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Ghouls night out: Cannibal women in two contemporary horror films

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This work is dedicated to my mother and to all queers.

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Go to the meatmarket of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal's jaw? Cannibals? Who is not a cannibal?

Herman Melville

ABSTRACT

The present thesis discusses the horror film, more specifically the ones that feature the cannibal woman. Taking as a starting point Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of the intruder and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, I utilize close reading and affect theory in order to analyze specific scenes of the films *Raw* (2016) and *The Lure* (2015). In the entanglement of gender, sexuality, monstrosity and other markers such as animality, what emerges is a queer formation that seeks to destabilize discursive identities.

Keywords: Horror. Gender. Queer. Contemporary horror. Cannibal. Feminism.

RESUMO

A presente dissertação discute o filme de horror, mais especificamente aqueles nos quais figuram a mulher canibal. Tomando como ponto de partida a ideia do intruso, de Jean-Luc Nancy e o conceito do abjeto de Julia Kristeva, eu utilizo *close reading* e teoria do afeto para analisar cenas específicas dos filmes *Raw* (2016) e *The Lure* (2015). No emaranhamento de gênero, sexualidade, monstruosidade e outros marcadores como animalidade, o que surge é uma formação *queer* que visa destabilizar identidades discursivas.

Keywords: Horror. Gênero. Queer. Terror contemporâneo. Canibal. Feminismo.

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1 INTRODUCTION

It was becoming a stranger to me, intruding through its defection— almost through rejection, if not dejection. I had this heart somewhere near my lips or on my tongue, like an improper food... a sort of mild indigestion.

Jean-Luc Nancy

This study addresses the horror film genre, more specifically those that feature the monstrous, cannibal woman. I am, here, mainly interested in how these women are constructed in the breaking down of borders and boundaries that might allow for a queer reading of the texts. I understand “queer” first as an inciter of trouble regarding gender and sexuality identity categories such as male/female and homo/heterosexual, and secondly, as concerning an open set of contesting and deeply relational knowledges. “Queer” means strange, oblique, and as a word it has been reappropriated from its derogatory sense into a radical problematization of sexual binarism. Construction of gender identities that are opposed to biological determinism and essentialism informs queer in its capacities of theory and practice. Tasmin Spargo (1999) writes that “[q]ueer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire” (p. 9). She goes on to say that

the term describes a diverse range of critical practices and priorities: readings of the representation of same-sex desire in literary texts, films, music, images; analyses of the social and political power relations of sexuality; critiques of the sex-gender system; studies of transsexual and transgender identification, of sadomasochism and of transgressive desires (ibid.).

In the films discussed here, *Raw* (2016), a production from France directed by Julia Ducournau, and *The Lure* (2015), a Polish production directed by Agnieszka Smoczyńska, the main characters are women who feed on human flesh. In *The Lure*, Silver and Golden turn into deadly sirens when they get wet, sporting pointy fangs and long, slimy fish tails, and searching for victims to satisfy their appetite for human flesh. In *Raw*, Justine is the main character, a vegetarian who goes to veterinarian school and ends up finding she has cannibal tendencies hiding in her. Both films deal with the women’s bulging sexualities and their changing relationship with their own bodies, which permeates their process of self-discovery as bodies whose desires are monstrous. The films’ portrayal of the female monster seems to escape

dichotomies like good/evil and homo/heterosexual; both films deal with “deviant” behavior, non-traditional families and abject bodies and desires. The films chosen for the proposed research present characters that are marked by their gender, in addition to being monstrous; their femaleness seems to be informed by monstrosity and vice-versa.

Gender and sexuality are “the most visible marks of otherness” in horror (HALBERSTAM, 1995) and have been the main focus of analysis in feminist horror scholarship, and I propose that, for this research, these categories should function as starting points up to where we look at them as entangled with discursive formations such as animality, cannibalism and monstrosity. I argue that these are tied together through Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection (1982), although not without problematizing some of the implications this reading entails, and that Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea of the intruder can help decenter Kristeva’s psychoanalytical subject into a multiplicity of affects that render the self open to change and to troubling categories such as human/nonhuman.

In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1993), Barbara Creed’s landmark work, she states that the female monster is always constructed in relation to her sexual and reproductive functions, and the films analyzed here certainly subscribe to the notion of a monstrous sexuality. Because of that, Creed provides tools with which to begin an investigation of the female monstrousness present in the films. Furthermore, Creed challenges the Freudian idea of the woman who terrifies because she is castrated, instead theorizing that women terrify precisely because they are not – they are whole, in full possession of their powers, potential castrators (p. 5). In *Raw* and *The Lure*, the threat of castration emanates from their main characters, whose cannibal tendencies and practices make them potential aggressors rather than victims. Creed draws from Kristeva’s concept of abjection in order to theorize the monstrous-feminine as a creature that breaches borders, mainly between the human and the nonhuman. The idea of abjection is central to this thesis. I understand abjection as how it has been proposed by Kristeva; her theory accounts for the apparatuses by which human societies separate the human from the nonhuman, the self from the other. Here, I utilize some key ideas to engender frameworks for the readings of the films. Along with Creed, Carol J. Clover has been responsible for one of the most influential feminist criticisms on gender and the horror film. Clover penned *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992), a study of the *slasher* film and its relationship to what she coined “the final girl”, a character that survives the horrors imputed by a psychopath killer. Clover’s “final girl” challenges the idea that female characters are always helpless victims in horror films, instead proposing that they are smart, resourceful, and ultimately become their own heroes in the story. Clover assesses spectatorship in her analysis,

in that she evaluates how the final girl can serve as a stand-in for male audiences (which she contends are the vast majority of the horror audience) to experience dread and pleasure, effectively constructing a gaze in drag. Both studies inform the present research in their insights into gendered difference in horror.

Annette Kuhn (1994) contends that a feminist film analysis “renders the invisible visible” (apud. HARRINGTON, 2018, p. 20), and in this regard, I believe feminism is the underlying approach and framework to the above-mentioned ideas. Horror has traditionally been filled with just-below-the-surface discourse and ideology, especially with regards to gender and sexuality. Feminism might be able to bring to light certain taken-for-granted aspects of horror films that either corroborate or subvert sexist representations of women. While this study owes much to the work done by Clover and Creed, including, in the case of Creed, access to Kristeva’s theory, it is necessary to point out that they have failed to recognize that the archetypes analyzed by them, while potentially damaging to women, address specific types of women only: white, bourgeois, cisgender, and most of the time, heterosexual. This invisibility of other women is not so much because of the authors’ blind sightedness to these issues but due to the horror genre itself¹, known for not showing diversity in their narratives². It is crucial that these characters are located within systems of oppression that deal with not only gender, but also race, class, sexuality and other markers of difference.

Writers and directors in the horror genre are “overwhelmingly male” (HARRINGTON, 2018, p. 237), and it is one of the purposes of this study to celebrate work done by women in the field, so both films here are directed by women. This is not to say there are qualities in the films that are inherited by their makers’ gender – even if there is such a way to know this, it is not the objective of the present study – but this research aims to provide an up-close examination of their works in hopes to add to feminist horror scholarship, ultimately trying to contribute to more visibility on female filmmakers of the horror genre.

The films covered here are from 2015 and 2016. This places them at what has been called “post-horror”, a questionable term used to describe recent horror films that in one way or another break with “traditional” horror in terms of themes, narrative, aesthetics and other filmic devices. While the argument for the use of the expression is one under dispute, it is

¹ While the films discussed in this study are both European, and France, in particular, has its own history in the genre, when I talk about the horror genre as a whole, I am mostly referring to U.S. based movies. This is due to the fact of “horror’s position within the history of American film as a staple genre” (HARRINGTON, 2018, p. 22) and how North American horror criticism has been influential in scholarship across the globe.

² The title of “Get Out”, Jordan Peele’s film, alludes to black audiences shouting at the screen in a horror movie at the sight of a black character, who was perceived to most likely be killed in the story.

interesting to frame the films within a “wave” that has been notably breaking with the (not completely misguided) idea that horror films are dumb entertainment and hostile to women. It is not the intention of the present study to make broad claims as to what constitutes contemporary horror, or if the label “post-horror” is ultimately a smart one. Rather, I would like to examine the two chosen films in order to provide insight into which existing frameworks of analysis might be useful in reading horror texts that, since the turn of the decade, are increasingly preoccupied with *the intruder*, not as an external force to be dealt with, but as coming from *within*: inside the social order, the family or the self. Even if this has been dealt with before (films like George Romero’s “Martin” and Jean Rollin’s “Living Dead Girl”, for example, explored the theme of the monster’s subjectivity), the new batch of films coming from different parts of the world, such as *Babadook* (2014), *Under the Shadow* and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), as well as the films discussed here, innovate in their hybridity, feminist sensibilities and upsetting of conventions.

Following Steven Neale (2000), definitions of what constitutes a horror film are “hard to come by”, beyond being “that which aims to horrify”. I have taken to mean “horror”, first, as films that are marketed as such. Secondly, taking Noël Carroll’s (1990) hint into consideration, the horror film is that which is haunted by the presence of a monster. While I discuss the monster further in the review of literature, it is necessary to state now that for the purposes of this research, I follow Jeffrey Jeremy Cohen’s (1996) notion of the monster as “an embodiment of difference, a breaker of category, and a resistant Other known only through process and movement” (J.J. COHEN, 1996, p. x). The monster embodies difference through their textual existence, where any kind of alterity can be inscribed onto their body (ibid, p. 7); racialized, sexual, gendered, economic and other “others” have all been at times made to signify the monster, an infinitely interpretable creature (HALBERSTAM, 1995). Through signifying this radical other, the monster’s presence is always haunting the borders of the self or the social body, threatening to dissolve the demarcations instilled by their own categorization. As their meaning is prescribed to exorcize difference within (the self, the social body), the monster’s otherness is never quite separated from the self or the society that denies them. The mobility conferred by this movement of other-self-other makes it so that knowing the monster is an ongoing endeavor that never ceases to always be happening in order to be successful for, as Cohen states, “the monster always escapes” (1996, p. 4): literally, in stories, they disappear only to appear somewhere else, and even when defeated, the threat they represent persists. But they also escape boundaries, categorizations.

I also follow the works of scholars like Erin Harrington (2018) and Jack Halberstam³ (1995) in suggesting that the horror film is one preoccupied with borders, especially those between self and other. According to Harrington, “[t]he horror genre... relishes in the complexities that arise when boundaries – of taste, of bodies, of reason – are blurred and dismantled” (2018, p. 1). For Halberstam, this goes back to the nineteenth century Gothic fiction, where “boundaries between good and evil, health and perversity, crime and punishment, truth and deception, inside and outside dissolve and threaten the integrity of the narrative itself” (1995, p. 2). As a genre film, horror “exists in the conceptions of its audience as much as in the artefacts of which it is apparently composed” (TUDOR, 1989, p. 5). The conventions on style, iconography, narrative, setting, characterization, like in any genre film, are negotiated between producers and audience, who will determine what gets to be a part of the genre’s language. The genre’s flexibility makes it open to interpretation by different audiences in different times and different contexts, and it is this flexibility that prevents horror from having strict definitions. Furthermore, horror has been fertile ground for innovations that happen from time to time and are either accepted or rejected by its audience. This formula of repetition and variation might be the reason why historiography on horror tends to see the development of the genre happening in cycles (CHERRY, 2009): when a film innovates and achieves commercial success, many films adapt or even downright copy the film’s devices, sometimes creating whole new subgenres⁴.

Additionally, however broad and tautological the definition is, the “aim to horrify” should not be discarded right away. To be horrified – horripilated – is to be stimulated, moved, affected. Recent scholarship on cinema has been increasingly focusing on the affects elicited by films beyond the realm of representation, on the film as artifact that plays with time and space and provokes embodied reactions on its spectators. Horror films engage a visceral response from their audience, they “demand that we cognitively and physiologically respond to their fictions by translating their sensorial enactments across our bodies” (NDALIANIS, 2012, p. 3).

When talking about boundaries, I am necessarily talking about what exceeds them. For Halberstam, “the female monster is a pile of ‘remains’: the leftover material, the *excess* of the narrative” (1995, p. 52, my emphasis). Moreover, Linda Williams theorizes “spectacle” as

³ While bibliography states the name “Judith Halberstam”, here I choose to use his preferred name, Jack, and pronouns, he/him/his.

⁴ This happened clearly in the *slasher* cycle, started in the seventies by “The Texas Chainsaw Massacre” (1974) and “Halloween” (1978) and endlessly reworked throughout the 1980s.

something that also *exceeds* the story (1992, p. 3); the “abject”, for Julia Kristeva, is that which is in *excess* of language and the body (1982, p. 1-2). These terms have been coupled with “queer”, as in “abject queer”, “queering the monster”, “queer gaze”; further, Eve Sedgwick proposes that “queer” can signify “*excesses* of meaning” (1994, p. 8, my emphasis). The possibilities for (re)configurations of these ideas seem to be permeated by instabilities which also give rise to possibilities of interpretations across the bodies involved in the experience of the film: the monstrous body represented on screen, the film body itself, and the spectator’s body.

The significance of the proposed research relates to a few broad aspects. First, it regards the use of queer theory in filmic analyses, to which the proposed study should contribute. Narrowing the scope, it serves the purpose of investigating how queer studies can provide a framework for the analysis of horror films, specifically on two instances: gender representation in the horror film in the figure of the abject female monster, and the matter of spectatorship. Moreover, the research should add to the studies previously held at UFSC. So far, four studies have employed queer theory to their filmic examinations: “Punk Rock É Só Pro Seu Namorado: uma leitura queer sobre o filme *All Over Me*” (2014), by Tatiana Brandão de Araújo, “Instigando o Olhar: as identificações Queer nos filmes de Pedro Almodóvar” (2008), by Justina Franchi Gallina, and “Troubling Queer Metronormativity in Latin American Contexts: intersectionality in *Madame Satã*, *XXY* and *Pelo Malo*” (2017), by Claudia Santos Mayer. One of them has used queer theory to analyze horror films, Raphael Albuquerque de Boer’s “Who Is Going To Save The Final Girl?: the politics of representation in the films *Halloween* and *Silence of the Lambs*” (2014), which focuses on the figure of the female victim/hero. Broadening the scope, it is my intention to value work done by female directors in horror. Finally, the proposed research is significant for personal reasons. It is my aspiration to broaden my knowledge on queer and film theories. Furthermore, as a queer, feminist, and an admirer of the horror genre in particular, I am interested in exploring its tactics of allurements and shock when intimately connected to issues of sexuality and gender.

The following questions have been elaborated to provide the guidelines for the proposed research: how can Nancy’s intruder be inserted in the context of the films, and how does it relate to Kristeva’s concept of the abject in such context? How do *Raw* and *The Lure* construct monstrosity? In what way around the binary human/nonhuman does it offer possibilities for a queer reading of the texts?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is divided into two main parts: the theoretical framework and the analyses of the films, using close reading. The theoretical framework starts by analyzing Jean-Luc Nancy's essay "L'Intrus" (2002), and it is divided into "the intruder", where I give an account of Nancy's text; "the abject", an introduction to Julia Kristeva's concept of the same name; "the cannibal", an overview of the literature on cannibalism; "the animal", where I discuss animality; "the monster", where I discuss scholarship on the monstrous subject; "the horror", an overview of the horror tradition and spectatorship; the "queer", a short overview of Queer theory; and "the family", where I discuss family in the horror film. Their intersections make up my theoretical framework, which will be applied in the analyses of the films themselves. The analyses of both films will be done together, following the subjects above.

2.1 I is another

Je est un autre.

Arthur Rimbaud

The intruder lurks on the margins of the familiar, simultaneously threatening it and defining it, ready to make the distinctions between inside and outside collapse, foreign to the world and perhaps to herself. I, the body, am (a body) in time. At the time of the intrusion, I become foreign to myself: if the intruder, the not-me, is now part of me, who am I? At the same time, without the foreigner, I have no way of knowing the contours of myself either. Jean-Luc Nancy's experience makes explicit, first, how the body can be made apart, how it is made of exteriors even inside. In his essay "L'Intrus" (2002), he accounts for a heart transplant he went through and, ten years later, his battle with cancer after taking immunosuppressants for years. He takes this opportunity to reflect on an "I" and an "other", and finds he is his own intruder. The "I" itself is put into question as it is "foreign to the subject of its own utterance; necessarily intruding upon it" (NANCY, 2002, p. 2). Punctuating this notion is the distance Nancy takes from his own self in the text, saying "nothing but the 'proper' immersion in me of 'myself' that had never identified itself as this body, even less as this heart, and that was suddenly concerned with and watching itself" (NANCY, 2002, p. 3). The intruder does not necessarily come from outside, as his heart begins to fail and becomes gradually part of him and other: where he before

had never paid attention to his heart, it becomes a *thing*, something inside of him and simultaneously a stranger that needs to be extracted. In doing so, his body opens, troubling the notions of outside and inside, the continuity of the self, “with the organic, the symbolic and the imaginary entangled”, represented in the breathtaking image of “passing over a bridge, while still remaining on it” (NANCY, 2002, p. 3). Now a body not quite closed and not quite open, subject to contamination by the other, the notion of a self that is centered and unified is thoroughly disturbed. Nancy is impacted by the external world on his own body. From this, binarisms such as inside/outside, self/other, body/thought, animal/human, open/closed, dead/alive and others end up making up, when pushed to their limits, the binary human/nonhuman. The humanist subject operates by demarcating borders and eliminating all that is “not me”, but Nancy questions these fixed meanings by shaking up their distinctions. The intruder haunts not only the human body, but the social body as well. As soon as the stranger arrives and is recognized, they are known by their difference, which becomes categorical. But something is not quite tamed; something about the stranger resists assimilation, it remains unsymbolized.

2.2 Abjection

Nancy’s intruder can be made to converse with Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, through both of these concepts’ relationship to a strangeness that invades the self but cannot be assimilated:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 1)

The process of abjection happens at the level of the individual and the social order. When faced with the abject, “I am at the border of my condition as a living being” (KRISTEVA, 1982), thrown (we could read this as both ‘terrified’ and ‘tossed’) back to a stage before my entrance in the symbolic realm. Wounds, blood, feces, the corpse – all are signs of abjection which an individual, or a society, must be rid of in pursuance of being admitted into language and into law. When the subject comes into contact with the abject, all stabilities of identity are threatened.

If the object, [...] through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, [...] what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is

radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses
(KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 1-2)

The abject escapes signification in the symbolic order and must therefore be excluded, through rituals, in order to (re)establish the proper boundaries between self and other, subject and object.

Revulsion and disgust operate in the subject at their encounter with abjection, leading them to a temporal loss in their perception of boundaries between being and non-being. We are reminded of the fragility of the self, of a time where bodily contours were not well defined. Kristeva links this phenomenon with the moment before the subject is separated from their mother and begins to understand the borders between me and other, a pre-symbolic stage where objects of representation have not yet been established. The child learns rituals of defilement from the mother and Kristeva will contend that “[m]aternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape” (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 72). For Kristeva, nature, the feminine, and more specifically the maternal are, then, the realm of the abject, what the individual must suppress to constitute their self as a whole, coherent and stable unity. Therefore, in order to be inscribed in a symbolic economy, thus fully constituting themselves as subject, one must bear no indication of their debt to nature. Kristeva presupposes a clear, if problematic, distinction between nature (to which woman, according to her, is utterly tied) and culture (the realm of the symbolic/the father); such a division is what gets undermined when the abject appears, which is why the abject must be excluded: so that the proper self remains intact, fully inscribed in “civilization”. The abject is a menace to the stability of the self because it threatens to send them back to a state of undifferentiation; it is that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (ibid., p. 4).

The confusion of distinctions between human and nonhuman is, for Kristeva, one of the occurrences of abjection:

[It] confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder.
(KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 12-13)

At the same time that the abject must be excluded, it must also be kept near, in sight, for it is the presence of the abject that helps define the self: the abject is what I am not (CREED, 1993, p. 8). An important notion put forth by her is that the abject is ambiguous just as it is undifferentiated; it provokes disgust, but at the same time, fascinates: “[o]ne does not know it,

one does not desire it, one joys in it [on *enjoit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion... One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones” (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 9). In the horror film, images of the abject abound blood, pus, vomit, corpses and mutilated bodies, which are featured prominently especially from the 1970s onward. They are “central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific... signify[ing] a split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father” (CREED, 1993, p. 14). The horror film brings us in contact with the abject so that it can be expelled and the boundaries between human and non-human can be subsequently reestablished.

Kelly Oliver’s (2010) overview of Kristeva’s theory focuses especially on the relationship between food and abjection. In her account, the child is socialized through knowledge that she or he is not an animal and “therefore must abstain from incestuous, cannibalistic, or murderous urges” (OLIVER, 2010, p.1317). Through eating nonhuman animals, the child becomes human and starts distinguishing animal from kin. For Kristeva, the prohibition of cannibalism comes with the abjection of the mother’s body:

Is that parallel sufficient to suggest that defilement reveals, at the same time as an attempt to throttle matrilineality, an attempt at separating the speaking being from his body in order that the latter accede to the status of clean and proper body, that is to say, non-assimilable, uneatable, abject? It is only at such a cost that the body is capable of being defended, protected—and also, eventually, sublimated. Fear of the uncontrollable generative mother repels me from the body; I give up cannibalism because abjection (of the mother) leads me toward respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother. (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 79)

2.3 Eating humans

Cannibalism, as a discourse of colonial enterprises, has served to enforce the alterity between the “civilized” and the “savage”, justifying oppression and extermination of peoples who were made to signify absolute difference. In *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (1979), William Arens argues just that: cannibalism was a myth devised by anthropologists to further the divide the colonizers from the colonized and therefore uphold the hierarchy between them (apud. LEVI-STRAUSS, 2016). Levi-Strauss, however, contends, in his essay “We are all cannibals” (2016), that societies with cannibal rituals were a reality, but points to a relativeness of these practices against Western standards, first saying that “[cannibalism] cannot be reduced to its most brutal form, which consists of killing enemies in order to eat them” (LEVI-STRAUSS, 2016, p. 87), and secondly, asking whether medical practices such as injecting brain matter or even organ transplant are not some type of

cannibalism, as he asks “what essential difference is there between the oral route and the blood route, between ingestion and injection, for introducing into an organism a little of the substance of another?” (ibid, p. 86). This way, this marker of total opposition, cannibalism, is made unstable through a “recognition of corporeal similarity”, predicated on the “relatedness of bodies” (GUEST, 2001). At once, cannibalism points to the presence of boundaries and to their dissolution, to the divide between inside and outside and its collapse; the humanist binary logic of self/other is troubled, and the unity of identities is contested. Maggie Kilgour contends that

[t]he figure of the cannibal dramatizes the danger of drawing boundaries too absolutely. But perhaps it equally reveals the peril of not drawing them at all, as the act of cannibalism is the place where self and other, love and aggression meet, where the body becomes symbolic, and at the same time, the human is reduced to mere matter. (KILGOUR, 2001, p. viii)

This collapsing of borders has made appearances on films where cannibalism is depicted. In *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), a group of documentary filmmakers ventures into the Amazon forest in search of an anthropophagic tribe, and parameters of good and bad are shaken when we learn of the abuse and exploitation they put the tribe through in order to make its members consumable to an audience, before being finally brutalized and eaten by them. In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), five young people are brutalized by an anthropophagic family who used to slaughter cattle and pigs but lost their jobs to technical advancements. The family represents country-side working class whereas their victims are the liberated children of the 1960s’ social movements which, in the context of the film, 1974 United States, have been going sour, with the failure of the Vietnam war, the oil crisis and political scandals. The family, made redundant by industrialization, is itself a victim of capitalism where, according to Robin Wood (2016), the ultimate logic is possessiveness and thus, cannibalism. Excluded from the workings of capitalism, but still within its cannibal underpinnings, the family needs to make a living. We also learn that the youngsters themselves have inadvertently eaten human flesh in the beginning of the film, further implicating them as the privileged who consume the oppressed, and thus troubling the division between them and their tormentors. These and other films point to a fragility of distinctions that seems to accompany the concept of cannibalism.

Philosopher George Bataille (1986) pins the separation of humans from animals down, historically speaking, on the making of tools and simultaneous upholding of taboos. He argues that those taboos involving the dead were probably the first ones, along with sexual continence (BATAILLE, 1986, p. 30). For Bataille, taboo is that which functions to contain violence but, at the same time, it invites transgression (ibid, p. 41). Violence is excluded by taboos through work, and this violence is intimately connected to nature. This is problematic as it implies there

is a pre-social realm, nature, which is unruly, violent, and needs to be tamed by cultural structures. Naomi Merritt, analyzing Bataille, asserts that taboo defines “boundaries of horror”, something that imposes “a limit” or designates a “forbidden element” (MERRITT, 2010 p. 208-210). By naming taboo, violence is excluded, individuals become workers and consumers, but transgression is always lurking, invited by the taboo itself. For Bataille, “[p]rohibitions eliminate violence, and our violent impulses (those which correspond with sexual impulses can be counted among them), destroy within us that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable” (BATAILLE, 1986, p. 38).

For anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), taboos delineate what is proper within a society. Douglas conceives of language and culture as social systems which bring order, and taboos will help contour the clean and proper. Upon entrance in language, the subject is now in an orderly world with identifiable things. However, there still lies, between these categorical essentials, something that language cannot quite apprehend, that haunts the subject from its nonplace. Douglas considers that social taboos conceive the body and determine its boundaries; ritual serves the purpose of establishing bodily borders and creating order by exaggerating differences like the ones between inside and outside, male and female and so on. Rituals focus on getting rid of the polluted, and “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” (DOUGLAS, 1966, p. 4), with the body as center of cleanliness practices. Orifices are where the body delineations may break down and therefore are considered potentially abject; rites and prohibitions accompany these orifices to make sure of their purity and the social order that depends on it. The mouth, it seems, is particularly at risk, as food intake makes it vulnerable to pollution, blurring the distinctions between inside and outside.

For Kristeva, cannibalism is a crucial site of abjection. The corpse is the ultimate abjection (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 6) and therefore consuming the corpse, the ultimate taboo. Along with incest, it is a taboo that regulates relationships within a society, maintains order and coherence. Both embody a close relationship to an other, which needs to be surveilled in the interest of keeping notions of self and other, inside and outside upheld. In breastfeeding, self and other are in a transitional space where mouth and breast alternate between being separate entities and one unit. The baby, through this movement, alternates between hunger and fulfillment without distinguishing its own body from the mother’s body. “Through oral-dietary satisfaction”, Kristeva writes, “there emerges, beyond it, a lust for swallowing up the other, while the fear of impure nourishment is revealed as deathly drive to devour the other” (1982, p. 118). The mother’s body needs to be linked with abjection in order to be successfully

separated from the child. Oliver contends that “if on the level of the individual abjection is necessary for separating from the maternal body, on the level of the social, abjection is necessary for separating from the animal” (2010, p. 1317).

2.4 Eating animals

The Enlightenment project produced a conception of the Human as a coherent, stable subject whose main distinction from other animals was language and their capacity for rational thought. By excluding all that is nonhuman, this exceptionalism produces binary categorical imperatives that are hierarchized in terms of what constitutes a dominant value or being, and its subjugated other. In such sense, classifications such as woman, animal and nature are grouped together as the inferior counterparts to their dominant others: man, human, culture. What it means to be human, in this context, is suppressing your animal, “natural” self. Jacques Derrida states that “[t]he animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other” (DERRIDA, 2008, p. 23). This absolute alterity built upon anthropocentrism constructs the human as the opposite of animal, but the space between animal and human remains unnamable, inaccessible; unthinkable by humanist standards.

Derrida talks about “sacrificial structures” and Kari Weil (2012) connects the thought to Judith Butler’s “discursive exclusion” (2012, p. 71), where, through a process of abjection of the animal, subjectivity will be constructed. The sacrificial structure is “a matter of discerning a place left open, in the very structures of these discourses (which are also ‘cultures’) for noncriminal putting to death” (apud. WEIL, 2012, p. 117). This describes a procedure by which the subject, by requiring integrity, a nonviolence against themselves, makes necessary violence against others, whether in war, state violence or the slaughtering of animals for consumption. I am not trying here to equate these instances; Derrida himself cites the killing of animals as a foundational product of sacrificial structures (useful for an understanding of this is Cary Wolfe’s (2003) distinction between animalized animals, animalized humans, humanized animals – such as pets – and humanized humans). The killing of animals is, according to Derrida, socially authorized by means of protecting the human, whether their livelihood (the economy), nutrition, health (animal testing), and other instances of human rights or preferences. The structure of the subject opens a space where these sacrifices are not only justified but imperative: in transforming the *homo sapiens* into the human, the violability of the animal is requisite.

Humanism's fixity and rigid borders regarding what constitutes a human being presupposes an essence that is common to all humans, from which they can enact their subjectivity in a way that is untouched by history and culture. Critics of humanism, according to Matthew Calarco, "encourage us to think about human individuals as being irreducibly enmeshed in a series of sociohistorical processes and cultural relations that constitute us from the ground up" (CALARCO, 2015, p. 30). This opens a possibility to think about how the human has been defined as such and differentiated from their others, including their animal others. Calarco proposes we look at animal studies through three tenets that organize ways of relating to animals on personal, ethical and political grounds. In what he terms the "identity" mode, a philosophy and ethics of animals is based on the evolutionary continuum and constructed around the notion that we share with animals many traits that are said to make us human, and therefore animals should be put under equal consideration – at least some animals. The "difference" approach, on the contrary, defends that neither animals and humans can be organized under the rubrics "Animal" and "Human", due to the diversity each of these categories hold. Instead, we should think in terms of singularities that allow us to appreciate the multiplicity found among these categories. Contrary to the "identity" mode, where the point of reference is the human, Calarco states that "[a]n ethics of differences starts from the premise that the ultimate origin of ethics resides not with me (my rationality, my freedom, my autonomy) but with the Other, with radical difference or *heteronomy*" (CALARCO, 2015, p. 32, author's emphasis). Derrida's encounter with his cat produces on him the notion that the animal (here specifically Derrida's cat) exceeds categorizations or reductions. He sees the cat "as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (DERRIDA, 2008, p. 9). In the difference approach, the borders between animals and humans are not erased but complicated and multiplied. In "indistinction", much like in identity, the boundaries between humans and animals are put into question. However, unlike identity, where a line of reasoning would start at the human and extend towards other animals (the animal is like me), indistinction will question the direction of that thought and ask whether, on the contrary, *we are like the animals*. Further, indistinction asks of the animals that are not like us: should they not be in consideration as well? Identity theorists, by placing humans at the center of ethical consideration and then extending it towards other animals based on their similarities with human beings, reiterate the very discourses of difference. Indistinction theorists, on the other hand,

attempt to develop ways of thinking about human beings, animals, and ethics in a manner that radically displaces human beings from the center of ethical reflection and that avoids many of the exclusions associated with lingering forms of anthropocentrism. (CALARCO, 2015, p. 50)

Identity theorists, when trying to close gaps between animals and humans, end up reinforcing their distinctions. In indistinction, the pleasure of connection between humans and nonhuman animals is emphasized.

Calarco elaborates on indistinction utilizing Gilles Deleuze's concept of "becoming-animal" (CALARCO, 2015, p.). Becoming-other, for Calarco,

is a refusal to enact the ideals and subjectivity that the dominant culture associates with being a full human subject and to enter into a relation with the various minor, or nondominant, modes of existence that are commonly viewed as being the other of the human. (CALARCO, 2015, p. 56-57)

Becoming-animal is about inhabiting zones of indistinction where categories that comprise the dualistic animal/human binary are displaced. It is not a practice of imitation of the animal, but a mental process where the human will creatively emit an animal/human hybrid whose species defy definition (CALARCO, 2015). "To inhabit this zone of indistinction", writes Calarco, "is to find oneself in a surprising and profound relation to animals" (2015, p. 58). Ultimately, becoming displaces 'the human' as a "subject position to which... all other modes of existence are relegated", and is thus profoundly anti-anthropocentric. Deleuze (2003) sees some paintings by Francis Bacon as examples of becoming-animal. In Bacon's paintings, humans are frequently portrayed in an anguished state, sided with pieces of meat, generating zones of indeterminacy where vulnerable, fleshy embodiment recalls us that "every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and the beast" (DELEUZE, 2003, p. 23). If the fact that some animals are like us makes them inedible, the position where we are like animals, in turn, risks relegating us to being nothing but meaty, edible bodies.

2.5 Monstrous feelings

The Latin root of the word "monster", *moneō*, means "to warn, to advise, to remind"⁵. Racialized, sexual, gendered, economic and other "others" have all been at times made to signify the monster (HALBERSTAM, 1995); cultural fixations and silent anxieties in the face of a difference that cannot be completely apprehended (COHEN, 1996). The monster simultaneously constructs the self and threatens its dissolution. In the figure of the monster,

⁵ <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/moneo#Latin>

racial anxieties become sexual fears, class may represent nationality; the politico-cultural monster is an amalgam of metaphorized categories that are shattered and subsequently stitched together, and the slippage between these often-subjugated identities creates a multiplicity of meanings that is all the more threatening. For if the monster helps define the self, it also points to a fragility of the system by simply standing outside it and confusing the boundaries within it.

The monster always means something Other than itself. Like the abject, one must keep a safe distance from the monster, yet keep it in sight in order to delineate the boundaries of the self. For Jeffrey Jeremy Cohen, the monster is that onto which we project anxieties regarding identity and humanity; they always signify something, as difficult as this “something” might be to apprehend. The nineteenth century literary monster follows this change of paradigm as the monster becomes increasingly more human (HALBERSTAM, 1995); their appearance is no longer what terrifies. The Gothic tradition, as Halberstam asserts, inaugurates a preoccupation with the disturbance of boundaries of modern subjectivity: body/soul, male/female, native/foreign, and others (1995, p. 23). He points to Gothic as a “crisis occasioned by the inability to ‘tell’; meaning both the inability to narrate and the inability to categorize” (1995, p. 23). Despite all the meanings that can be attributed to the figure of the monster, the monster him/herself remains unintelligible, at a liminal point. J. Cohen claims that the monster is “full of rebuke to traditional methods of organizing knowledge and human experience, [his] the geography [...] is an imperiling expanse, and therefore always a contested cultural space” (1996, p. 7). For if the monster helps define the self, it also points to a fragility of the system by simply standing outside it and confusing the boundaries within it (GIRARD, apud. COHEN, J, 1996, p. 12). Halberstam argues, however, that if race, class and other categories were common meanings assigned to the monster in the nineteenth century, the invention of sexuality as an identity inaugurates a period where “other ‘others’ become invisible and the multiple features of monstrosity seem to degenerate back into a primeval sexual slime” (1995, p. 7). In more recent horror texts, the location of monstrosity is stabilized in gender and sexuality identities; this happens, Halberstam claims, due to “the success of the hegemonic installation of psychoanalytic interpretations of human subjectivity [in a Western context] which understand subjectivity as sexual subjectivity and identity as sexual identity and monstrosity as sexual pathology” (1995, p. 24).

According to Foucault (2003), the queer descends, at least in part, from the monster. In tracing the genealogy of the “abnormal subject”, he contends that the monster appears in the Middle Ages as a breach of the laws of society and nature. The monster, then, is a “mixture”

between human and animal, between man and woman. From this point until the eighteenth century, monstrousness is a visible feature enacted on the bodies of the disabled and intersex people, nonetheless, from the nineteenth century onwards, this changes: when the embodiment of differences becomes naturalized by medicine, the monster turns into a moral monster; it is the transgressive act that produces monstrosity, not the contrary; the monster is no longer a somatic disorder but a criminal – one who practices homosexuality, for example. The once externalized monstrousness is now internal; it belongs to the psyche of the individual and is enacted through their behavior, and it is this internalized, invisible element that will inaugurate the “abnormal individual”, still carrying traces of the monster. This change of focus from body to soul institutes a new “economy of punitive power” (p. 82); where corporeal punishment reserved for the criminal was a mode of punctual warning, now new regimes of normalization operate on a constant level of surveillance, through medical and legal practices. While individuals will be judged as criminals for their monstrous acts, they will be assessed in terms of pathologies, which will in turn produce the “normal” subject, one who has no traces of monstrosity.

In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed takes on Kristeva’s notion of abjection to the horror film’s depiction of the female monster, almost always constructed in relation to her sexuality and mothering functions (CREED, 1993, p. 7). She proposes that all societies, throughout history, had their version of the monstrous-feminine, and that within patriarchal, phallogocentric ideology, this monster is constructed around the issues of castration and sexual difference. Common to every type of monstrous-feminine is a concern with the loss of boundaries; the perceived distinction between social/cultural and natural realms is threatened by the female monster. Like Foucault’s monster who breaks the social pact and returns to nature, the monstrous-feminine, because of her reproductive functions, is regarded as close to the natural world, a world that is pre-symbolic, pre-social and therefore dangerous and possibly abject. Creed categorizes the monstrous-feminine according to seven archetypes: archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, witch, possessed body, monstrous mother and castrator (p. 7), and argues that these “faces” of the female monster are more telling of male anxieties than female subjectivity, but nevertheless, they challenge the notion put forth by Laura Mulvey that woman is always positioned as passive within the film (MULVEY, 1976, p. 843).

2.6 Watching in horror

Whether through suspense and jump-scares or displays of graphic scenes of gore and violence, the affects the horror film elicits can be extreme, momentarily escaping any rationalization. Linda Williams (1990) draws from Laura Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure (1976), in which Mulvey asserts that film viewing can be split into active and passive modes, to theorize what Williams deems the "body genres". Mulvey's dynamic of film spectatorship translates into a gendered division between narrative and spectacle: men drive the narrative forward, in an action-oriented manner, and place onto women the role of spectacle, the male gaze directed at woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" (MULVEY, 1976, p. 837). In her article "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess" (1990), Williams takes this notion of spectacle and argues that films pertaining to her concept of body genres produce an "excess", not amenable to the film's action-oriented plot; scenes of pure spectacle that generate on their audience bodily responses. The horror film is part of the body genres (which also include melodrama and pornography) which produce "sensational effects" on the viewer. What these genres have in common is the display of the female body featured in moments of intense sensations or emotions. In the movies, the body is shown as ecstatic, "beside itself", with sounds and cries of pain, pleasure and anguish. Williams contends that what distinguishes these genres is that their success is marked by how much the spectator mimics the sensations shown on the screen: the horror audience shudders in fear and disgust, indicating the film's accomplishments.

Elena Del Río (2008) points to Williams' article as a key moment in the turn from a strictly analytical mode of film investigation to cinema as an embodied experience. She proposes a move beyond the cinema of representation into what she calls the cinema of performance. The structures of meaning provided by semiotic and psychoanalytical models are based on binaries such as subject/object, thought/emotion, activity/passivity, which makes them insufficient to analyze precisely these "exceeding" moments (p. 10) that Gilles Deleuze calls the time-images⁶. She takes on Williams' proposition that the melodrama is a cinema of excess and affects in order to analyze films from the genre from a perspective she calls "affective-performative" cinema, one that privileges affect over the visual/aural:

performance [is that which] involves the expression and perception of affect in the body. Affect is the force of becoming that enables characters/actors, and ultimately the film itself, to pass from one bodily state to another, while performance constitutes its expression. But force and expression do not occur as two linear, consecutive moments; rather, they generate one single affective-performative event that exceeds the character/actor and pervades the filmic moment. (DEL RÍO, 2008, p. 10)

⁶ See Deleuze, Gilles; *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*.

Also drawing from Deleuze's theorizations on cinema, Laura U. Marks (2010) proposes the notion of a haptic experience of film. While analyzing over two hundred experimental intercultural videos and films, she devises an affective reading of the works "to understand how meaning occurs in the body, and not only at the level of signs. The elements of an embodied response to cinema, the response in terms of touch, smell, rhythm, and other bodily perceptions, have until recently been considered 'excessive' and not amenable to analysis" (MARKS, 2010, p. xvii). Analyzing this "excess" she is able to codify sensorial experience into language. A haptic mode of viewing involves the notion of touch. Marks' appeal to other senses provide a framework that is different from Western modes of spectatorship, "where optical visibility has been accorded a unique supremacy" (p. xiii). These privileging of a "body epistemology" would be, then, an alternative for film viewing pleasure not as dependent from the "gaze" and its dichotomies of gender imbued with hierarchic sexual difference.

2.7 Trouble with normal

Queer theory, according to Rosemary Hennessy, "is an ensemble of knowledges, many of them contesting knowledges. It is, in other words, a site of struggle, not a monolithic discourse." (p. 53). I understand queer, for the purposes of this research, as something that disturbs the normative. Rather than seeing sexuality as a natural given, queer theory understands it as a constructed category which has historical, social and cultural, not biological, origins.

If queer culture has reclaimed 'queer' as an adjective that contrasts with the relative respectability of 'gay' and 'lesbian', then queer theory could be seen as mobilising 'queer' as a verb that unsettles assumptions about sexed and sexual being and doing. In theory, queer is perpetually at odds with the normal, the norm, whether that is dominant heterosexuality or gay/lesbian identity. It is definitively eccentric, abnormal. (SPARGO, 1999, p. 40)

For Judith Butler, the process of identity formation is an exclusionary practice which will necessarily produce an abject Other, a "not-me" that is to be constantly expelled in order to "constitut[e] a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject" (Gender Trouble 170, 171). Therefore, for the heterosexual to stabilize his or her condition as such, for example, the homosexual must be excluded and deemed abject. According to Butler,

[t]hose sexual practices [...] that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively re-inscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines. [...] The deregulation of such exchanges accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all. (BUTLER, 1990, p. 169)

Significantly, Butler refers to Iris Marion Young's use of Kristeva's concept; Young, according to Butler, elaborates these practices in terms of an "expulsion" followed by "repulsion", which then stabilize the hegemonic identity as dominating its opposite Other. Queer theory proposes that these fixed dichotomies should be undermined, since the subject is not equal to a totalizing identity, but rather, according to Michel Foucault, constitutes itself through practices (KELLY, 2013, p. 4). Drawing initially from gay and lesbian studies as well as from poststructuralist and postmodernist thought, and more recently engaged with other disciplines such as postcolonialism and affect theory, authors in queer studies challenge the normalization of hegemonic, stable identities, and their cultural markers (COHEN, C., p. 438). Butler offers that gender is performativity, a "doing" that will institute what qualifies as "being" (BUTLER, 1993), and that both "sex" and "gender" are categories that are culturally constructed by discourse and normative forces (BUTLER, 1993). Binarisms such as man/woman, hetero/homosexual are necessarily hierarchical, implying oppressive relations. Additionally, "[q]ueer theory is very definitely not restricted to homosexual men and women, but to anyone who feels their position (sexual, intellectual, or cultural) to be marginalized" (DOWSON apud GIFFNEY, 2004, p. 73), that is, other discursive markers such as race are problematized by queer theory as well. Judith Butler (1993) employs the idea of abjection into processes of subject formation:

The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject [...] This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation. (BUTLER, 1993, p. 3)

Although not a methodological framework, queer theory has also been employed in analyses of literary texts, music and other cultural and artistic manifestations (SPARGO, 1999, p. 9).

2.8 All in the family

A young black man sees himself amidst cult members who take over the bodies of black people. A children's book character comes to life to haunt mother and son. An adolescent girl is increasingly seduced by occult forces in 17th century USA. Twin brothers suspect the woman

living in their house is no longer their mother. An unseen threat keeps a family locked inside. A woman grieves the death of her child. A three-piece band is taken hostage by neo-nazis. Mysterious evil lurks the home of a woman and her daughter in 1980s Tehran. A dinner party gets stranger and stranger throughout the night. A business man takes his daughter on a train trip amid a pandemic. A janitor at a top-secret government facility forms a bond with a strange creature. A girl walks home alone at night. A young veterinarian student discovers new appetites. Two sirens sing and dance in a family band. A nanny discovers her boss and lover has weird cravings. A woman is haunted by her doppelgänger⁷.

Of the films mentioned above, many deal with the family. This is true also of the two films analyzed in this study. Robin Wood asserts that the “simple and obvious basic formula for the horror film [is that in which] normality is threatened by the Monster” (WOOD, 2003, p. 71). Normality, he goes on to say, is comprised of “the heterosexual monogamous couple, the family, and the social institutions... that support and defend them” (ibid.). The family is frequently at center stage in horror. Whether these families are terrified by the monster or they are themselves monstrous is always connected to the film’s discourse on the normative. The repressed forces that come, in the figure of the monster, to upset the bourgeois nuclear family, will either be subdued or, from the seventies onward especially (WOOD, 2003, p. 78), remain haunting normality, never quite going away. In twenty-first century horror, the threats that disturb the family are no longer coming from outside but from within the family home (JACKSON, 2016, p. 2). The heteronormative ideals that were once re-established after the dangers of the intruder were defeated (frequently by doings of the father, as in “Poltergeist”) are now broken with no possibility of being stitched back together; the dream of a family unit that is sheltered from outside threats turns out to be a nightmare where the threat is already within, shattering any ideas of comfort and bourgeois respectability. The patriarchal family, centered around the figure of the father, needs to repress any and every attempt at stepping outside heteronormativity.

⁷ The films described here are (in order): “Get Out” (2017); “Babadook” (2014); “The Witch” (2016); “Goodnight Mommy” (2014); “It Comes at Night” (2017); “Hereditary” (2018); “Green Room” (2017); “Under the Shadow” (2014); “The Invitation” (2015); “Train to Busan” (2016); “The Shape of Water” (2017); “A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night” (2014); “Raw” (2017); “The Lure” (2015); “As Boas Maneiras” (2018); and “Us” (2019).

3 THE LURE

The female monster is a pile of "remains:" the leftover material, the excess of the narrative, [...] the female monster is present on the margins but she does not signify in her own body the power of horror, she signifies its limits, its boundaries. (HALBERSTAM, 1995, p. 52)

In *The Lure* (2015), a horror musical drama, two young flesh-eating mermaids, Golden and Silver, come to the shores of a Polish riverbank at night and meet a family (comprised of a white, heterosexual couple and their son), who ends up taking them into the city, more specifically into the nightclub where they regularly perform as a musical act. People at the club express concerns over being eaten by the two, but they are assured Golden and Silver are still young, not in the age for flesh eating. Golden and Silver communicate through mental noises, which humans cannot hear. In the band's dressing room, Golden and Silver look like young, white, able-bodied, female humans as they jump and down on the couch and giggle, but, as the father shows the club manager, they possess no vagina or anus, and their legs will turn into fish tails when wet. The manager, impressed by their exoticness, accepts hiring them as a supporting act for the band, and they are set up to sing background vocals and strip dance, while Krysia, the mother, sings and plays keyboards, Mietek, the son, plays bass, and the nameless father plays drums. Silver becomes enamored with Mietek, who corresponds her affections to an extent, but refuses to touch her because of her animal parts. Meanwhile, Golden kills and eats a man, prompting a female detective, with whom she gets involved, to go after her. The family, upon hearing the news of the murder, gets suspicious of the girls and after a fight breaks between the two, the father assaults them and seemingly kills them, dumping their bodies at the river. However, they come back, and against Golden's wishes and advice, Silver gets a "body bottom transplant" in order to be with Mietek. This causes her to lose her voice; Mietek is disgusted by her bleeding scars and ends things with her. He soon meets another girl, and at their wedding, Silver must eat him in order to avoid turning into sea foam. She fails to do so, and Golden, after killing Mietek, goes back into the river and seemingly out of the now broken family's life.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the film *The Lure* can be read as constructing monstrosity to positively signify queer desire by constantly undermining binary oppositions in terms of diegesis and discourse. I will try to demonstrate how the film's use of spaces and surfaces points to a fragility of distinctions between inside and outside, strange and familiar, which not only illustrates but provokes the unstable positions for which I am arguing.

Figure 1 - Lurking



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

From the point of view of the monsters (see figure 1), we lurk our victims from the shadowed waters. The eye (I) of the horror sees little at this point, but the threat is installed as it is possible to foreshadow the nuisances that await the family: the gaze is veiled, unstable and dark. The film has a special relationship to the gaze which will become clear throughout its duration – the act of looking is not an innocent one, the mediation between us and the film is at times exposed and the film becomes about the act of watching it as much as it is about the story. According to Carol Clover (1992), “horror... is about the eyes... [m]ore particularly, it is about eyes watching horror” (p. 167); through the I-camera that goes in and out of the water the audience is asked to simultaneously turn on a particular lexical of the horror film and consequently identify with a yet faceless monster that lurks from outside the land, the family.

Right after their first show, Golden and Silver sit with Krysia in front of an illuminated mirror, where she tells them how proud she is of them and displays a type of warmth which cannot be properly categorized into one form of relationship or another; as she kisses Golden and then Silver on the cheek, the camera circles from around their backs across behind the mirror. Next, they are framed by black edges and the sound we hear is of something familiar to that of a cinema projector.

Figure 2 - Mirror



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

Two of the characters, Silver and Krysia, look into the mirror at themselves and straight across at the audience (see figure 2), prompting a double position for us as their gaze enables both identification and reflexivity. Laura Mulvey (1972), in her influential article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, argues that Hollywood films are designed for the heterosexual male’s pleasure and that women are image and men, bearer of the look (MULVEY, 1972). She argues that cinema mimics the real-life dynamics that are already in place which, according to psychoanalysis, means that woman is a “bleeding wound” that only exists in relation to the male. According to Mulvey, “mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal other” (ibid.) in order to produce visual pleasure, which is the way it maintains itself. She cites scopophilia, the pleasure of looking, as one of the gratifying ways cinema employs in order to allure; narcissism, she contends, is also a factor: recognizing the human form on screen. Pleasure in looking splits between active and passive, the male gaze directed at woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness”; this dynamic translates into a division between narrative and spectacle. Men drive the narrative forward, action-oriented, and place onto women the role of spectacle; this is made possible by “structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify” (ibid.). Furthermore, in order to conceal women’s threat of castration visibly enacted by her lack of a phallus, she is turned into object of either voyeuristic or fetishistic pleasure (ibid.).

Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to notice that this scene, like many others in the film, does not properly have a “function” in the plot; it features the three main female characters as they fill the frame, almost silently but for a few words spoken by Krysia, looking at

themselves in the mirror. With the camera behind the mirror, or maybe what is behind a mirror (an inverted world, a monster, a camera?), and they are framed into a screen, the spectacle exposes itself as such, there is deliberateness in how they look at the mirror/camera. The space that expanded behind them is brought to the film screen/skin and as characters projected in a film theater they look much bigger than when they fill the whole, regular screen.

The mirror works as a porous membrane dividing up what's inside and outside, but the fixed look of Kryisia right into the camera pulls us through, making a cut on the film skin. The light behind them mirrors that of the cinema projector behind us, allowing for a depth of field at the same time it delineates and fills the space they are in. This is one instance where the film exposes itself as such; it exposes its depths as not real but projected, as if saying one should pay attention to nothing but surfaces. After a moment of pause one of the girls, Golden, leaves the frame, bothered, as if she doesn't want in in this story. It could also be she is refusing to look at herself, or to be looked at, or refusing our identification with her.

Figure 3 - Longing



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

When they are all at home, Golden stares into a screen located in the bathroom (see figure 3), showing paradisiacal beaches; her demeanor is one of longing, translated by long looks into the screen and a camera standing behind her, directed at the portraits. Golden and Silver are further marked not only because of their human-fish hybridity, or because they eat human flesh, but also, possibly, because of their migrant status. The place where they come from is not disclosed (they have been in Bulgaria), but it is clear they are foreigners in transit; they consider New York to be a destination option, implying a wish for an urban setting as well

as following other Eastern Europeans' steps in migration to Western centers (ADAMS, 2019) – but the scene tells us that Golden also seems to long for places by the ocean. As it frequently happens with immigrants in precarious situations (FUDGE, 2011), throughout the film they are exploited economically and sexually; they don't get paid for their shows and are assaulted by the father in a scene that makes it clear that their lives are disposable. Abjection, here, is a social phenomenon, through which some lives (and deaths) are made to be grievable and others, not.

Figure 4 - Golden's song



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

Golden walks around the house naked singing a sad song while Silver and the members of the family are static (see figure 4). She approaches each one of them as if to smell them, and when she gets to Silver, she makes an angry noise at her, who moves. Golden sings about being sad and getting “cravings that are not wholesome” at night. In the bathtub (see figure 5), she turns into a mermaid, with a long fish tail and sharp fangs, suggesting her appetites are blossoming.

Figure 5 - Bathtub



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

Figure 6 - Silver showers



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

While looking for Golden, Silver walks through the bathrooms at the club (see figure 6), and accidentally catches Kryisia performing oral sex on a man whose face we cannot see. Immediately, water gushes from the walls in the corridor as a shocked Silver walks through it. Water is sign, medium and enabler to Golden and Silver's awakening into sexual and gustatory desire. Elizabeth Grosz contends, in *Volatile Bodies* (1994), that female corporeality is constructed around notions of viscosity and liquidity, secretions and flows, not as an ontological status but "inscribed as a mode of seepage" (p. 203). Grosz contends that if in the cartesian

binary logic of body/mind, women is on the side of body, there are bodily zones that “emphasize women’s difference from and otherness to men” (ibid.), and although there is nothing inherent in these zones in their representation of difference, there is a coding of women’s bodies being bodies that leak and serve reproduction functions. Water flowing, here, can allude to mouthwatering or vaginal juices, and as it flows everywhere when not contained, it can serve as a metaphor for something that has not been controlled.

Silver and Golden’s monstrosity seem to emanate from discrete yet intertwining places: their human-animal hybrid status, their cannibalism, and their foreignness. Each of these instances, even if initially seeming to be predicated on the distinction of an absolute Other (the animal, the foreigner, the “savage”), is ultimately marked by instabilities of their boundaries; the mere presence of this “Other” means it is already inside, threatening to dissolve the limits that safeguard and help define the self. When Golden and Silver are brought to the club, it is their smell that brings the manager to the room in which they are, a foul, ‘fishy’ smell which he ultimately discards as unimportant, given how they look as mermaids. Nevertheless, it is the first sign of their abjection; not only the smell by itself, but that it signifies a crossing of borders between human and animal.

Barbara Creed (1993) contends that “[a]ll human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (CREED, 1993, p.1); she delineates seven faces of the female monster which, she argues, are always in relation to woman’s mothering and reproductive functions. They are: “the archaic mother; the monstrous womb; the witch; the vampire; the possessed woman; the *femme castratrice*; and the castrating mother” (ibid.). Of particular use for this analysis is Creed’s interpretation of the female vampire. Although she ultimately links the archetype to the archaic, devouring mother, the oral-sadistic aspect of the vampire figure is well expounded and an apt starting point for elucidating the cannibalistic qualities of Golden and Silver, whose orality is center to their monstrosity. Like the vampire, the mermaids’ bloodlust is linked, if only partially, with their sexuality; this is made apparent through Golden in two instances: when she seduces a willing victim in order to eat him, and when she gets involved with the detective that has been investigating the death of said victim. Silver and Golden’s fanged mouths, along with their fish tails, animalize them, putting them at a liminal place between the human and the non-human. Because of that, as Creed argues for the vampire, they represent abjection. Although Creed mentions cannibalism as one possible feature of the woman-as-monster, she fails to develop it into an archetype in itself; however, she does provide insight into the “woman-as-

castrator” stereotype, which might be of use in analyzing Golden and Silver’s flesh-eating habits in one of its potential facets.

Figure 7 - Nursing



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

In a fantasy sequence, Krysia is nursing Golden and Silver (see figure 7). The scene opens with a distant scream, stemming from the previous scene, and noises that initially cannot be distinguished but eventually begin to sound of water and moans; we see a close-up shot of Krysia’s facial expressions, which demonstrate a mixture of pleasure, pain and shock, lips parted, eyes looking directly into the camera, in the dark. As the shot gradually opens and the room brightens, Golden and Silver are on each side of her, suckling on her breasts. In reality, Krysia is in bed with her husband; he kisses her body, suggesting her fantasy might be of a sexual nature. Back to the fantasy, the camera distances itself from the characters, we realize that Krysia also possesses a fish tail. The sequence is interrupted when Krysia stops her husband from kissing her, as she smells fish on him and leaves the bed, upset.

In Krysia’s dream sequence, liquidity is suggested in Silver and Golden’s act of sucking on her breasts; milk flowing from her. Their tails are also wet and look slimy. Slime does not flow, it attaches itself to surfaces and refuses to separate immediately, highlighting the boundaries on which it sits. Its status as neither liquid nor solid confers it instability. Slime is capable of momentarily sticking together two different surfaces, making the boundaries between them unstable. The three fish tails laying down on the bed, juxtaposed, is an act of intimacy; philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (2003) writes that “to touch the slimy is to risk being dissolved into sliminess” (p. 630); the three women risk dissolving into one another. Here,

Kristeva's pre-symbolic stage of oneness with the mother is suggested by the nursing and by the *mise-en-scène* itself, almost free of distinct objects. In fact, the whole scene is colored in an off-white, milky tone, including Silver and Golden; here, the scene contrasts with the rest of the film where texture frames the characters, a pale, hard surface surrounds them and texture is at the very center of the screen, on the bed and in the characters – especially their tails. There is no action in the scene other than Silver and Golden's nursing, there is no clue as to where they are other than a mirror ball turning on top of them, which suggests music, even though we only hear sighs and moaning and a rising wall of noise which cannot be distinguished. This way, the scene is pure affect, by juxtaposing layers of sound which broaden our senses beyond the frame while at the same time focusing our vision in the very center of the screen, there is a dissonance that diffuses our attention into the moment, disregarding any action-oriented intent. In this sense, the scene is in excess of the narrative, it is pure spectacle.

Like the abject, then, the two creatures in *The Lure* are, at once, terrifying and alluring. They use their mouths to speak, eat, kill, sing, kiss, maim, have sex and, in Krysia's fantasy, suckle. When morphed into mermaids, their mouths become filled with pointed, grotesque fangs, which they use in their predatory endeavors. Given that they possess no anuses, one wonders how their food intake becomes excrement. This confusion of functions of bodily orifices is tantamount with the undifferentiated, pre-symbolic, not-yet-subject of the maternal realm.

Many of the shots are framed by a kind of texture created through objects and patterns seen in perspective (see figures 8 and 9). This happens sometimes when a character is centered in the *mise-en-scène*, but not exclusively; these shots also feature "screens" (real or suggested).

Figure 8 - Walls 1



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

Figure 9 - Walls 2



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

After a show where Silver and Golden take center stage, putting the audience into a frenzy, Silver and Mietek exchange passionate kisses under the gaze of a distressed Golden. She leaves the club and takes to the streets, where she is intercepted by a policewoman, a detective, searching for the suspect of the murder and dismembering of an adult male. They engage in a flirtatious song and dance and alternate roles in such a way that it is unclear whether they are playing aggressor, victim or police, but it is clear they are performing for one another in a way that confuses and destabilizes positions (see figure 10).

Figure 10 - Flirting



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

The idea that they are representing characters is further reiterated by two aspects that can be seen in the frame above. First, their deliberate performances seem to produce the location. Secondly, in the background of the mise-en-scène we see a structure producing a rectangular, black frame behind a hard beam of light that fabricates the impression of a flattened surface contrasting with the angled depth of field that leads to it. This smooth, one dimensional surface creates the illusion of a cinema screen, stopping us from reveling in spectacle as well as echoing the notion of their awareness of the parts they are playing.

After the policewoman takes Golden to her apartment, the following scene offers a few clues about the narrative and discourse, in a diegetic and extra-diegetic level. The

policewoman's apartment is equipped with projected images on the wall, citing their own story only by a short time range delay. They display images of the herself, starting with the car trip that took them there. As Golden and the policewoman get closer in the "present", the latter covering Golden's mouth in self-preservation, Golden also appears on the wall. The policewoman pours water in a glass, wearing a fishnet body suit which invokes Golden's creature status, as the projected image shows the her in her uniform, contrasting that identity to that of herself in the present: she is both detective and *femme fatale* (see figure 11). As seen on the picture below, she stands in front of a type of canal stretching back in perspective.

Figure 11 - Femme Fatale



Fonte: screenshot of *The Lure* (2015)

The depth of field is unmasked as a surface, making us question the other scenes in the film which present similar depth: are we seeing nothing but a screen when we see them? The policewoman hands Golden the glass of water, which Golden proceeds to pour on her legs, thus turning into mermaid. She is now naked on the bed, and the policewoman runs her hands on Golden's scales and licks up her dorsal fins.

Golden's dorsal fins are evocative of the textures of the walls, confusing the distinction of inside and outside, surface and depth: the surface of her body invoking the interior of the spaces she now inhabits. The blinds in her apartment not only thicken the texture in the same

fashion but add to the feel of the scene's film noir aesthetics. More importantly, the touch of the policewoman's tongue on them by metonymy suggests that these walls that frame the characters also enclose them in the tactile, one dimensional layer of the screen, also available to us, the audience, to experience.

Golden and Silver are creatures that have been abjected through a number of instances which mark them as "polluted": animal-human hybrids, cannibals, foreigners. These occurrences both produce and are produced by instabilities. But most of all, it is the defiance that they represent to the capitalist, patriarchal society, through their challenging of well-established categories, that puts their characters in a qualified place for a queer reading. Their abjection (renders them monstrous because it otherizes them), brands them undesirable within an economy of symbolic practices. The unstable position of the monster threatens to dissolve the boundaries that organize and define the self and the social body. Like the abject, the monstrous needs to be banished but kept in sight in order to delineate the "clean and proper body"; the abject guarantees the existence of the normative.

Upon falling in love with Mietek, Silver becomes dissatisfied with her condition of mermaid, which prevents her from having heterosexual, penetrative, genital sex. She then decides to go through an operation which exchanges her fish tail for the bottom part of another girl's body, something that costs her voice. Throughout this process, Golden tries to dissuade her from going forward. The relationship between Golden and Silver is never properly established: they are travelling together, they sing together, and they seem to eat together; they exchange caresses and kisses, although that is always in the context of performance. Regardless of whether they are lovers, sisters, friends, or singing partners (or all of the above), they share intimacy and affection for one another. In order to enter the world of the humans around her, operated by normative imperatives, Silver must submit herself to the political instances that regulate her body, most of all by mutilating it so that it fits into a heterosexual dynamic with Mietek. Assimilating into heterosexuality, however, does not keep Silver from being abjected. Her scars remain intelligible markers of her abjection, of her previous condition as mermaid. Where previously, in human form, her body was whole and "closed-down", with no orifices but her mouth, now she is a bleeding wound, not a sign of abjection but abjection herself. She is put aside by Mietek as still not enough conforming – she might have inscribed herself in heterosexual paradigms but still fails to ascribe to practices that put aside as queer anything that does not conform to. This effacement that Silver imposes on herself will ultimately lead to her own self-sacrifice.

4 RAW

Raw's synopsis is straightforward enough. The film tells the story of Justine, a young woman who goes to veterinary school, following the steps of her parents and sister. After a hazing ritual in which she is forced to eat raw rabbit liver, Justine, a vegetarian, begins craving meat. It then starts to seem like that is not enough, and she finds herself craving human flesh. Unlike horror classics *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1980), the cannibal here is not an external threat that must be annihilated but someone whom we follow in her process of self-discovery: what Justine wants to be rid of is within her, making it impossible to have it go away completely.

At a stop on the way to veterinarian school, Justine is choosing her food from a buffet and we, the audience, are placed as the food, through a camera that points up at her, perhaps foreseeing what is to come. Already sitting down, she takes a bite of her food and spits it out, as she realizes it has meat in it; her mother gets angry at the people working at the restaurant as the whole family is vegetarian. This suggests an all-encompassing mother who is responsible for the child's feeding, the mother of a pre-symbolic realm to whom Justine is still attached.

In the car, Justine sits by the window on the backseat; the camera is up close to her face, lingering on her skin. Her jacket's collar seems to be made of wool, framing her face with animal hair and bringing texture to the screen. We see a close-up of Justine rubbing her hands together between her legs, setting the haptic tone for the scene. The sleeve of her jacket is full of hair, which becomes justified once a dog enters the frame. The hair on her jacket implies closeness with that animal; the shared screen with the dog puts them on a position of equals. But most of all, it is an indication that the borders between Justine and nonhuman animals are not necessarily well defined. The car is an enclosed, safe space where Justine is shielded from the world outside by her parents, again implicating her as a child who is being led somewhere passively. While we know she is on her way to a place, that there is action-oriented intent in the scene, time, the scene is all surfaces, space, from the focus on Justine's skin to how she is framed by textures: the dog, the trees outside, the stuff in the car – all are brought to the front of the screen, creating a thin, continuous membrane that renders the film tactile. At this moment, touch becomes the most important thing in the film and the sense of time gets disoriented.

After arriving at the school and saying goodbye to her parents, Justine begins settling in her dorm room, which she finds out she will share with a man, despite having had asked for a woman. Adrien, her new roommate, is gay; he says to Justine that, for the school, that is the same thing as a woman. That is a casual remark, yet it is a sign of how the film deals with

gender as well as with species, troubling distinctions. They are ripped out of the room by veterans and instantly bond, trying to stay next to each other; they are then led to an elevator where most people are in scant clothing, touching one another's skins, frightened and quiet. In the next scene, the freshmen are crawling on all fours outside the school. As they come out of the darkness, they seem like predators hunting at night. However, as more and more of them come out, they start to look like herded animals; they crawl slowly next to one another as if heading to an abattoir. What this scene brings out in its uncanniness is how vulnerable while at the same time threatening these students are. Opposite to the car scene earlier, the depth of field here seems to imply there is something that can be brought out of the darkness in each of the kids, that the human being is constantly haunted by an animal within, threatening to come out. But their vulnerability breaks with the idea that this "nature within" is wild and untamed.

On the next day, hazing rituals continue. The freshmen are gathered for a photo and blood is thrown onto them, in a scene that reminisces "Carrie" (1976) (see figures 12 and 13); like Carrie, Justine is about to unleash a dark, unknown force entangled with her sexual awakening.

Figure 12 - Justine's bloodbath



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

Figure 13 - Carrie's bloodbath



Fonte: *Carrie* (1976)

The point of entrance, for Justine, is at the moment she is forced by her sister to eat raw rabbit liver during the hazing. After this, she develops a rash on her skin, which she scratches relentlessly in between her sheets. The rash is the first symptom of what is to come, a sign of becoming monstrous. That her skin is the first site/sight of her monstrosity is indicative of a disturbance of the notion that our animal impulses are hidden somewhere inside of ourselves, of our souls; depth and essence give way to surfaces where monstrosity is inscribed. Dichotomies like inside/outside and body/soul are made obsolete on the skin which both shelters the monster and exposes her. It is skin, also, that keeps the body integral, it is what the cannibal will have to tear through in order to feed. In the scene prior to the showing up of the rash, Justine is scorned by her professor, who dismisses her as being too intelligent thus making other students' lives difficult. Here, the construction of the character of Justine points to a humanist view of the subject as one guided by logic and thoughts, a notion that will be somewhat dismantled in the subsequent rash sequence, where Justine is all body.

Justine is full body in frame under a sheet scratching herself. We only hear the scratching at this point, and the sound is almost tactile. She uncovers herself and she is skin and legs, a white skin with a dark spot on her buttocks and darkness around it. She continues scratching on various parts of the body and finally turns on the light of her bedroom to see dark red spots all over her. We follow up close each part of her body as she scratches them violently,

skin occupying the frame and soundtrack creating a wall of sound. Justine finally collapses on the bed, sleeping. We then see the paws of an animal running in the same place, on a treadmill. The animal is a horse and we can still hear Justine's heavy breathing. Like the distinct body parts we saw her scratching, we also see the animal in parts, wherever on its body there is something pulling it, restraining it, areas in contact with harnesses. At her office, the doctor peels, carefully, a thin layer of skin off Justine's rash, which now looks like burnt spots.

Justine's condition is never named, throughout the film. It is an intrusion that resists symbolization, (un)rests in the realm of experience that is not captured by linguistic structures. Finding herself deprived of language, Justine cannot name herself; she is robbed of a fixed identity and threatens to dissolve the boundaries of what Butler (1993) calls "discursive exclusion", where the abjected body is named and excluded in order to provide an identity for the subject. In Justine's case, abjection is precisely where her body resists signification, "the place where meaning collapses" (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 2). This way, through this undifferentiability, it is confused with Justine; her body is it, the intruder. Her body then becomes symbolic and mere matter; symbolic because it is made sign of the condition, and matter because it is the site of its symptoms.

Figure 14 - Justine throws up hair



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

After speaking with her professor, Justine rushes to the toilet, coughing and gagging. She throws up hair and saliva (see figure 14). The strings of hair keep coming out of her mouth; Justine is turned inside out. Here, the distinctions between inside and outside are made unstable. In Kristeva's terms, abjection manifests itself in nausea: "nausea makes me balk at that [which]

separates me from the mother. [...] ‘I’ want none of that element [...] ‘I’ do not want to assimilate it [...] ‘I’ expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself” (1981, p. 3). Vomit is a reminder that the mouth is an opening where flux goes both ways, making it a volatile boundary. While the outflux of words is civilizing, the outflux of vomit is connected to abjection; it confuses the distinctions between self and other at the moment when what was supposed to be introjected comes out again. Vomit points to a fragility of the body that needs to consume in order to live but is not free from rejecting what nourishes. In Justine’s case, what comes out is something that should have never been inside to begin with, hair. Ingesting hair implies eating not just the flesh but the skin of animals, indistinctively consuming parts that were not made for consumption – in this way, the hair is a metonymy for the animal’s entire body, it says that there are no parts that cannot be ingested.

To experience abjection, in Justine’s case, is to come up against revulsion and disgust directed at bodily waste, food, sexual difference (GROSZ, 1994, p. 193); the contact with these matters sends the subject back to a state of undifferentiation between self and other, a time before the constitution of the subject as such. With this unravelling of the subject, the distinction between human and the nonhuman is compromised; “[t]he experience of abjection... endanger[s]... the individual... it threatens the boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins” (ARYA, 2017, p. 51). Furthermore, Justine’s condition not only animalizes herself but others as well, when she renders their bodies subject to consumption.

After a night out together, Justine goes to her sister’s dormitory room, where Alex proceeds to remove hair from Justine’s body, telling her that at her age, she was already getting “Brazilians”. Justine lies on the bed with her legs spread apart, and for a moment, the dog, Quickie, gets herself in between her legs.

Figure 15 - Teeth



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

In *Idols of Perversity* (1986), Bram Dijkstra expatiates on the association of women and wild animals in paintings. The paintings he analyzes feature lions, bears, tigers and others, always near the women's genital area; the animal's "growling jaws suggested the *vagina dentata* which turn-of-the-century men feared they might find hidden beneath [the woman's] gown" (DIJKSTRA, 1986, p. 294). The closeness of the dog with Justine's genital area points to an affinity between animal and girl (see figure 15), making a connection that implies that the threat of castration emanates not only from Justine's mouth but also her vagina. The other connection might be about hair. By removing hair from Justine's groins, Alex is not only feminizing her by recent Western beauty standards, but she is also de-animalizing her.

After removing some of the hair on Justine's groin, Alex spreads the wax on the other side under Justine's protests, however, when she tries to pull it out, it gets stuck. Alex then gets scissors in order to cut the wax off, but as she leans in to do it, Justine gets restless and pounds against the scissors, chopping off Alex's middle finger (see figures 16 and 17).

Figure 16 - Waxing



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

Figure 17 - The finger



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

There is again a suggestion that Justine's vagina is castrating, that she is not the "bearer of the bleeding wound" but the cause of the wound in others, troubling the notion of her earlier displayed passivity and instead placing her as a dangerous threat to others. This, of course, makes her monstrous: she inverts the equation that women are castrated and therefore powerless and makes it so that her body is a site of terror, ready to maim anyone that comes near her. On the face of it, this dynamic is not unlike many horror films where women are the amalgam of sex and death. However, Justine troubles this by escaping the punishment usually attached to such construction of characters.

After having her finger cut off, Alex faints. Justine, panicked, calls the emergency number and is instructed to keep the finger on ice. She looks frantically for the finger and finds it when Quickie is approaching it; she quickly gets the dog away from the finger and picks it up, then looking in the refrigerator for ice, which she doesn't find. Defeated, she sits down and looks at Quickie; she then looks at the finger, dripping blood, closer and closer. The soundtrack is ever more present, suspenseful. Justine examines the finger, picks on its skin, faintly smiles. When more blood drips from the finger, she puts her hand below it to catch it, and as the blood spills from her hand, she quickly brings the hand to her mouth and drinks it; in the same movement, she licks the finger and stops, as if realizing what she has done. Slowly, then more avidly, she starts nibbling on the finger's skin (see figure 18).

Figure 18 - First bite



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

Skin is surface, it is what guards bloody horror; if being inside one's skin means feeling out their identity, ingesting someone's skin could mean incorporating who they are, engulfing their distinctiveness, ultimately obliterating the other's selfhood by metonymy. Skin, in *Raw*, is open to being marked by desire, of the self or the other, or it is yet where self and other are not discernible, as a body leaves prints (or bite marks) on another body. Depth and essence, connected in literature and psychoanalysis to our "true selves", here liquefy into surfaces. Cannibalism reinforces the division between self and other at the same time it dissolves the boundaries it produces.

Figure 19 - The gaze



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

Justine watches a football match between a few guys, among them Adrien. Her gaze is intent on Adrien, following him around the field and watching him get in an argument with another player (see figure 19). For Carol J. Clover (1992), we are asked to identify with the killer through the I-camera, at moments when he (it is usually a he) is lurking his potential (female) victims. These moments are never long, and we don't see the killer at all. *Raw* inverts this dynamic by placing the female monster as the holder of the gaze, and we are asked, through subjective camera, to look at her potential male victim as prey, sexual and otherwise. He becomes the "bearer of the look" in a scene where Justine/the camera follows him, freezing, at that moment, the flow of narrative. There is no more question whether she wants him now we are seeing through her, but the question of whether she wants him in a sexual manner or as dinner remains open. In fact, there is no certainty about how these two things are related, but in this scene they seem intertwined with each other. At this point, he is a potential victim, but the blood on Justine's nose is yet another symptom of the condition, this one marked... All her symptoms are surfacing, as if wanting to get out of her body. She is overflowing, like it is the condition itself that wants to expand, take up all her body and beyond.

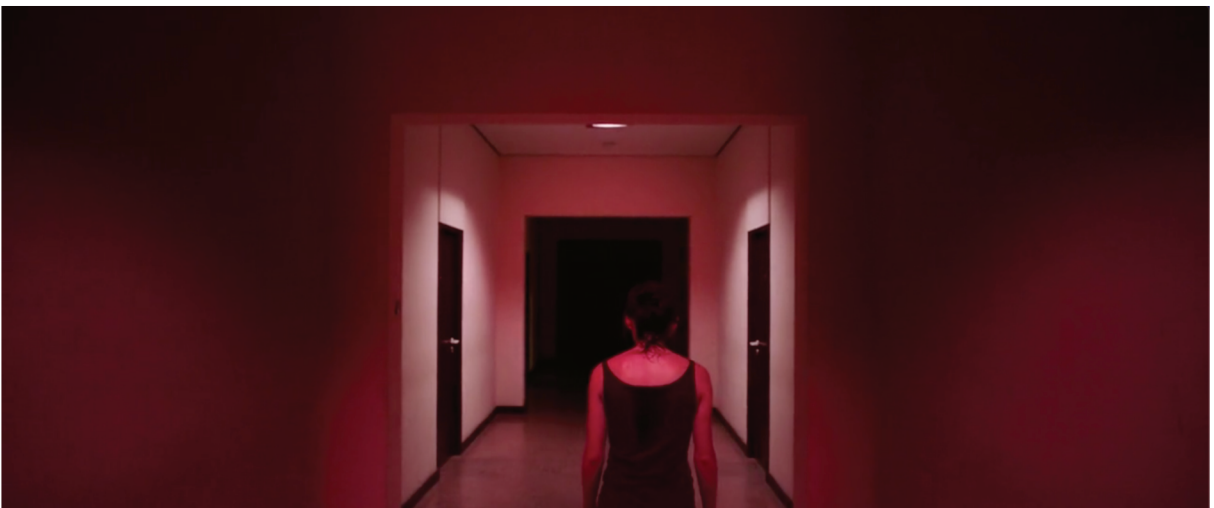
Figure 20 - Symptoms



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

As Justine ignores her cravings, her symptoms get worse. In a scene, she is under the sheets while what sound like chains hit her repeatedly, provoking pain (see figure 20). She tries to protect herself from the lashes by bracing herself. Justine is not just monster; she is victim of her condition. She goes through the horrors that her condition imposes her, much like a victim of a monster or a killer would. In a sense Justine is a final girl, her own victim and hero. Like the killer at the end of movies, there is always the promise that it will come back again.

Figure 21 - Walls 3



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

Justine then leaves the bedroom, soaking in sweat, and walks down the corridors of the dormitory (see figure 21). She is bathed in a pink/reddish light, and the walls beside her form a

flat screen framing her as she stands outside the corridor with two doors and a dark background. The lights in the corridor make it seem like it is a room, a box to which Justine stands outside. It is as if she is outside of the story for a moment, engulfed in nothingness, outside of time. The warm red light transforms Justine's ever-growing bloodlust into sensorial overload that is concomitant to the character's transformation, as if she is reaching the peak of her desires. Justine enters a room and is immediately splashed with blue paint. The students in the room then enlist a guy with yellow paint on him, pushed them into a bathroom and tell them not to come out until both are green. The guy takes the initiative and pulls Justine closer to him, running his hands over her chest, mixing the colors. He then rubs his hands on her buttocks and legs; Justine throws her head back, an expression of pleasure on her face. Skin mixes with skin, leaving prints, the paint sliming across their bodies, little by little the blue and yellow turn into green. The paint denounces where bodies have been, on the walls of the bathroom. They are surrounded by the presence of other bodies, the exteriority of skin engulfing them. They kiss, but Justine pushes him away and walks across the room. The guy approaches her again, it is clear that Justine is fighting her feelings: her body language and expression tell us so. As they kiss again, the frame turns slightly so to encompass a mirror on which they are reflected. Instead of a depth of field, however, what we see in the mirror is almost a print of the two of them (see figure 22).

Figure 22 - Skin



Fonte: screenshot of *Raw* (2016)

All the scene indicates surfaces, from skin to the prints on the walls to the mirror. When the camera is back in the bedroom, we hear a scream coming from the bathroom and we learn

Justine has pierced through the surfaces by biting the lips of the guy. He comes out, bleeding; Justine has his blood on her mouth. The mouth is a liminal place, a boundary that “allow[s] the world... to become a part of us” (PIATTI-FARNELL, 2017, p. 41); because of that, it is an othering site, where what comes in is determined by cultural standards of taste, so when Justine eats part of the guy’s lips, she is breaking not only the border between self and other, but troubling the culturally determined notions of touch and taste. In this sense, Justine becomes abject, in excess of herself.

5 FINAL REMARKS

The abject appears in the films as corpses, mutilated bodies, blood, spit, tore up skin, the suggestion of smell, slime. Most of all, it is the act of the ingestion of human flesh that is abject, but for Justine, Golden and Silver, that is also a source of desire. This indifferenciability between abjection and desire is what intrudes, what comes to come to make itself known to its host. The abjection of this desire marks it as a nonhuman occurrence, it must be expelled in order to delineate the proper body with its proper, policed, sexuality. Throughout the narratives, their bodies go through the shock of the first ingestion, that displaces self and other not as opposites anymore but as concomitant beings; this reconfigures not only body but the human as unfinished, open to intrusions. The coming of the intruder never ceases to be an intrusion, despite the possible attempts to naturalize it. Justine, Golden and Silver deal with their intruder, which consumes them as much as they want to consume the other, differently: Silver does not want to be a monster anymore; it is implied that Justine will be looking for ways to “tame” her condition; and Golden swims off unbounded. These three instances can be analyzed in terms of how they disturb the normative.

By the end of *Raw*, we know Justine’s condition runs in the women of the family. Her father shows her his scars, caused by her mother, and tells Justine she will find a way of living with it. In her mother’s case, her “way of living with it” was through marriage, that is, she is, in a way, brought into heteronormativity through her condition. Although nothing indicates if Justine will or will not follow her mother’s steps, it is implied Justine must find a way of being inserted in the social body as a “normal” woman. In *The Lure*, Golden, on the other hand, swims away from the heteronormative family into a supposable journey (whichever *telos* that might imply), after experiencing rejection from Silver, who chooses to become sea foam over killing Mietek. Silver had tried to conform to heteronormativity by getting her tail removed and implanting the bottom of another woman’s body and in doing so, getting rid of her animal parts. But her scars are sign, for Mietek, that she will never live up to be a “real” woman, even if she performs femininity. *The Lure* and *Raw* can be said to embrace queerness, narratively speaking, in the character of Golden and Justine. Through their monstrousness, they escape binary categorizations. The vagina dentata insinuates that female sexuality is dangerous, monstrous, and must be surveilled, but the films turn this negative framing into one where a desirous figure manages to emerge. With Justine and Golden, we find that cannibalism is a mode of agency where they decide what enters upon their bodies – and where pleasure is located for them. This

open, unbounded affect flows forth and marks the monstrous not as inherently negative but as generative and productive.

Additionally, in both films, the film-body itself is constantly framing and reframing the diegetic gaze and leading us toward unstably gendered identification. The female bodies in the films are at times displayed as fragmented, both within the frame and in editing itself, which “cuts up” body-image parts. In this, the sense of woman as a coherent subject is destabilized. “Woman”, of course, has to be preemptively thought of as an open and historically specific category, in fact troubling the singular word which implies there is a particular way to be a woman – a source of potential oppression of women who are not in the most visible place in the intersecting set of discursive identities. But to the extent that these women are white, cisgender and visually coded as “feminine”, their “femaleness” is disturbed by how they place themselves regarding binaries such as active/passive, inside/outside, production/reproduction, human/nonhuman and others.

Specifically, the binary human/nonhuman should be taken into broader consideration. Here, the concept of abjection that has been laid down on this study permeates the two main, intersecting concepts that mark up the breaking down of the dualism, species and monstrosity. In both films, the source of the women’s abjection is their appetite. Their cannibalism breaks the border between civilized and savage; the eating of human flesh also entails the consumption of blood, skin, viscera – all abject matters. They also possess abject bodies; Silver and Golden have slimy fish tails and Justine’s symptoms visibly enact abjection on her body, through the peeling of skin and vomiting of hair and saliva. The nonhuman, this way, is at the core of the human, and it becomes impossible to separate what was once a dichotomy. A queer view of the films relies on the resistance to reiterate binaries, thus reconfiguring the gender and sexuality axes and creating new categories that are never fully realized before being subverted again.

I have proposed that the intruder is the abject, the Thing that has been repressed, and comes back to haunt the individual by shaking up binary oppositions which structure the self and the socially hegemonic. In *Raw*, the intruder is inside, it is the urge Justine feels in eating human flesh. In *The Lure*, the intruders are the monsters themselves, who infringe upon the workings of the heteronormative family. In both films, the distinctions between human and animal are troubled, indicating cracks in the humanist subject.

Horror films are artifacts that produce and reproduce cultural meaning. The meanings of the films are not fixed or self-evident but are dependent on context and tools available with which to read them. Here, I have hoped to demonstrate how a horror film can dispute the (not unfounded) common assumption that horror is not a friendly genre to women but that it can be

a rich source of shifting, complex discourses on gender and sexuality. I find that the films discussed here demonstrate how anxieties about women's bodies, sexual lives and subjectivities can be reframed into difference that is positive, that is, difference that resists structurally devalued categorizations – or yet, do away with categorizations altogether. Both films have shown to constantly undermine dualistic norms in their discourse, narrative and imagery, especially regarding gender and sexuality, but also concerning family and even species. This is not enough, in itself, to claim that the films or characters are queer or have been “queered”, but it is an indication that these issues are treated in light of troubling the normative, a perspective that Ruth Goldman contends is central to queer theory (apud. GIFFNEY, 2004, p. 74).

The gendered body crossed by the discourses that form our experiences presents us with narratives that might be helpful in understanding our own bodies and the ways they function in the world. The films discussed here present horrific representations of women that open up potencies of deviant genders and sexualities, which invoke modes of being and subjectivity that defy the normative, making for interesting characters and inspiration for a queer life.

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