming in unimaginable ways.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to construct an alternative and supplementary framework for analyzing the theme of queer monstrosity in contemporary horror films that moves beyond psychoanalytic, identity-based paradigms and fixed metaphors, which remains both inadequate and problematic in addressing the fluid, non-deterministic nature of queerness and monstrosity. By adapting Deleuze and Guattari's process-oriented ontology of becoming and its attendant set of concepts, this thesis proposes an understanding of the liminal, indeterminate, and transitional features of the non-normative bodies and sexualities embodied by the figure of the monster in the selected films as queer-becomings. Rather than pathologizing difference within binary frameworks, this approach fosters affirmative and open-ended relationships between queerness and monstrosity.

As a theoretical and methodological guide, chapter 2 of the thesis brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from film studies, Deleuzoguattarian philosophy and its applications in queer theory to reconceptualize the relationship between queerness and monstrosity in contemporary horror cinema, highlighting marginalization,

radical social transformation, as well as experimental and non-identitarian relations. As this chapter argues, the monster, inhabiting a liminal space between multiple and even contradictory heterogeneous elements (human, animal, female, non-heterosexual etc.) has not traditionally been defined as something specific but rather understood as “the (generic) human’s Other” (Hawkins, 2020, p. 19) with the category of human being defined as white, heterosexual and male. Therefore the concept of becoming, with its emphasis on fluid change, transition and transformation has enabled me to theorize monstrosity not as something that is defined, fixed or anchored, but as a process that is always capable of becoming-other-than-itself, constantly shifting and reconfiguring in response to its encounters with other forces and intensities. Taking Verena Conley and Claire Colebrook’s discussions on Deleuzoguattarian queer theory alongside Deleuze’s own arguments on homosexuality, this chapter reframes queer as a non-identitarian, experimental and inventive process of becoming, producing novel relations and expressions beyond majoritarian power structures. To theorize non-identitarian relationships between queerness and monstrosity and its applications to film studies, Chapter 2 synthesizes the ideas of various Deleuzoguattarian queer/feminist scholars, including Patricia MacCormack, Rosi Braidotti and Frida Beckman, which reveals both the figure of the monster and monstrous transformations as affairs of queer-becoming. To investigate how these representational cinematic expressions can open up to queer-monstrous-becomings, the methodological discussion of chapter 2 critiques traditional psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches to queer horror cinema, instead proposing schizoanalysis, as developed by Deleuze and Guattari to explore the socio-political and affective dimensions of queer monstrosity in the selected films.

Together, these perspectives challenge traditional representations of monstrosity in the horror genre, positioning them as radical sites of queer potential.

Chapter 3 both critiques and reframes the historical and contemporary tropes of queer-coded monstrosity and how these narratives can be rethought beyond their symbolic and representational connotations. Approaching the animalized alterity of cannibalism in *Raw* and *Bones and All* through the concept of becoming-animal, this chapter shows how the trope can exceed its problematic socio-political history and instead become a site of queer potentiality. This chapter highlights how becoming-animal is a process that challenges the idea of a fixed subject; instead embodying a mode of existence that disrupts and moves beyond social, cultural, and political majoritarian structures, particularly those related to identity and sexuality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 233), and thus allows approaching the monstrosity of cannibalism not as a failed human subjectivity but rather an affirmative process of queer-becoming. The chapter posits becoming-animal as a framework that can be applied to other horror tropes and conventions, encouraging further exploration of queerness and monstrosity as non-identitarian processes of becoming that exceed the limits of anthropocentric thought.

Chapter 4 argues that queer monstrosity in horror should not be disentangled from sexuality, which has been a main emphasis in the very construction of the trope, but instead could be re-examined through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desiring-production. Through this discussion, this chapter positions erotic images of monstrous couplings as mediums to redefine normative understandings of desire and embodiment. Critiquing traditional psycho-sexual and identitarian readings of queer

monstrous sexuality, which frames it through deviance and perversion, this chapter instead advocates for an affirmative exploration of molecular sexuality as a force that destabilizes binary regulations of gender, sexuality, and other essentialist oppositions like human/non-human or organic/inorganic and thereby capable of initiating monstrous-queer-becomings with each encounter. In its analysis, the chapter argues that *The Untamed* and *The Lure* use affective visual and narrative strategies in their depictions of non-normative monstrous couplings and sexual attraction, creating an erotic landscape where traditional categories of desire are rendered obsolete, dismantling the essentialist categories that regulate human sexual norms and their operations on the socius.

Chapter 5 instead of approaching the monstrous body with its blurring of the boundaries between human and non-human materiality as negative deviations from normative ideals, Chapter 5 argues that examined through Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of assemblage and Body without Organs, queer-monstrous embodiment is a site of perpetual becoming: rejecting societal and biological constraints in favor of fluidity and open-ended transformation. The chapter first explores the Cenobites in *Hellraiser* (2022) as figures embodying the BwO and the concept of assemblage through their unorganized, unformed and unstructured bodies, which resists traditional categorizations of gender, sex, and anatomy, both building upon and exceeding the series established queer legacy. Continuing the discussion with *Titane* (2021) and Alexia's sexual relationship with a car and the resulting human-car offspring, the chapter argues that the film's hybridization of flesh and metal in both its cinematography and narrative disrupts normative erotization of the body and challenges conventional notions of gender, reproduction, and motherhood. Thus

approaching difference as an affirmative force shaped by processes of transformation and relationality, this chapter positions monstrous bodies as mediums for envisioning new possibilities for queer desire and embodiment beyond anthropocentric and patriarchal frameworks.

The three analytical chapters of this thesis are strategically crafted to mirror the dominant concerns of traditional queer horror scholarship. By directly addressing the prevalent themes of allegorical otherness, deviant sexuality, and ambiguous corporality, the thesis showcases how a Deleuzoguattarian framework can provide a refreshing and insightful lens for re-examining these well-established areas of inquiry. Moving beyond identity-based and psycho-sexual interpretations that have historically dominated the field, which often pathologizes non-normative bodies and sexualities by framing monstrosity within a transcendental, moral or psychological paradigm, this thesis reimagines monstrosity as a process of queer-becoming that destabilizes binaries like human/non-human and male/female, challenging anthropocentric, heteronormative, and essentialist frameworks that have constrained the analysis of queer portrayals in horror. No longer conceptualized as the abject terror or threatening embodiment of societal repression, this affirmative view encourages reclaiming queer monstrosity beyond allegorical resemblances based on celebrated transgressive attributes. Instead framing the relationship between queerness and monstrosity through their shared production of new modes of existence, the framework this thesis constructs allows reclaiming queer monstrosity without the negative connotations surrounding the abject. Furthermore as the analytical chapters demonstrate, the framework this thesis constructs allows for the exploration of fluid, dynamic, and non-representational forms of queer sexuality,

embodiment, and desire in horror cinema, enriching the field with new ways to interpret the monstrous and the queer. By broadening the theoretical and analytical tools available for queer horror film scholarship, it encourages scholars to move beyond representational and identity-based readings to engage with the affective and transformative dimensions of queer horror cinema. In this sense this thesis emerges as an alternative and supplementary study that can both incorporate and exceed the limitations of dominant psychoanalytical feminist/queer academic discourses around the genre.

This thesis further contributes to Deleuzoguattarian studies and its anglophone reception by animating and mobilizing the core concepts related to the ontology of becoming in the context of queer horror cinema, highlighting how queer horror can materialize these philosophical ideas to critique heteronormative, patriarchal, and anthropocentric frameworks. By extending the reverberations of Deleuzoguattarian philosophy to contemporary filmic and cultural analysis, the thesis demonstrates the importance and relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas for understanding queerness, monstrosity, and their manifestations in film. Furthermore, it bridges the gap between Deleuzoguattarian philosophy and queer horror studies, a connection that remains relatively underexplored despite the evident conceptual alignments. While queer-feminist scholarly interpretations of Deleuze and Guattari often emphasize their critiques of representational frameworks and their potential for dismantling the notions of identity and subjectivity, these approaches have yet to be fully integrated into queer horror film studies—a problem this thesis attempts to solve.

While I have tried to demonstrate the practical applications of this framework as broadly as possible by focusing on what I identified as core discourses of feminist-queer horror film studies in the selected films, there are still crucial areas left to explore for future studies. First of all, the selected corpus, although diverse, still remains western-centric. The application of this framework to non-western media is not only possible but also highly encouraged as it would open up new insights on how to approach queer horror cinema, especially within socio-political contexts where direct representations of queerness are limited by censorship laws and/or conservative social attitudes. Furthermore, as the corpus is limited to contemporary horror films, a huge portion of the genre's history that is both foundational and still highly influential could not be discussed. Following this, certain foundational queer-feminist approaches to the genre, such as Carol Clover's conceptualization of the final girl within slasher horror, could not be re-examined to see how the framework this thesis proposes would integrate these theories, and what kind of possibilities would emerge from such a project in order to theorize on the queer horror genre as a whole. Thus the older cycles of the genre, from 70's lesbian vampires to 80's slashers and their attentive discourses is worth visiting in future studies. For the sake of keeping both the focus and word count manageable, discussions based on Deleuze's cinema books as well as the audience's role in the image's ability to express queer-becomings had to be left out. As a part of this omission, the discussions around role of affect and sensory experience in queer horror, particularly the ways in which the films' aesthetic choices (sound, visuals, etc.) can produce creative instances of queer-becoming had to be significantly reduced. A future study incorporating Deleuzian cinema concepts, such as time-image, movement-image,

impulse-image, and embodied spectatorship theories would certainly enrich the framework that this thesis began to construct.



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