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# EMBODYING THE OTHER

## A CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF MISREPRESENTATIONAL OPPRESSION

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a holistic perspective on the phenomenon of embodying Otherface. It provides a deeper insight into the categories *Transface* and *Cripface*, the latter being a term for an able person depicting a person with visible or invisible disabilities, also referred to as *cripping up*. The thesis sums up the plight for rights and acceptance whilst looking at the problems involved with authentic representation in film and media, as well as the lack thereof.

As a contemporary analysis, backed by 102 relevant film references from North America, Europe and Asia over a span of 102 years, it dissects cultural methods of reinforcing stereotypes by depicting Otherness and provides readers with an alternative trans gaze in the future of filmmaking.

## INTRODUCTION

### THEORY

For this thesis, I use queer, critical whiteness and gender studies as well as phenomenology, monster and grotesque theory.

Kobena Mercer stated in 1991: “Analogies between race and gender in representations reveal similar ideological patterns of objectification, exclusion and ‘othering’”, as quoted by Ann E. Kaplan in *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, which I use as a reference throughout this study. The post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak famously asked, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”,<sup>1</sup> a thesis which Kaplan developed into “not only Can the subaltern *look?* but *how* does the subaltern look?”<sup>2</sup> This study intends to prove the need for both the subaltern voice *and* gaze in contemporary and future film culture, to reflect our society as a whole, seeing as the big picture we have absorbed from the receiving end so far, is an extremely one-dimensional image from a homogenous

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<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak” in Nelson, Cary & Grossberg, Lawrence (red.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, Macmillan Education, Houndmills, 1988

<sup>2</sup> Ann E. Kaplan, *Looking for the other feminism, film, and the imperial gaze*, Routledge, New York, 1997, p. 4.

and privileged industry elite. Kaplan introduces the reversal gaze as a theory, which will be investigated further in this thesis: “Modernism’s two powerful gazes – those of patriarchy, the much-debated ‘male gaze’, and of colonialism, the ‘imperial gaze’ – need to be understood both in themselves and in the reversal and problematizing of these gazes by minorities”.<sup>3</sup>

Posthumanism and intersectional feminism are my main theoretical sources, as all forms of oppression are interconnected. To briefly explain posthumanist theory and how it relates to film studies: In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (the peak of the humanist era), the ultimate – and thereby constructed as normative – human being was defined based on Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*. This influenced scientific studies of racial biology, nowadays known as scientific racism. During this time, it was believed that a person suffering from mental illness was part animal. For this reason, early moving image experiments were used scientifically, to capture a person frame by frame during psychosis, to see whether they turned into an animal. Psychology as well as film technology and the academic field of film studies have all evolved a great deal since then, but the humanist thinking of who is able to produce and act in films still remains. The non-normative body and mind is still regarded as monstrous, not fully human,<sup>4</sup> which will be expanded upon. To further introduce posthumanism and how it specifically relates to this essay, one should be aware of the various inventions that have helped people previously considered “less human” to function as humans, rather than being dispatched to an institution for life, such as contact lenses, computers, Braille, bionic prosthetics, medical drugs and vaccine to name a few. These inventions and many more helped create the posthuman. Thanks to these and new digital technology such as CGI as well as various other creative methods, we no longer need a film industry influenced by Darwinism, that enforces individualism based on survival of the fittest.

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<sup>3</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Wibke Straube, *Trans cinema and its exit scapes: a transfeminist reading of utopian sensibility and gender dissidence in contemporary film*, 1. ed., Linköping University, Department of Thematic Studies - Gender Studies, Diss. Linköping : Linköpings universitet, 2014, Linköping, 2014, p. 133.

## PURPOSE & QUESTIONS RAISED

Since the beginning of film, as stated by Kaplan but also statistically documented by Stacy Smith for Geena Davis Institute, there has been a privileged, male dominance in the industry, portraying the world through their perspective.<sup>5</sup> The Male Gaze encourages the spectator to internalise a male perception of the world and thereby controls the audiences' worldview of whom to dis/identify with on the screen. This cements the us/them mentality as well as stigmatises certain bodies constructed as non-normative. The humanist era simplifies and polarizes people into binary dichotomies such as black/white, able/disabled, rich/poor, cis/trans, affecting how we see and construct ourselves and our societies. It is noticeable that all forms of misogyny, racism, class oppression, colonialism, transphobia and ableism are reproduced in the film industry, both in terms of who is represented on screen and the off-screen writers and decision makers.

This essay turns a critical eye to the contemporary film industry and raises awareness in regards to how it can be more equal. I will particularly examine the notion of Otherface and how this constructs and reinforces our prejudice of the Other. This essay will not focus on individual performances, but will rather look at who is excluded and investigate who speaks for and benefits on the silenced.

How has the blackface and freak show traditions extended into modern day cinema culture? How does social acceptance, or lack thereof, shape film representations? How can filmmakers improve their onscreen representations of non-normative bodies? Could a more diverse and equal film industry have long-term positive effects on our societies as well as on our relationships to our own bodies and Others?

This is my contribution to initiate an academic discussion on the social aspects of lack of authentic role models and star ideal norms in the global film industry.

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<sup>5</sup> Stacy Smith "Gender in Media: The Myths and Facts", USC Annenberg School for Communications & Journalism for Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. (23 Sept 2015) <http://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/gender-in-media-the-myths-facts>

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF OTHERNESS

After the 1960's Afro-American civil rights movement in the United States, the embodiment of Afro-Americans performed by white actors – known as *Blackface* – is widely considered taboo. Yet it unfortunately still occurs, both in real life as depicted in *Dear White People* (2014) and on-screen embodiment, as we have seen in *The Forbidden Zone* (1980) and contemporary pop culture such as Die Antwoord's music video for *Fatty Boom Boom* (2012). Another example is the *Afromantics* series by artist Makode Linde, which heavily relies on the blackface aesthetic, and therefore generated a great deal of controversy. Linde, however, defends the work by claiming that using items from Eurocentric art and popular culture painted into a stereotypical blackface, completely removes their character “and they have this new, supposedly ‘African’ character imposed on them.” Johan Palme expands in the same article: “It is an almost painfully symbolic reproduction of the process of Othering, diverse individuals being forcibly assigned a simplistic shared identity”.<sup>6</sup> The debate that followed Linde's controversial *Painful Cake* piece about eating the Other, was mainly criticizing the blackface element, whilst only a few critical voices pointed out that Linde also appeared in transface, when embodying the shape of Venus of Willendorf in blackface. Kenyan artist Shilja Patel raised the point of representation:

African women and girls, the world's favourite target for rescue, the population everyone loves to speak for and speak about, but rarely cares to listen to. What makes this cake episode so deeply offensive is the appropriation, by both Linde and his audience, of African women's bodies and experiences, while completely excluding real African women from the discourse.<sup>7</sup>

This work and the debate that followed, sum up the essence of this essay: To paint a person into a stereotypical shared identity of the Other whilst excluding authentic representation.

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<sup>6</sup> Johan Palme “Makode Linde – The ‘Swedish Cake’ artist – explains himself” published on 24 Apr 2012. <http://africasacountry.com/2012/04/africa-is-a-country-interview-with-makode-linde> (24 sept 2015)

<sup>7</sup> Shilja Patel “The missing ingredient in Sweden's racist-misogynist cake” published on 19 Apr 2012 <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category.php/features/81491> (2 Dec 2015)

Alongside the blackface tradition of white actors embodying a black character, we have seen an equally long tradition of *Yellowface* and *Brownface* that bare strong similarities with the blackface phenomenon and still occur. *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie* (2016) has most recently received heavy criticism for casting a white woman to play a Japanese fashion designer.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Kirsti Whalen points out: “[We] drew a line in the sand when it comes to blackface a while ago, but actors are still crippling up and being lauded for it”.<sup>9</sup> David Church explains how the term *crip* has been reappropriated for political empowerment and writes in *Freakery, Cult Films, and the problem with Ambivalence*: “[S]eldom discussed by cult film scholars is the significance of disability in the conceptualization of cult cinema”. Church discusses this through two intertwined premises: Representations of disability as “freakish” spectacle and the ableist perception of disability as abnormal. Church moves on to quote Paul Watson:

The social history of cinema and the traditional freak show overlapped in the early twentieth century as the newer form of entertainment replaced the older one but retained many of the same unequal viewing dynamics. Echoing the freak show, an economic capitalization on the public's desire to see and know more about the possibilities of the body underlies the invention of cinema.<sup>10</sup>

In the last few decades, there has been a big increase in the transface phenomena as this study illustrates. Judith Halberstam problematizes the rise in public interest: “Transgender lives often seem to attract enormous attention from biographers, filmmakers, talk show hosts, doctors and journalists, all of whom are dedicated to forcing the transgender subject to make sense. [...] we should be wary of overly rational narratives about lives filled with contradiction”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hanna Rose Ewens “Why getting a white actor to play an asian role is bad” published on 21 Dec 2015 <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/28915/1/white-actor-cast-as-asian-in-ab-fab> (3 Jan 2016)

<sup>9</sup> Kirsti Whalen “Disappropriating: Crippling Up, Winning Big” published on 19 Mar 2015 <http://pantograph-punch.com/post/disappropriation-cripping-up-winning-big> (3 Dec 2015)

<sup>10</sup> David Church (2011) “Freakery, Cult Films, and the Problem of Ambivalence” *Journal of Film and Video*, 63(1), 3–17. <http://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.63.1.0003> (4 Jan 2016), p. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a queer time and place: transgender bodies, subcultural lives*, New York University Press, New York, 2005, p. 54.

Halberstam elaborates:

The potentiality of the body to morph, shift, change, and become fluid is a powerful fantasy in transmodern cinema. [...] The] body in transition indelibly marks late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century visual fantasy. The fantasy of the shape-shifting and identity-morphing body has been nowhere more powerfully realized recently than in transgender film.<sup>12</sup>

After extensive research on trans cinema, I decided to examine the cultural phenomenon of depicting Otherness between North America, Europe and Asia, as bodies constructed as non-normative are presented (but usually misrepresented) in their respective film industry, and investigate this in relation to cultural representation, appropriation and legal as well as social acceptance. Halberstam also indicates that sexual communities and identities depicted have "less in common with the white gay and lesbian worlds [...] and they may share significant traits with sexual and gender practices associated with *tombois* in Indonesia and Thailand, *travesti* in Brazil, and *bakla* in the Philippines.<sup>13</sup> As much as Europe and North America wish to be at the forefront when it comes to equal rights, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal (as well as Australia, New Zealand, Germany and France)<sup>14</sup> are the first countries to legitimize a third gender. For this reason I chose to focus on Asia as a progressive alternative to Western laws and film industries. Worth noting is that Thai society, despite the lack of legal status, is one of the more tolerant towards *kathoey* (transwomen or effeminate men), who are especially sought after in certain work industries,<sup>15</sup> as pointed out by the queer and critical race academic Dredge Byung'chu Käng.

Käng explains how ever since "former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra [...]

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<sup>12</sup> Halberstam (2005), p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Halberstam (2005), p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Christina Cauterucci "France's New Third Gender is just as Narrow as the first two" published on 15 Oct 2015  
[http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/10/15/france\\_s\\_new\\_third\\_gender\\_is\\_just\\_as\\_narrow\\_as\\_the\\_first\\_two.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/10/15/france_s_new_third_gender_is_just_as_narrow_as_the_first_two.html) (5 Jan 2016)

<sup>15</sup> Dredge Byung'chu Käng "Kathoey In Trend: Emergent Genderscapes, National Anxieties and the Re-Signification of Male-Bodied Effeminacy in Thailand". *Asian Studies Review* 36 (4): 475–494. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/10357823.2012.741043>, published in Dec 2012 (19 Nov 2015), p. 481.

attempted to censor kathoeyness on television, there has been an explosion of more balanced and humane representations of kathoey”.<sup>16</sup> But the Thai trilogy *The Iron Ladies* (2000), *The Iron Ladies II* (2003) and *The Iron Ladies Roar!* (2014), where most of the kathoey characters were faux portrayals,<sup>17</sup> demonstrate there is still a lot of room for improvement.

Selvaraj Velayutham explains in *Tamil cinema: the cultural politics of India's other film industry* that Tamil Cinema has a history of propagating humanist egalitarian ideals.<sup>18</sup> Amisha R Patel explains in *India's hijras: The case for Transgender Rights* how the progressive state of Tamil Nadu has permitted the Indian third gender, the *hijras*, to be recognized as “T” for transgender on local ration cards and whose authorities are building separate toilet facilities for hijras, who previously had no access to such basic necessities.<sup>19</sup> “However, in spite of social acceptance [...] hijras struggle with their basic human rights, such as lack of basic access to health care, sexual health information, and general political rights; employment and police discrimination; and ongoing gender-based violence and police brutality”,<sup>20</sup> according to Gust, Sage and Russo in *Transgender Communication Studies*. Patel adds: “Despite this, some hijras have managed to emerge in the forefront of media and politics, giving voice to the unheard”.<sup>21</sup>

To round of this brief introductory chapter on Otherness, Patel formulates the deeper social issue: “Hijras struggle to reconcile their physical visibility with the invisibility of their community as a whole. [... C]ommunity invisibility makes

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<sup>16</sup> Käng (2012), p. 480.

<sup>17</sup> Yanapon Musiket “Volleyball? It’s an LGBT thing” published on 26 Sep 2013  
<http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/371552/> (19 Nov 2015)

<sup>18</sup> Selvaraj Velayutham (red.), *Tamil cinema: the cultural politics of India's other film industry*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p.152.

<sup>19</sup> Amisha R. Patel “India’s hijras: The case for transgender rights”. *George Washington International Law Review*, 42(4) (2010), p. 854-855.

<sup>20</sup> Gust A. Yep, Sage E. Russo, and Jace Allen “Intercultural Communication - Pushing Boundaries: Toward the Development of a Model for Transing Communication in (Inter)cultural Contexts” in *Transgender Communication Studies*, ed. Capuzza, Jamie C. & Spencer, Leland G (2015), p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Patel (2010), p. 851.

hijras susceptible to gender violence and other human rights abuses”.<sup>22</sup> This essay will look into this exact phenomenon, how the lack of authentic visual and community representation renders a minority invisible and how suggested on-screen violence triggers social attitudes and results in real life fear of – and actual, lethal – violence, as described by Straube and Halberstam.

## METHOD

The model for transing communication, explained by Gust, Russo and Allen in “Intercultural Communication”, featured in *Transgender Communication Studies*, consists of two interdependent and orthogonal axes: Degrees of difference and degree of mediatedness. These measure the data through four domains of communication:

- 1) Low degree of difference and low degree of mediatedness (e.g., face-to-face interactions between gender normative and non-normative people from similar cultural systems, for instance TV show interviews).
- 2) Low degree of difference and high degree of mediatedness (e.g., mediated representations of gender non-normative people within a cultural system, such as media portrayals of transgender people within the context of their own culture).
- 3) High degree of difference and low degree of mediatedness (e.g., face-to-face interactions between gender normative and non-normative people from different cultural systems, i.e. the Eurovision Song Contest).
- 4) High degree of difference and high degree of mediatedness (e.g., popular discourses of gender non-normative people from two distinctive cultural systems, in other words, mass mediated representations of trans bodies from different cultural systems).<sup>23</sup>

The above model is relevant to measure and acknowledge the vast in/visibility and in/validation of various forms of queer lives across cultural contexts. I will mainly study the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Queer film) and 4<sup>th</sup> (Normative gaze on Others) phenomena, and focus on feature-length fiction films that feature a non-normative character as either the main or main supporting character.

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<sup>22</sup> Patel (2010), p. 855.

<sup>23</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 71.

But instead of limiting myself to the categories gender and trans, I'll measure the normative and traditionally non-normative aspects, so I can use the same principle when discussing all forms of Otherface, i.e. a non-authentic representation of the Other by a body traditionally defined as normative.

Also useful for this essay is Kaplan's analysis of Hollywood imagery, which contains a deeply rooted colonial and humanist gaze on the Other, in various forms as categorised by Kaplan here:

- 1) infantilizing minorities (helpless and childlike within adult bodies);
- 2) animalizing minorities (associating them with nature);
- 3) sexualizing minorities;
- 4) debasing minorities as immoral, if not simply quite evil.<sup>24</sup>

To organise the subcategories, Halberstam's identification of three different motivations for the representation of a transgender life by non-transgender people, as listed in *In a Queer Time and Place*, proved useful:

- 1) *The project of stabilization*: Establishing the transgender narrative as strange, uncharacteristic, and even pathological.
- 2) *The project of rationalization*: In which reasonable explanations and motives for the "dangerous and outrageous" behaviour is sought and found. (This narrative placates mainstream viewers by returning the temporarily transgender subject to the comforting and seemingly inevitable matrix of hetero-domesticity.)
- 3) *The project of trivialization*: A narrative to contain the threat they represent to gender stability, in which the transgender life is dismissed as non-representative and inconsequential, such as the cross-dressing soldier (a "military maid") or pirate.<sup>25</sup>

I will add a fourth motivation for faux representation of non-normative lives:

The project of *sensationalization*, in which the embodied dramatisation of the Other is widely spread, heavily praised and greatly awarded.

Lucy Miller explains in *Distancing Transgender Representation in Popular Film Comedies*: "Transgender representations in film work generally to distance the transgender character from the audience by evoking feelings of ridicule, fear and

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<sup>24</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> Halberstam (2005), p. 54-55.

sympathy”.<sup>26</sup> What Miller refers to is the representation of a non-normative film character, represented by a normative body. I intend to take the discussion further and clearly indicate when the non-normative character is embodied by a normative actor and thereby becomes an Otherface. I will do this in order to examine how narratives differ when actually made by people with non-normative experiences.

Finally, Andrew Casson’s diagram in *Funny Bodies* shows how the grotesque appears in form and content, categorised as *Fantastic*, *Horrible*, *Comic* and *Real*. Relevant for this study are the two latter, with the subcategory *Caricature* in between them,<sup>27</sup> as this essay investigates how the cinema institution replaced the traditional freak show by profiting on reproducing crip and trans stereotypes, and the exclusion or exploitation of those bodies.

## TRANSING COMMUNICATION

*Being represented through various media sources  
in a world that refuses to recognize and validate their existence.*<sup>28</sup>

Gust, Russo and Allen clarify in *Intercultural Communication*: “As people cultivate understandings of self through social comparison and self-reflection, it is vital that they see depictions of their identities within media contexts in order to validate their existence, legitimacy, and societal value”.<sup>29</sup> They continue to explain the transing communication model as a method: “Similar to processes of queering advanced by contemporary queer studies, transing is a critical practice that unpacks underlying relations of power within specific cultural, geopolitical

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<sup>26</sup> Lucy J. Miller "Becoming One of the Girls/Guys: Distancing Transgender Representations in Popular Film Comedies", in *Transgender Communication Studies*, ed. Capuzza, Jamie C. & Spencer, Leland G (2015), p. 128.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Casson, *Funny bodies: transgressional and grotesque humour in English children's literature*, Univ. Diss. Stockholm: Univ., Stockholm (1997), p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 79.

and historical contexts from a universalizing perspective”.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is important to continually discuss the gaze in film studies, as Sturken and Cartwright claims is “integral to systems of power and ideas”.<sup>31</sup> Kaplan refers to Foucault in relation to the gaze: “Like everything in culture, looking relations are determined by history, tradition, power hierarchies, politics, economics. [---] Looking is power”.<sup>32</sup> Church brings the ableist gaze into the discussion:

In normative society, freakery is premised on unequal viewing and social relations. A non-disabled audience retains the power to subject a non-normative body (traditionally, that of a person with disabilities) to the ableist gaze as entertaining spectacle, enjoying a mixture of shock, horror, wonder, and pity. Although it has taken many different cultural forms throughout history, freakery's viewing dynamic is still very much with us in contemporary society.<sup>33</sup>

The reversal of the Normative gaze is therefore crucial to facilitate a greater understanding of different lives, positions and perspectives.

The main thing about transing communication is that it focuses on all embodiments and subjectivities across a broad cultural spectrum. Hence why we keep returning to Asia for cross-cultural inspiration. Patel describes how “Indian society perceives hijras as un-entrenched political candidates – secular, casteless, and asexual – simultaneously able to understand the plight of the downtrodden”. Consequently, “[h]ijras have become increasingly visible in the political arena. After gaining the right to vote in 1994, a few have held political office in various states in India [...] In 2000, Kamla Jaan, a hijra in the state of Madhya Pradesh, was elected mayor of Katni after running as an independent”. Patel continues to highlight the transing communication of the state Tamil Nadu, that so far seems the most accepting:

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<sup>30</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 70.

<sup>31</sup> Sturken, Marita & Cartwright, Lisa, *Practices of looking: an introduction to visual culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Church (2011), p. 3-4.

There, a transsexual hosts a local talk show called 'Ippadikku Rose'. The state also hosts an annual transgender festival to facilitate acceptance of hijras into mainstream society. In addition, hijras are making appearances in the fashion industry and recent Bollywood films portray them in a positive light.<sup>34</sup>

As a final example of India transing communication to a greater extent than Europe and North America, Padmini Prakash was the first transwoman news anchor on India's Independence Day, in September 2015.<sup>35</sup>

### *TRIVIALIZATION:* THE NORMATIVE GAZE ON THE OTHER, AS A FIGURE OF COMEDY

*"To me, you're a man. But to her, you're just something to laugh at"*

– Frieda's comment to Hans in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932)

As queer artist Daniel Arzola explains: "Mockery is perhaps the most institutionalized form of violence that ever existed".<sup>36</sup> Miller expands:

Comedy is the most popular and well-known form of representation of transgender individuals in film. [--- This] is particularly limiting, with the humour in the films reinforcing the idea that transgender identities are not to be taken seriously and distancing transgender people further from an already unsympathetic public.<sup>37</sup>

Gust, Russo and Allen convey the example of a "Samoan *fa'afafine* (highly respected male who takes on feminine presentations) who visited the United States was referred to as a 'cock in a frock', demonstrates an ethnocentric projection of U.S. culture, that cross-dressing is a joke or source of entertainment

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<sup>34</sup> Patel (2010), p. 853 – 854.

<sup>35</sup> Daphne Seah, Keith Estiler "A Look Inside the Brave and Difficult Lives of Indian Transgender Females" published on 22 Sept 2015. (24 Sept 2015)  
<http://www.pixable.com/article/indian-transgender-females-sahar-fadaian-photos-57960>

<sup>36</sup> JamesMichael Nichols "This artist is using 'Artivism' to break down Queer Stigma and Stereotypes" published on 28 Aug 2015 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/im-not-a-joke-this-artist-is-using-artivism-to-break-down-queer-stigma-and-stereotyping\\_55d62857e4b0ab468da0574d](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/im-not-a-joke-this-artist-is-using-artivism-to-break-down-queer-stigma-and-stereotyping_55d62857e4b0ab468da0574d) (20 Nov 2015)

<sup>37</sup> Miller (2015), p. 127.

as opposed to a respected gender identity”.<sup>38</sup> John Phillips writes in *Transgender On Screen*: “Comedy thus helps to ridicule and hence domesticate a transvestism that might otherwise prove threatening”.<sup>39</sup>

Transgender characters used as objects of ridicule – or in Judith Butlers words: “forms of drag that heterosexual culture produces for itself” – <sup>40</sup> appear in the following films:

*The All-American Co-Ed* (1941), *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *Myra Breckinridge* (1970), *Tootsie* (1982), *Victor/Victoria* (1982), *Just One of the Guys* (1985), *He’s My Girl* (1987) *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), *Big Momma’s House* (2000), *The Iron Ladies* (2000), *100 Girls* (2000), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), *Sorority Boys* (2002), *The Iron Ladies II* (2003), *White Chicks* (2004), *Cheonhajangsa Madonna (Like A Virgin)*, 2006), *Hairspray* (2007), *Welcome to Sajjanpur* (2008), *Jack and Jill* (2011), *Cockpit* (2012) and *The Iron Ladies Roar!* (2014).

Straube describes how trans scholar Jordy Jones criticised *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* not only for its misrepresentation of Hedwig as a trans woman, but also for the racist representations of Hedwig’s partners.<sup>41</sup> Misrepresentational oppression is usually connected due to lack of intersectional awareness and this is why it is important to have a holistic perspective when discussing Otherface as, again, all forms of oppression are interrelated. Cripface isn’t quite as popular in the feature film comedy genre as it is in other media portrayals, but it occurs as a dramatic element in the Swedish comedies *Livet är en Schlager (Once in a Lifetime)*, 2000) and *Miffo* (2003).

The above titles exemplify the broad spectrum of comedy – in fact all are listed as comedies on the Internet Movie Database, IMDb. However, as Dustin Hoffman proclaimed in the American Film Institute interview from 2012: “[Tootsie] was

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<sup>38</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> John Phillips, *Transgender On Screen*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2006 <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9780230596337>, p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Butler *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2011 [1993] <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=683946> p. 126

<sup>41</sup> Straube (2014), p. 100.

never a comedy for me”,<sup>42</sup> and this is most likely applicable to several more of the films listed in this category. Yet, the act of embodying the Other triggers a humorous response or media sensationalism, which we are about to investigate further. Hoffman naturally guides us into the next chapter, as he actually won two Academy Awards for roles where he embodied the Other; Transface performance in *Tootsie* (1982) and cripface performance in *Rain Man* (1988).

### *SENSATIONALIZATION:*

#### THE NORMATIVE GAZE ON THE OTHER, AS AWARDS BAIT

In *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), Chris Sarandon played Leon Shermer, a character based on Elizabeth Eden, a transwoman married to bank robber John Wojtowicz. The film won an Academy Award and was nominated in additional four categories, including best supporting actor for Sarandon. Parker Malloy sums it up in an article for *Vice* magazine: “*Dog Day Afternoon* marked one of the first times a mainstream film featuring a prominent transgender character received critical acclaim. Sarandon's nomination for playing a trans individual signalled the start of a trend”.<sup>43</sup> In the years that followed, *The World According to Garp* (1982) earned John Lithgow an Oscar nomination for his role as Roberta Muldoon, a transgender woman, and Leonardo DiCaprio for his supporting crip role in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993). In terms of crip as award bait, Bette Davis was already nominated for an Oscar in 1963 for her mentally demented role in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962). In Whalen's words, “those who have lived the stories are not trusted to tell them, but those who haven't and do tell them are rewarded. Sixteen percent of Academy Awards for best actor or actress have been for portrayals of disability and mental health”.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kurt Schlosser, “Dustin Hoffman's tearful 'Tootsie' interview about women goes viral” published on 9 Jul 2013 <http://www.today.com/popculture/dustin-hoffmans-tearful-tootsie-interview-about-women-goes-viral-6C10578440> (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>43</sup> Parker Molloy “From ‘Glen or Glenda’ to ‘The Danish Girl’: A History of Trans Lives on Film” published on 7 Mar 2015 <http://www.vice.com/read/trans-history-101> (15 Nov 2015)

<sup>44</sup> Whalen (2015)

The following films are a selection of the Otherface roles that granted actors an Academy Award or Golden Globe in the leading roles: *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Tootsie* (1982), *Rain Man* (1988), *My Left Foot: The Story of Christy Brown* (1989), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Monster* (2003), *Transamerica* (2005) and *The Theory of Everything* (2014). Eddie Redmayne was also predicted to win both awards for his performance as transwoman Lili Elbe in *The Danish Girl* (2015), but did not win the Golden Globe on Jan 10, 2015, which could potentially indicate a crucial paradigm change of raised awareness regarding the Otherface phenomenon.

In this chapter, the discussion is extended to include the non-established category *Uglyface*, to show how it interlinks with the Otherface phenomenon.

When applying an intersectional analysis on gender in film studies, stardom and the topic of Othering in particular, we notice that women face a harder task to build and sustain a long career in cinema, particularly in Hollywood, due to beauty norms and ageism that affect feminine bodies to a much higher extent. Sally Chivers writes about old age and disability in cinema and hints at grotesque theory when referring to Bette Davis as Baby Jane and the intensified appearance of age to make her into “a grotesque parody of her past self”.<sup>45</sup> Before the sensationalism that followed Jennifer Aniston’s (heavily discussed made-under physical) appearance in *Cake* (2014), Chris Lee wrote the following in the article “Mariah Carey shows her ugly side in *Precious*” that also reveals how the director, Lee Daniels personally saw to *uglying her up*: “Movie history is studded with A-list actors who subverted their prescribed images in a bid for greater respect and awards season glory”.<sup>46</sup> Let me remind you of Halberstam’s quote, “the body in transition indelibly marks late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century visual fantasy,” which I find appropriate to adapt on the uglyface category. *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* may not have won Robert De Niro an Academy award, nor Charles Laughton as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939) or Eric Stoltz for his performance in *Mask* (1985), but their make up teams were

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<sup>45</sup> Sally Chivers, *The silvering screen: old age and disability in cinema*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2011, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> Chris Lee “Mariah Carey shows her ugly side in *Precious*” published on 5 Nov 2009 <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/05/entertainment/et-mariah5> (17 Nov 2015)

either nominated or awarded (except for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, as Best Makeup was not an award category in 1940). Obviously, authentic representation may be hard to find when casting for the fictional posthuman creation of Frankenstein, or when depicting rare medical conditions as in Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980). But worth stressing is that crip bodies can also be transformed and deformed into a variety of characters and may bring extraordinary emotions and experiences into the performance.

In my quest to de-Americanize ourselves from North American cinema as the universal centre of cultural attention, I will also list films in which the actor has won at least one award for their Otherface performance at other award ceremonies than the two mentioned above: *Julien Donkey-Boy* (1999), *Beautiful Boxer* (2004), *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005), *XXY* (2007), *Romeos* (2011), *Tomboy* (2011), *Laurence Anyways* (2012), *Bol* (2011) and *Ardhanaari* (2012).

Romain Duris was nominated twice for François Ozon's *Une Nouvelle Amie* (2014) but did not win. Similarly, Tom Wilkinson was nominated for four acting awards as Ruth Appelwood in *Normal* (2003). Worth noting is that Dolan's *Laurence Anyways* breaks a pattern with conventional trans films as the physical effects of the character's transition or non-normative body never become visually exploited,<sup>47</sup> allowing the trans character to repeatedly become the holder of the gaze, materialising a transgender gaze,<sup>48</sup> which will be discussed further. Also worth mentioning is that Almas Bobby – a famous trans person and trans activist – played a minor supporting role in the Pakistani film *Bol* and androgynous Jaye Davidson was nominated for best actress *as well as* best actor for his performance as Dil in *The Crying Game* (1992), and thereby pushed the envelope for the binary award categories.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Wibke Straube, *Trans cinema and its exit scapes: a transfeminist reading of utopian sensibility and gender dissidence in contemporary film*, 1. ed., Linköping University, Department of Thematic Studies - Gender Studies, Diss. Linköping : Linköpings universitet, 2014, Linköping, 2014, p. 181.

<sup>48</sup> Judith Jack Halberstam (2001) "The Transgender Gaze in *Boys Don't Cry*", *Screen*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 294.

<sup>49</sup> Jaye Davidson's awards page on Internet Movie Database:  
[http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001109/awards?ref\\_=nm\\_awd](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001109/awards?ref_=nm_awd) (2 Dec 2015)

## *RATIONALIZATION:*

### THE NORMATIVE GAZE ON THE OTHER, AS A PLOT TWIST

The trans element used as a plot twist is too common in all genres of normative culture. In this particular category, we tend to find the more exoticized as well as violent portrayals of the transgender, which tends to be how the plot twist is revealed and later, its consequences. Straube explains that the forms of violence range from sexualised violence, through non-sexualised, physical violence to verbal assault as well as a voyeuristic depiction of the trans character's nakedness, in which:

They are often embedded in a structure that experiences their passing as deceptive. [---]  
The fact that in particular situations the trans character is shown partly naked, exposing breasts, a flat chest or genitals that are in 'discrepancy' with the gender identity of the character [---] conceptualise the trans characters as untruthful, deceptive and fake.<sup>50</sup>

In Susan Stryker's words: "Their gender presentation is seen as a lie rather than as an expression of a deep, essential truth."<sup>51</sup>

Films in which the trans element is particularly used as a plot twist, in a variety of ways and purposes: *The Crying Game* (1992), *Orlando* (1992), *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999).

Halberstam makes clear that this is the category in which most "temporary" trans characters return to a comfortable and seemingly inevitable matrix of hetero-domesticity, such in *The Ballad of Little Jo* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*.<sup>52</sup> The same concluding narrative is found in *Glen or Glenda* (1953) as well as in *Myra Breckinridge* (1970). Halberstam also explains how films like *The Crying Game* and *Boys Don't Cry* surprises audiences with the transgender character's ability to "remain attractive, appealing, and gendered while simultaneously presenting

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<sup>50</sup> Straube (2014), p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Stryker, *transgender studies reader*, 2006, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Halberstam (2005), p. 55.

[...] a sense of self not derived from the body”.<sup>53</sup> Straube reports how contemporary trans “character representation nurture conventionalised, euroamerican beauty ideals and idealise androgyny”.<sup>54</sup> The surprise revealing of the unexpected body parts is similar to the objectification of crip performers. Church articulates this as “the voyeuristic gaze that explores the 'abnormal' body.”<sup>55</sup>

Returning to India and the case of trans as plot twist, Kalpana Nair writes that the subtleties of the identities that fall under the transgender spectrum are “largely lost in an industry which has barely begun to wrap its head around homosexuality. Strangely however, performing in drag seems to be a rite of passage. [---] But only when the plot twists temporarily”.<sup>56</sup> Velayutham describes how Shivaji Ganesan from the age of six toured with various Tamil companies, “playing both male and female roles”. Whether this was because it was not socially acceptable for young women to act is hard to know, since, as Velayuthan continues, “cinema as a subject has [...] not been developed. Universities, colleges and schools that provided place for music and dance, completely ignored cinema. This severely restricts a meaningful discourse in Tamil of cinema”<sup>57</sup> and limits my own research on the social aspects of Tamil cinema.

The IMDb storyline of horror film *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) reads: “The disclosure of the murderer's identity is one of the most shocking climaxes in the history of American cinema”.<sup>58</sup> This mysterious transgender plot twist opens up for the discussion of the most twisted portrayals of the Non-Normative body.

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<sup>53</sup> Halberstam (2005), p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> Straube (2014), p. 213.

<sup>55</sup> Church (2011), p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Kalpana Nair “When Bollywood Plays Trans”, 7 Jun 2015 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/When-Bollywood-plays-trans/articleshow/47569118.cms> (16 Nov 2015)

<sup>57</sup> Velayutham (2008), p. 66 and 122.

<sup>58</sup> *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086320/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086320/?ref_=nv_sr_1)  
Storyline written by Drew (20 Nov 2015)

## *STABILIZATION:* THE NORMATIVE GAZE ON THE OTHER, AS PATHOLOGICAL

I am sensitive to those footprints of categorisation that are immanent in the medium of film and that I find recurring in many problematic representations of trans characters that surface not only within the naked body shots but also in the instances in which the trans character becomes a spectacle, objectified and isolated within the film as a singular, pathologised, 'deviant' character.<sup>59</sup>

Following Straube's train of thought in the above quote and Halberstam's motivation method, when the Other isn't the object of ridicule or sensationalism, it is characterized as an overly sexual and/or plain evil antagonist. We see this trend in the following motion pictures and, as pointed out by Church, even in films portraying crip, as "the framing of freaks as spectacle nevertheless reproduces culturally ingrained viewing relations that isolate non-normative bodies as sites onto which social anxieties about otherness and deviance are projected": *Psycho* (1960), *Myra Breckinridge* (1970), *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Sleepaway Camp* (1983), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Sadak* (1991), *The Idiots / Idioterne* (1998) and *Appu* (2000).

In Sinnott's words: "[The Thai government and media] claim that 'sexual deviance' was foreign, and a threat to Thai identity, with the position popular in psychiatric circles that transgendered people/homosexuals were violent".<sup>60</sup> With less than one in 10 North Americans knowingly knowing a transgendered person and therefore getting most facts about this group from popular culture,<sup>61</sup> it becomes obvious that the prejudice against transgendered people have been constructed and implanted by normative film and other media. Moreover, the films in which a transperson is portrayed as a deviant murderer, often interlink their motives with their complex sexuality or gender dysphoria. This reinforces the general idea that transgender people are overly sexual and violent.

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<sup>59</sup> Straube (2014), p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> Megan Sinnott "The Semiotics of Transgendered Sexual Identity in the Thai Print Media: Imagery and Discourse of the Sexual Other". *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2(4), 425-440. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3986700>, published in Dec 2000 (19 Nov 2015), p. 431.

<sup>61</sup> Molloy (2015)

In Gust, Russo and Allen's words: "There is a pervasive conflation between gender and sexuality. In discourses across different contexts, we continue to see trans identity associated with homosexuality",<sup>62</sup> the same way disabled people are wrongly assumed to be asexual, when in fact sexual orientation is as separate from gender identity as it is unrelated to a person's disability.

If you noticed *The Little Mermaid* (1989) listed in this chapter and wondered why, it is because Ursula, the sea witch, was originally a neutral enabler in the Hans Christian Andersen story, but for the animated Disney adaptation, the character was modified into a full-fledged antagonist and was stylistically based on drag queen Divine.<sup>63</sup>

It is only Bruce La Bruce's deadly transman in *Pierrot Lunaire* (2014) who kills due to lack of social acceptance. Which brings us into the topic of Queer Films.

## QUEER FILMS: SCENES FROM WITHIN THE NON-NORMATIVE SPHERE

Contrary to the previous four chapter categories, that dealt with mass mediated representations of non-normative bodies with high cultural difference (4, in the trans communications model, simplified into the *Normative gaze on Others*), this chapter focuses on films with less or low degree of difference and high degree of mediatedness (2). I refer to the latter category as *Queer film*, which I use as a broad and inclusive term. Separating the categories by using the trans communication model, allows us to compare how alternative subcultures and life experiences are represented from within as opposed to from the outside.

It should be noted that sexual orientation has not been researched nor taken into consideration in this analysis of Queer Films and the Gays'/Ace Gaze in relation to the Male Gaze is a discussion I will leave for a future study. For the sake of transing film history and to have a deeper discussion in future, I can only hope

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<sup>62</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 84.

<sup>63</sup> *The Little Mermaid* (1989) trivia page on Internet Movie Database  
[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097757/trivia?ref\\_=tt\\_trv\\_trv](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097757/trivia?ref_=tt_trv_trv) (2 Dec 2015)

there will be more filmmakers, writers and actors openly identifying as trans, queer, ace (asexual) and particularly crip in coming years.

The feature fiction films written, directed or acted by at least one body known to have non-normative experiences, i.e. either crip, trans, gender fluid,<sup>64</sup> drag queen<sup>65</sup> or with cross-dressing experiences:<sup>66</sup> *Glen or Glenda* (1953), *Flaming Creatures* (1963), *Trash* (1970), *Women in Revolt* (1971), *Female Trouble* (1974, as one example of several John Water films featuring Divine), *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *City of Lost Souls* (1983), *Blue* (1993), *Cremaster 3* (2002), *Wild Side* (2004), *By Hook or by Crook* (2001), *Open* (2010), *Narthaki (Narthagi: Hijra Real Life Story*, 2011), *Gun Hill Road* (2011), *Ni Guang Fei Xiang (Touch of the Light*, 2012), *Någonting Måste Gå Sönder (Something Must Break*, 2014), *Tangerine* (2015), *Folkbildningsterror* (2015) and *Dyke Hard* (2015).

Ranging from pure, DIY comedy and musical madness to fine art and honest depictions of real life struggles, Wood's *Glen or Glenda* stands out in this selection of queer cinema. This is a film that despite Wood's signature dramatic and mysterious build-up actually intends to demystify a very stigmatised topic around a time when public cross-dressing was widely illegal.<sup>67</sup> Notably, the film is problematic in several ways, but unlike contemporary trans cinema it is not only a respectful and informative film, but it also actually depicts two different trans characters. As previously mentioned, the non-normative body is usually portrayed isolated – in both Queer and Normative film narratives – which leaves them lonely and misunderstood in their struggle. *Glen or Glenda* also finishes with the line “What about all the Other Glens the world over?” suggesting an early intersectional notion by Woods, who also starred as Glen/Glenda.

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<sup>64</sup> Jo Fidgen “Richard O’Brien: ‘I’m 70% Man’” published on 18 Mar 2013  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21788238> (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>65</sup> Brad Darrach “Death Comes to a Quiet Man Who Made Drag Queen History as Divine” published in *People* 29 (11) on 21 March 1988.  
<http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20098530,00.html> (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>66</sup> Ed Wood's biography page on Internet Movie Database:  
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000248/bio> (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>67</sup> Molloy (2015)

2015 was a good year in Swedish queer cinema, with two DIY queer features released and Saga Becker being the first trans person to win a Swedish acting award. However, *Någonting Måste Gå Sönder*-director Ester Martin Bergsmark revealed how the distributor wanted the main trans character to be rewritten as the supporting character.<sup>68</sup> This shows how the cinema industry is not yet bold or diverse enough to support and promote progressive films that focus on non-normative lives, without trivialise, sensationalise, rationalise or stabilise the motivation for portraying those, as seen in previous chapters. Juliet Jacques expresses how we in Rosa von Praunheim's *City of Lost Souls*, "see the difference between scripted films of the 90s and 00s that used cisgender actors to play transgender characters [...] and the underground directors who cast transgender people as themselves, allowing them to create more honest portrayals of the experience of gender-variant life".<sup>69</sup>

Voyeuristic gazes and physical, mental or sexual abuse towards the non-normative character are however common even in queer cinema, but excluding violent elements and thereby embellish these stories could be interpreted as avoiding the topic of real-life – often lethal – violence. I will discuss this and its implications further in the *Non-Normative / Trans Gaze* chapter.

Basically, every filmmaker reluctantly influenced by the male gaze standard needs to be aware of their potentially internalised voyeurism. There is a fine line between full frontal exploitation and sex positive portrayals, which is a difficult balance to juggle and something future filmmakers need to pay attention to in future depictions and be aware of any internalised misogyny, transphobia, ableism or any form of oppression that affects how we look at and portray certain bodies, even our own.

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<sup>68</sup> Kobra (2014) *Transrevolutionen*, Sveriges Television, SVT Play. Published on 12 Nov 2014 <http://www.svtplay.se/video/3063685/kobra/kobra-sasong-14-avsnitt-20> (1 Sep 2015)

<sup>69</sup> Juliet Jacques "Returning to the City of Lost Souls" published on 4 Jan 2012 <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/returning-to-the-city-of-lost-souls/> (15 Dec 2015)

## FURTHER DISCUSSION

### THE HOMOGENEITY OF STARS

Whereas in centuries prior to the proliferation of images and imaging technologies, “identity” may have been formed within the circle of a relatively homogenous community and culture, the rapid increase of transnational flows of bodies has created complex identity issues.<sup>70</sup>

As Kaplan describes, Hollywood has a long conservative tradition of whitewashing culture and establishing a mainly white privileged cinema elite that reproduces a colonial gaze. Richard Dyer’s critical whiteness studies are referred to in Hynek Pallas’ dissertation that analyze whiteness in Swedish fiction films between 1989 and 2010, with references to how the heterosexual female is often constructed as a symbol for the motherly moral of the nation. Mentioned in named dissertation is D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915), an infamous film because of its blackface element that confirms Toni Morrison’s thesis regarding Afro-Americanism in relation to how identity is formed: “In the construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also [...] the projection of the not-me”.<sup>71</sup> Identity is created by disidentification, as we can only tell our own difference by identifying what we differ from, which brings us back to the importance of representation.

Despite the many struggling as well as the hyper visible black and openly trans actresses currently working in US cinema, such as Harmony Santana (*Gun Hill Road*) and the *Orange is the New Black* star Laverne Cox (starring in the upcoming film *Freak Show* and *Rocky Horror Picture Show* remake), the industry continually insists on whitewashing history by leaving out crucial and important characters. In the actual Stonewall Riots, leading transwomen Marsha Johnston, Sylvia Rivera and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, two of which of colour, were all rewritten as white, middle class, gay men in the *Stonewall* (2015) film, as

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<sup>70</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 22.

<sup>71</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 66.

clarified by B.P. Morton on the blog *Philosophical Percolations*.<sup>72</sup> Also, the *Suffragette* film from the same year chose to depict an all-white cast, despite notable women of colour involved in the suffragette movement. Anita Anand explains how one of these was the Indian princess Sophia Duleep Singh, who “had every reason to hate the British. They had taken everything from her: her father’s kingdom, wealth, future, everything. But she believed in this sisterhood, and she sacrificed everything to fight for British women’s vote”. Anand, author of *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary*, expands on the topic and echoes what Shilja Patel explained earlier:

“There’s an implication that white women felt they were more able to speak for Indian women than Indian women themselves. So although I’m not sure I’d say it’s overtly racist, it is imperialist”.<sup>73</sup> This is the deeply rooted hierarchal mindset still noticeable in contemporary elitist filmmaking.

In terms of diversifying the Hollywood elite, Lee Daniel’s film *Precious* (2009) is a prime example of a modern feature that uses the star driven industry system and the media sensationalism by casting stars in minor supporting roles. As mentioned earlier, there were headlines about Mariah Carey’s ugly side, which clearly shows the media fascination and sensationalism involved in uglyface. Aside from uglying up Carey, what Daniels did manage to do due to the film’s success, was to make the Hollywood elite a little more diverse by granting Gabourey Sidibe a well-deserved entrance into the limelight. This is what makes the decision to leave Philip DeVine, a disabled Afro-American man also murdered alongside the main characters, out of the narrative of *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999) so unfortunate, because not only does this erase the character and a rare opportunity to introduce a new talent, but the entire white supremacy context of the murders. This would have demonstrated how ableist and racial oppression is closely connected with homo- and transphobia, in a mass mediated context.

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<sup>72</sup> B.P. Morton “Thoughts on Cis Actors in Trans Roles: Transface, Blackface, Yellowface and Beyond” published on 11 Sep 2015 <http://www.philpercs.com/2015/09/thoughts-on-cis-actors-in-trans-roles-transface-blackface-yellowface-and-beyond.html> (3 Dec 2015)

<sup>73</sup> Anna Leszkiewicz “What did the suffragette movement in Britain really look like?” published on 7 Oct 2015 <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/feminism/2015/10/what-did-suffragette-movement-britain-really-look> (3 Dec 2015)

My hope is that a future Bond movie will grant Professor Stephen Hawking his wish: To play “a baddie in a James Bond film. I think the wheelchair and the computer voice would fit the part”.<sup>74</sup> There is a need for the same variety of roles for non-normative actors as there are for normative ones, including pathological roles, as long as there are multiple other roles available to traditionally non-normative performers that go beyond the victim/perpetrator dichotomy and away from the stereotypical portrayals listed in this study.

The star of Tamil film *Narthaki* (*Narthagi, Hijra Real Life Story*, 2011) is the first transwoman with a lead role in a major motion picture.<sup>75</sup> The opening credits proudly announce “Introducing: Transgender Kalki”. It is a welcome change in film culture, as actor, activist and author Kalki Subramaniam asserts in response to the question “what are your views on transgender stories or characters which have been featured in Indian films (...) so far”: “Indian films have betrayed us and shown us in negative/pervert characters”.<sup>76</sup> When more and varied opportunities are given to non-normative actors, the depiction will not affect an entire minority negatively by insinuating that a character’s behaviour is reflective on an entire group. Diverse representation will merely help normalise the commonly thought of as abnormal. Filmmakers, writers and creative decision makers generally need to work on evolving the goodie/baddie and victim/perpetrator dichotomies into a spectrum of more complex characters and narratives that will not fuel the us/them mentality with underlying cis, hetero, able and white supremacy connotations. Also on the topic of stars, Jin Xing is a dancer and martial arts actress who also happens to be one of the first and most recognisable open transwomen in Chinese media. So far she has played Madame Rose, a transsexual member of a Chinese gang in *Tom-Yum-Goong* (2005) and Auntie Blossom, the ruthless crime boss in *Birth of the Dragon* (2016).

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<sup>74</sup> Anita Singh “Prof Stephen Hawking: Make me a Bond villain” published on 1 Dec 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/11262059/Prof-Stephen-Hawking-make-me-a-Bond-villain.html> (19 Nov 2015)

<sup>75</sup> Patel (2010), p. 854.

<sup>76</sup> Monika Kowalska “Interview with Kalki Subramaniam” published on 26 Mar 2014 <http://theheroines.blogspot.se/2014/03/interview-with-kalki-subramaniam.html> (7 Dec 2015)

## REPRESENTATION OF THE NON-NORMATIVE VS. EXPLOITATION

- We talked then as we speak now, Swedish.
- Yes, but you shouldn't articulate so well.
- But this is how we talk.
- Yes, but it's not *believable*.

The above conversation was between director Arne Sucksdorff and the two sisters (credited Rose-Marie Taikon and Pauline Taikon) when they were typecast as Romas for *Smeder på Luffen (Vagabond Blacksmiths, 1949)*, retold by Rosa Taikon.<sup>77</sup> It highlights the problems involved with authentic representation when directed with a normative gaze, as stereotypical depictions of the Other are very likely to occur. Greg De Cuir Jr writes in *The Feather Collectors: Erased Identity and Invisible Representations of the Roma in Yugoslav Cinema (2011)*: "I am concerned with (...) how Yugoslavia has invented (or imagined) the Roma on film".<sup>78</sup> The same statement is applicable to any film industry in relation to minorities, but former Yugoslavia stands out on this particular topic, because, as De Cuir elucidates, "a complex and accurate picture of the Roma appears for the first time in *The Feather Collectors [Skupljaci perja (I Even Met Happy Gypsies 1967) ...]* as the first film shot on location in a Roma ghetto with a large number of actual Roma as actors."<sup>79</sup>

Based on what has been raised in this thesis, we do notice a rise in industry interest to at least appear more inclusive and diverse in media communication. This is where the transing communication model is useful to measure intensions and levels of in/visibility and in/validation as well as how sensationalization has played in on the marketing of the production. Should there be a live action remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1939)*, one could only hope that both crip Quasimodo and his Roma friend, Esmeralda, would be cast by other than an able-bodied and another white actor as previously. However, authentic

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<sup>77</sup> Taikon (Lawen Mohtadi, Gellert Tamas, 2015), author's translation of the conversation. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4893244/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4893244/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1) (4 Dec 2015)

<sup>78</sup> Timoshkina, Alissa, Harrod, Mary & Liz, Mariana (red.), *The Europeanness of European cinema: identity, meaning, globalisation*, 2014, p. 101.

<sup>79</sup> Timoshkina, Harrod & Liz (2014), p. 102.

representation always faces the risk of exploitation and here are a few examples of authentic representation in feature fiction films and fictional TV productions worth highlighting: *Freaks* (1932), *The Holy Mountain* (1973), *Gummo* (1997) and *American Horror Story* (2011 – ).

Tod Browning's cult film *Freaks* caused great controversy due to audiences' revulsion with its use of actual sideshow "freaks" as actors. The film was believed to be a "crass exploitation of the mentally and physically challenged".<sup>80</sup> On *Freaks'* IMDb page one can read how the actors featured in *Freaks* are:

[A]ctual individuals who have appeared as 'freaks' in various carnival, circus, and vaudeville shows. Consequently, we are introduced to Siamese twins Daisy Hilton and Violet Hilton, Half Boy Johnny Eck, Armless Girl Frances O'Connor, the Living Skeleton Peter Robinson, Bearded Lady Olga Roderick, the Living Torso Prince Randian, Bird Girl Elizabeth Green, and pinheads Schlitze, Zip (Elvira Snow), and Pip (Jenny Lee Snow).<sup>81</sup>

Others argue that the film is "sympathetic to the disabled stars and was therefore an empowering vehicle, showcasing their struggle".<sup>82</sup> A contemporary example of this form of typecasting is TV series *American Horror Story* (2011 – ), which features many crip actors, such as Mat Fraser, Jyote Amge and Jamie Brewer, the latter being described as "a genuinely integrated member of the cast".<sup>83</sup>

Whalen has emphasised: "The only time we see disabled people on TV and in film is when they're playing characters whose story is about their disability [---] We don't have a balanced portrayal".<sup>84</sup> In Harmony Korine's *Gummo* (1997), Rose Shepard plays the romantic object of the main character, Soloman, as a sex worker with downs syndrome. Donna Brewster is credited as Albino Woman,

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<sup>80</sup> Christopher Bickel "Gorgeous cast portraits from Tod Browning's 'Freaks' (1932)" published on 17 Dec 2015  
[http://dangerousminds.net/comments/gorgeous\\_cast\\_portraits\\_from\\_tod\\_brownings\\_freaks\\_1932](http://dangerousminds.net/comments/gorgeous_cast_portraits_from_tod_brownings_freaks_1932) (17 Dec 2015)

<sup>81</sup> *Freaks* FAQ page on Internet Movie Database:  
[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0022913/faq?ref\\_=tt\\_faq\\_1#.2.1.3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0022913/faq?ref_=tt_faq_1#.2.1.3) (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>82</sup> Bickel 2015

<sup>83</sup> Whalen (2015)

<sup>84</sup> Whalen (2015)

alongside characters such as Midget, Deaf Woman and Deaf Man on the IMDb credit list. This film was mostly typecast and has probably the most diverse authentic representation in modern film history. But because *Gummo* was made in the ironic 90's and all the main characters were played by able, white actors, the diversity amongst the minor supporting characters can be read as token accessories. However, Korine's universe of minorities is a more exciting and accurate representation of the world than most films. More importantly, these minor supporting characters are not driven by their disabilities; they are merely struggling to co-exist like everybody else.

The kinds of Cinderella stories Whalen refers to, in which people with disabilities struggle and overcome the additional challenges, are common in the contemporary neo-liberal era, always hungry for news of sensational people overcoming every obstacle. These kinds of films and TV shows are the ones most likely to exploit their crip participants or actors, yet it can also be a way to normalise disability and it could potentially lead to a level of fame that can take the participants further. Saying that, there is an extreme level of competition for the minimal amount of non-normative roles available, especially when these are already earmarked for previously established film and TV stars. My advice to writers, directors and casting agents would be: Instead of finding room for a stereotypical token supporting character, question why all the main characters need to be portrayed as able, cis, white and generally quite normative?

Whenever there is a higher level of cultural difference between the filmmaker and the character or actor, such as in the case of Jodorowsky's *A Holy Mountain* (1973), one ought to question whether their aims diverge greatly. If one wishes to diversify screen representation and the other does it simply for the sake of generating money (either by participation or sensationalization), the risk of exploitation is higher. For the most authentic portrait of the Other, there must be a greater sense of perceptive, open and equal collaboration, as opposed to the initial example, where the director imposes prejudice onto the characters.

The Bangladesh drama *Common Gender* (2012) is the result of director Noman Robin witnessing a hijra attempting to use a public restroom and consequently

being verbally and physically assaulted while proclaiming: “Why can’t I use it? Am I not human?”. The director’s response to the question “professional actors played the roles of hijras in this film. Why not hijras?” reveals the double standard: “I did not want to use hijras for the benefit of my film”.<sup>85</sup>

But to use their stories and exclude them from telling those, whilst benefiting actors with traditionally normative bodies to play these roles, is what should qualify as abuse.

## POST-TRANSING COMMUNICATION IN A POSTHUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

Even if an actor with a genuine disability were to play the role of Hawking in *The Theory of Everything* they would still have to deal with the quite horrifyingly sentimental script which climaxes in a dream sequence where Hawking stands up and walks across a lecture theatre to retrieve a pen from the ground.<sup>86</sup>

Rob Crossan concludes the argument: “Because one thing’s for certain, if people who had even the slightest first-hand experience of disability were making films like *The Theory of Everything*, it’s pretty unlikely we’d see Stephen Hawking picking up a biro as a valid, meaningful or even respectful conclusion”.

Whalen seeks a solution:

If [the answer is] to hire an able-bodied actor to carry these stories then there’s something wrong. Because if a set isn’t wheelchair accessible, autism-friendly, patient or kind then the actors on set shouldn’t have the right to tell stories about wheelchair users, autism, patience or kindness.<sup>87</sup>

Transing communication involves expanding our ideas of opposite binaries. Not every trans person wants to cross from one side of the binary to the other, i.e. to be read as either male or female. And not all people with disabilities are

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<sup>85</sup> Alamgir Khan “Conversation with Common Gender’s Noman Robin” published on 2 Nov 2012 <http://www.bdmonitor.net/english/interviewdetail/detail/12> (7 Dec 2015)

<sup>86</sup> Rob Crossan “Eddie Redmayne's awards are not good news for disabled people” 11 Feb 2015 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11400980/Eddie-Redmaynes-awards-are-not-good-news-for-disabled-people.html> (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>87</sup> Whalen (2015)

obsessing over their inabilities; just as an able-bodied person is not very likely to obsess over their own incapacabilities. The filmmakers need to change their perception of normality, because the body read as abnormal is very much normal in that person's existence, and focus on abilities rather than disabilities (without showcasing the character *doing tricks* as in *Freaks* and *A Holy Mountain*, where the narrative is interrupted for an exploitative remnant of freak show culture, as audiences are expected to be awed by the armless characters lighting cigarettes).

In the Swedish film *Livet är en Schlager* (*Once in a Lifetime*, 2000) the trans and crip characters (both in *Otherface*, mind you, even though the role of David was originally written for crip actor/musician/comedian Jesper Odelberg.)<sup>88</sup> share the following conversation:

- If you could relive your life, would you be [trans]?
- If you could relive *your* life, would you be [crip]?
- If not... I wouldn't be me.

Feminist philosopher and queer crip scholar Margrit Shildrick claims that "bodies matter not because we live in them, but because the experiences that constitute the self are always embodied".<sup>89</sup> Straube extends the argument and refers to monster studies: "Yet, [... the non-normative] body is imagined as potentially threatening, especially when it violates visibly normative assumptions on bodily shapes and appearance. Such bodies become culturally rendered as monstrous".<sup>90</sup> Straube continues:

The monstrous figure has a long history in trans activism and trans studies of being an affirming figure (Stryker 2006b; Stone 2006; Wagner 2011). Rather than rejecting this cultural association of monstrosity that is applied to the anti-normative embodied selves of gender-dissident people, the monster instead becomes appropriated.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Joakim Löwing "Tackar man nej till Gardell är man bra dum" published on 12 Nov 2014 <http://www.allers.se/tackar-man-nej-till-gardell-ar-man-bra-dum/> (2 Dec 2015)

<sup>89</sup> Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous discourses of disability, subjectivity and sexuality*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 68.

<sup>90</sup> Straube (2014), p. 110.

<sup>91</sup> Straube (2014), p. 134.

A trans reading of Disney's *Frozen* (2013) can be imagined due to its already existing narrative: As a special child and because of social stigma, Elsa is hidden away not to be a threat to society (we have already touched upon the idea of trans being a threat to gender stability and national identity). The secret must be kept from her sister Anna, who ends up disrobing and thereby exposing the body part that hides the secret (the essential truth is revealed). And as the new Elsa performs her magical costume change, she rises "like the break of dawn"/"That perfect girl [who conceals and does not feel] is gone"). Elsa as the antagonist is interesting, because when Elsa gets upset, the powers emerge, similar to previous Normative thrillers that deals with trans topics, in which emotions or sexual provocations triggers the trans identity, as in De Palma's *Dressed to Kill*. Shunned and misunderstood as a monster, Elsa runs away into the snowy mountains like the monster in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994). The same monster that became a trans symbol when professor and filmmaker Susan Stryker the same year published the article *My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage*, which begins:

The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn back together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster.<sup>92</sup>

With the new live action version of *Little Mermaid* (2017) currently in early stages of production, there is a glimmer of hope that the Ursula character, as previously queered by Disney, could be developed into an actual trans character with complex motivations for their actions. Since mermaids are also trans symbols, as humanimal monsters themselves, one can only wish that the new film will qualify as queer cinema with a diverse cast and highlight the topic of ableism represented in the storyline:

Gaining a pair of legs in exchange for her voice.

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<sup>92</sup> Stryker, Susan, "My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage", *GLQ*, New York, N.Y. 1994, p. 2. Copy retrieved from [http://freeskoool.wikispaces.com/file/view/\\_My+Words+to+Victor+Frankenstein...pdf](http://freeskoool.wikispaces.com/file/view/_My+Words+to+Victor+Frankenstein...pdf) (15 Jan 2016)

Straube writes about the fantasy fairy as a figure of guidance in trans cinema and particularly in *Cheonhajangsa Madonna* and *Ma vie en rose*: “A beautiful, blonde, westernised female figure, the fairy counter-positions the character’s own sense of self as ugly and monstrous. As a monstrous figure herself, the fairy becomes [...] a supportive ally in the category of those rendered not quite human”.<sup>93</sup> Following Straube’s train of thought, film stars are actually culturally constructed fantasy fairies too, as they embody the status of superhuman elite on the opposite spectrum from those rendered non-human. I would even argue that as such monstrous fairies, these star icons are related to the crip and trans identities traditionally considered non-human, as both groups have a tendency to attract attention. With some aging actors using cosmetic technology and thereby obtain posthuman status, they bridge the gap between these two opposite binaries of culturally constructed monstrosities.

Chivers wraps up this entire extended discussion so far by dreading how “homogenization may lead to running out of new plots, and thus lead to [...] remakes and] a rebirth of outright horror about aging” should *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* be remade (and notably, it *is* currently listed as in development on IMDb) and thereby “continue to transform old age onscreen into a freak show”.<sup>94</sup> Surely we are able to produce narratives without reinforcing practices of Othering, whichever form of discrimination is dreaded?

For the last time in this essay, we return to India through Velayutham and this time in relation to superhuman stardom: “The popularity of film stars has a far more spiritual dimension in its manifestations especially in South India. Film stars are not only revered but also worshipped as gods”.<sup>95</sup> With this and Western stars as monstrous fantasy figures in mind, this is why we need to problematize lack of authentic representation in main roles, because as Gust, Russo and Allen states:

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<sup>93</sup> Straube (2014), p. 211.

<sup>94</sup> Chivers (2011), p. 147.

<sup>95</sup> Velayutham (2008), p. 10.

[K]eeping certain identities and their voices out of mainstream media insinuates that they are wrong, invalid and inferior in the culture. This exclusion can be detrimental to the development of a healthy self-image [...] and only serves to maintain the [...] systems that work to oppress non-normative identities.<sup>96</sup>

It doesn't help that stars with traditionally normative bodies officially claim "May the best actor win" in relation to *Otherface*,<sup>97</sup> echoing an out-of-date Darwinism, when there is a major discriminating structure in the casting industry and, even prior to that, in drama schools. Aleksa Lundberg was the first transsexual to graduate from a Swedish drama school in 2009 and it took thirteen auditions to be accepted and enrolled.<sup>98</sup> Patrick Brăila, a director and transman in Bucharest, Romania, told me how difficult it is to find an actor to play a young transman pre-transition, when drama schools only teach ultra-femininity.

Hoffman explained in the same interview as mentioned earlier: "I had an epiphany. [---] And I said, I *have* to make [*Tootsie* ---] Because I think I am an interesting woman".<sup>99</sup> But this results in Hoffman playing an *Otherface* and consequently wins awards for the achievement as *himself*. Meanwhile, this original, interesting character has evaporated. She is trapped in the celluloid fantasy world without real impact in the industry. As opposed to Gabourey Sidibe and *Precious*, in which the fictional character, Claireece Precious Jones, wants to be "on the cover of a magazine", which seems absolutely unobtainable to the character, due to various intersectional reasons and aspects. But Sidibe lives on and can fulfil the dreams for her. And this is what actually changes social attitudes. Nothing helped relieve the gay and lesbian stigma more than actual celebrity couples such as Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi, Monrudi and

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<sup>96</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 79.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Reynolds "Is 'Transface' a Problem in Hollywood" published on 25 Feb 2015  
<http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/2015/02/25/transface-problem-hollywood>  
(20 Nov 2015)

<sup>98</sup> Karin Thunberg, "Vår sexualitet väljer inte kvinnor eller män" published on 13 Apr 2014  
<http://www.svd.se/var-sexualitet-valjer-inte-kvinnor-eller-man> (21 Nov 2015)

<sup>99</sup> Schlosser (2013)

Kop,<sup>100</sup> as well as Jonas Gardell and Mark Levengood. Laverne Cox is an excellent role model and advocate for trans rights, but the industry should include more like her and we are still waiting for more opportunities where people with disabilities can be raised to the same level of stardom. Which is indeed proven very difficult, when the rare opportunities available are reserved for perfectly able-bodied actors crippling up.

s. e. smith, an advocate for gender and disability rights, wrote the following on the topic: "I hate the way [cripface] represents disability, and I cringe because it makes disability into something people put on, like a coat".<sup>101</sup> Carol Grant shares this view and voices on the topic of *The Danish Girl* (2015): "[Redmayne will] be able to shed off the experience after his probable Oscar win",<sup>102</sup> similar to how white actors could wash off their blackface after their minstrel performance.

The most frequent argument for appropriating crip, rather than casting authentic representation, is the difficulty to demonstrate the progression of the character. Whalen suggests: "We are, however, willing to suspend our disbelief when a child and an adult are cast to play the same character over time. [... We] know these people are not the same, yet embrace the narrative".<sup>103</sup> Not every actor has a twin brother who can help portray the progression of the character as Laverne Cox does,<sup>104</sup> however it is simply a matter of being creative with the content and what you have available.

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<sup>100</sup> Sinnott (2000), p. 435.

<sup>101</sup> s. e. smith "Why Is Hollywood Still Stubbornly Casting Nondisabled Actors in Disabled Roles?" published on 4 Feb 2015 <http://www.xojane.com/issues/cake-still-alice-cripface-oscars> (17 Nov 2015)

<sup>102</sup> Carol Grant "Regressive, Reductive and Harmful: A Trans Woman's Take on Tom Hooper's Embarrassing 'Danish Girl'" published on 3 Dec 2015 <http://blogs.indiewire.com/bent/regressive-reductive-and-harmful-a-trans-womans-take-on-tom-hoopers-the-danish-girl-20151203> (5 Dec 2015)

<sup>103</sup> Whalen (2015)

<sup>104</sup> Kimberly Potts "'Orange In the New Black' Star Laverne Cox on her Twin Brother's Surprising Role on the Netflix series" published on 21 Aug 2013 <https://www.yahoo.com/tv/bp/-orange-is-the-new-black--star-laverne-cox-on-her-twin-brother-s-surprising-role-on-the-series-232519980.html> (3 Dec 2015)

On the topic of crippling up, Mat Fraser and his wife, Julie Atlas Muz, shared the following conversation in an interview (slightly shortened by the author):

- My ideal role – obviously whatever character I play is gonna have short arms.
- It's not necessarily true at all.
- I could have wings.
- You could have wings. You could have long arms. Your strip tease begins with long arms. You don't have to play short-armed characters all the time...
- No, that's true.
- It could be CGI'ed.
- I could able-up, I suppose. But, no, ideally, a character that's there for their thoughts, dreams and hopes and personality. A father, a lawyer, a neighbour, a shopkeeper, an anything. A person.<sup>105</sup>

The question is, why are cinema audiences more inclined to be fascinated by techniques and technology that make an able-bodied actor embody disability or turn a cisgender actor into transface, rather than the opposite? Is it not in fact more interesting to see a trans person convincingly performing cis or a disabled person magically appearing non-disabled through the wonders of cinema (obviously without glorifying ableism, as in the example of Prof. Hawking managing to pick up a biro as a meaningful achievement in *The Theory of Everything*)? Body doubles, stunts and face swapping techniques are often used for able-bodied actors, so why not for actors with disabilities? An example of using technology in relation to crip, is the specially designed glass legs by Alexander McQueen and Gabe Bartalos's cheetah legs for Aimee Mullins' posthuman appearance in Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 3* (2002).<sup>106</sup>

With the non-normative body being under threat due to the largest sperm bank in the UK banning donors with neurological diseases (such as ADD, ADHD, Asperger syndrome and dyslexia) from donating<sup>107</sup> and IVF technology with

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<sup>105</sup> Monique Schafter "The 'Freak and the Showgirl' discuss disability, burlesque and taking offence" published on 23 Mar 2015 <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2015/s4203375.htm> (5 Dec 2015)

<sup>106</sup> Drew Tewksbury "DO: ART: Gabe Bartalos: Abhorrence and Obsession" published on 9 Sep 2013 <http://www.lamag.com/culturefiles/do-art-gabe-bartalos-abhorrence-and-obsession> (7 Dec 2015)

<sup>107</sup> Matthew Weaver "Largest UK sperm bank turns away dyslexic donors" published on 29 Dec 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/dec/29/largest-uk-sperm-bank-turns-away-dyslexic-donors> (4 Jan 2016)

gene interference experiments to remove genetic disorders from the foetus during pregnancy, means we are moving towards creating a humanity without alternative perspectives and less creative ways of thinking. This is why we have a responsibility to embrace and cherish difference.

An extreme example of a fictional posthuman narrative is *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014) in which Peter Dinklage is cast to play the Bolivar Trask character. To add levels of diversity to a character already designed as normative is a step forward. Comics tend to have progressive storylines and characters to represent this, and as Fassbender's character Magneto proclaims: "Humanity has always feared what's different". But, as *Frozen* shows, queer identities can have positive effects on society, once society shows more tolerance towards diversity.

## THE NON-NORMATIVE / REVERSAL GAZE

Lee Parpart first introduced the term, the Non-Normative Gaze, in Kay Armatage's *Gendering the Nation: Canadian women's cinema*,<sup>108</sup> whereas Halberstam talks of the more specific Transgender Gaze, which suggests "deploying certain formal techniques to give the viewer access in order to allow us to look *with* the transgender character instead of *at* [them]".<sup>109</sup> The technique of transing the gaze can and should be applied to every form of non-normative character, hence why I refer to it as a Non-Normative gaze. Kaplan develops the argument about the reversal gaze by quoting French philosopher Sartre, who wished his fellow white French readers would experience the discovery of their whiteness through the steady gaze of blacks: "I want you to feel, as I, the sensation of being seen. For the white man has enjoyed for three thousand years the privilege of seeing without being seen... Today, these black men have fixed their gaze upon us and our gaze is thrown back into our eyes".<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Armatage, Kay (red.), *Gendering the nation: Canadian women's cinema*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1999, p. 266.

<sup>109</sup> Halberstam (2005), p. 78.

<sup>110</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 10.

Leading figures of the French experimental film scene since the late 70s, Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki – known as the first female double auteur artists in the world – explored the (Ir)reversal gaze by switching roles between the director/performer, as explained at the Queer Experimentalism programme at Uppsala International Short Film Festival in 2015.<sup>111</sup>

As we have seen in this essay, trans characters tend to appear “without the company of other gender-dissident characters,” this is why Straube suggests “forming collective structures within the films in order to oppose the isolation of their representation” as well as “finding new and different ways to represent trans embodiment without embedding it in constraint”.<sup>112</sup> In regards to the future of trans cinema, Gust, Russo and Allen states: “It is crucial that trans individuals are presented consciously as multidimensional and humanistic”.<sup>113</sup> If filmmakers continue to portray queer bodies as prone to abuse and voyeurism, the audience who does not knowingly know anyone queer come across such a person in real life after having seen one depicted as a potential victim, they could be inclined to instantly categorise that body as inferior to themselves, as showcased in the suggested on-screen scenario. How about instead writing fierce and popular characters (rather than weakened by isolation), boosted by social acceptance that laugh at conservative forces attempting to reduce them to whatever makes them different?

As for crip cinema and why exploitation is likely to occur, Whalen describes how “disabled people are still, in far too many contexts, treated as something other. Something less. And, thus, something to be appropriated” [---] These people do not exist for our inspiration. But visibility seeds advocacy and in a society that claims to be progressive we’re too far behind”.<sup>114</sup> Crossan makes the following

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<sup>111</sup> Anna Linder “Queer Experimentalism at Uppsala Short Film Festival: The Angel Cycle by Maria Klonaris & Katerina Thomadaki” published on 22 Oct 2015 <http://annalinder.se/queer-experimentalism-the-angel-cycle-by-maria-klonaris-katerina-thomadaki/> (3 Dec 2015)

<sup>112</sup> Straube (2014), p. 26, 58.

<sup>113</sup> Gust, Russo, Allen (2015), p. 79.

<sup>114</sup> Whalen (2015)

concluding point: “For portrayals of disability don’t just improve by employing actually disabled actors. The films need to be scripted, directed and produced by people with disabilities too”.<sup>115</sup>

In both *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) and *Freaks* (1932), the antagonist is a normative, non-disabled character, which is one way to reverse the gaze. As Sartre explained, the normative enjoys “the privilege of seeing without being seen... Today, these [non-normatives] have fixed their gaze upon us and our gaze is thrown back into our eyes,<sup>116</sup> allowing privileged people read as normative to see themselves displayed as the Other, which is a great method of sharing transversal dialog and thereby shifting perspectives. This is what trans gazes should entail in order to transverse humanist dichotomies.

## CONCLUSION

Research done on Trans Cinema and Non-Normative Cinema in general, is still in early stages and therefore fairly unexplored with many fields to be investigated further. In this essay, I have provided a holistic approach to trigger other scholars, filmmakers and industry decision-makers to question the narratives on minorities and the star ideal of the industry and to dive deeper into various specific areas I have introduced here. Straube wrote in the final chapter of *Trans Cinema and its Exit Scapes*: “It would be interesting to continue the debate on trans casting for Trans Cinema or cinema in general, including on the topics of authenticity, access, advocacy and the de/naturalization of trans embodiment in cinema related to casting choices”,<sup>117</sup> which I have started to formulate in this thesis. And as Straube, I also consider this essay a starting point, rather than solely a result. It is a way to open up a conversation and raise awareness on how cinema can include greater diversity in relation to the bodies we see represented

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<sup>115</sup> Crossan (2015)

<sup>116</sup> Kaplan (2010), p. 10.

<sup>117</sup> Straube (2014), p. 213.

in the industry elite. As this thesis has shown, diverse representation is vital for positive self-identification. In Richard Dyers words, quoted by Straube: “Representational images ‘delimit and enable what people can be in a given society’”.<sup>118</sup> Straube also concludes by suggesting more areas of research:

Trans Cinema having so far not been analysed in detail in relation to the dominance and seeming privileging of whiteness and white trans characters in film. Neither has privileging of ‘able-bodied’ characters been addressed in research and related to the intra-action between trans representation and its social impact.<sup>119</sup>

This thesis initiated a discussion regarding crip and trans cinema, showing writers how to develop characters that are more than their disability, sexuality and gender identity by providing these characters with a personality and a plot unrelated to the thing that makes them stand out. *Don’t even make that thing a thing*. Chivers also points out the lack of critical whiteness studies within cultural science: “Neither age studies nor disability studies offers an adequate framework for thinking through race on the silvering screen. To date, most North American and European films that focus on aging feature white actors”.<sup>120</sup> And Miller’s final paragraph reads: “Analysis of transgender representation in film and other media continues to be important, and future research must continue to bring attention to the myriad ways transgender people are distanced by these representations”.<sup>121</sup> Both quotes indicate there is a strong need for academics to continue investigating these topics so we can progress as a society and global community.

To summarize: Diverse, equal representation is needed on all fields, both in terms of who are the creative voices behind the project and the industry decision makers – from selection committees at artistic schools to producers and distributors with a say in the content – as well as the pool of actors representing the characters on the screen.

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<sup>118</sup> Straube (2014), p. 59.

<sup>119</sup> Straube (2014), p. 213.

<sup>120</sup> Chivers (2011), p. 28.

<sup>121</sup> Miller (2015), p. 142.

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- *Livet är en Schlager* (*Once in a Lifetime*, S. Bier 2000, SWE/DK)
- *Big Momma's House* (R. Gosnell, 2000, US/GER)
- *Satree lek* (*The Iron Ladies*, Yongyoot Thongkongtoon, 2000, TH)
- *Appu* (Vasanth, 2000, IN)
- *100 Girls* (M. Davis, 2000, US)
- *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (John Cameron Mitchell, 2001, US)
- *By Hook or by Crook* (Dodge/Howard, 2001, US)
- *Cremaster 3* (M. Barney 2002, US)
- *Sorority Boys* (W. Wolodarsky, 2002, US)
- *Monster* (P. Jenkins 2003, US)

- *Miffo* (Daniel Lind Lagerlöf, 2003, SWE)
- *Normal* (Jane Anderson, 2003, US)
- *Satree lek 2 (Iron Ladies 2)* (Yongyoot Thongkongtoon, 2003, TH)
- *White Chicks* (Keenen Ivory Wayans, 2004, US)
- *Wild Side* (Sébastien Lifshitz, 2004, FR/BE/UK)
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- *Breakfast on Pluto* (Neil Jordan, 2005, IR/UK)
- *Transamerica* (D. Tucker 2005, US)
- *Tom-Yum-Goong* (Prachya Pinkaew, 2005, TH)
- *Cheonhajangsa Madonna (Like A Virgin)* (Lee, Hae-jun, Lee, Hae-yeong, 2006, KR)
- *XXY* (L. Puenzo 2007 ARG/FR/SP)
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- *Birth of a Dragon* (George Nolfi, 2016, US)
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