

# **‘The Mother of All Bad Movies’**

An audience research on the culture of Tommy Wiseau’s *The Room*  
based on the live cinematic experience

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## Abstract

The world of cult cinema is dotted with numerous films that are often characterised by event-like evening screenings in independent or art-house cinemas years or even decades after the film's initial release. One film synonymous with the cult cinema circuit is Tommy Wiseau's *The Room* (2003), which has often been hailed as the 'Citizen Kane of bad movies'<sup>1</sup> due to the film's lack of artistic vision, poor acting, and its general ineptitude in craft. Each month around the world, audiences would congregate at movie theatres to celebrate the movie through the conducting of numerous physical actions and verbal disparagement aimed at the screen. These types of screenings are the focus of this thesis where audiences of *The Room* in Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden were interviewed. Through the qualitative audience research methodology, this thesis places individual opinions at the forefront, emphasising on their abilities to ascribe meaning and constructing their realities. This approach allows the research to extract rich narratives and unpack the intricacies of audiences' values and thoughts based on *The Room* screenings they attended.

The aim of this thesis is to critically analyse how individuals conduct readings of such aesthetically 'bad' texts and how they appropriate knowledge they have gathered in the screening. It explicates how such reading protocols produce an atypical and transgressive live experience where that is distinct from a normal cinemagoing experience. The thesis analyses the nuances of taste and how camp sensibilities can give rise to numerous social implications such as the creation of bonds and the ability to obtain discursive resources. The findings indicate that the live viewing culture of *The Room* constructs affinities and socialises the audience into an understanding of the cult film culture in general.

This thesis argues that the camp sensibility, with irony as one of its key tenets is crucial for audiences to find pleasure in a text that is objectively poor in terms of aesthetics. The camp sensibility was found to be rooted in the audiences' perception that *The Room* was produced solely out of sincere intentions, creating a dichotomous condition that increases distance between audiences and the film itself. This allowed the live screenings of the film to embody the 'carnavalesque' in which social etiquette and especially the typical moviegoing etiquette is reversed. Based on this, *The Room* screenings can be considered to be an emotional public sphere where expressions of opinions and emotions are allowed. Due to the flow of expressions, the 'liveness' setting shapes the culture by creating a sense of belonging and camp capital is attained by audience members due to the screenings' affective climate, which arises from a shared reading protocol anchored in the camp sensibility. Camp capital is then defined as a specific form of capital that is valued within the camp context where an ironic mode of engagement is necessary and functions as a discursive resource and also signify one's place within the hierarchy of *The Room* culture.

Keywords: *Film, Movies, Audience, Media, Cult Cinema, Live Cinema, Camp, Taste, The Room, Tommy Wiseau, Denmark, Sweden, Irony, Interaction, Emotional Public Sphere, Camp Capital*

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.rossmorinfilm.com/the-citizen-kane-of-bad-movies.html>

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	2
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	3
<b>1. Introduction</b>	5
What is <i>The Room</i> ?	6
Researching <i>The Room</i>	7
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	10
The Audience Perspective	10
Cult Cinema	11
Live Cinema	15
Camp and Taste	17
<b>3. Qualitatively Researching Audiences of <i>The Room</i></b>	24
Methodological Approach	24
Location of Research	25
Design, Sampling, and Conducting the Research	26
Analysing the Data	28
Reflection on Methods	29
<b>4. Audiences' Perceptions on <i>The Room</i> as a Live Experience</b>	32
Camp Appreciation	32
Being in the Live Experience	39
A Realm of Freedom and Constraint	45
Attaining Camp Capital	50
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	55
<b>References</b>	63
<b>APPENDIXES</b>	70
Recruitment Message Example	70
Consent Form	71
Interview Guide	72
Field Notes Example	74
Sample Interview	76
Coding Scheme	82

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The experience of going to the movies in contemporary society can be seen as a form of escapism in which we are immersed in a world that is not our own through the power of audio and visuals that unfold in a meaningful narrative. Once the lights go out in a movie theatre, we become a part of a temporary gathering where certain rules and restrictions are enforced. We are typically encouraged to remain silent throughout the movie and discouraged from using our cell phones as a part of the general cinemagoing etiquette. In this way, audiences of the cinema are characterised by the repression of their expressions and exhibitionism (Mulvey, 2003, p.135). However, in the world of cult cinema, audiences are encouraged to interact with others and be vocal about their feelings in the act of making cult movie experiences.

One such film experience where throwing spoons at the screen and verbally abusing characters are considered normal, is Tommy Wiseau's *The Room* (2003), regularly hailed as one of the worst movies ever made<sup>2</sup>. This thesis is an audience research on how individuals are finding meaning and obtaining pleasure from a film that is aesthetically deficient. The research critically examines the values and opinions of individuals based on their experience of attending a screening of *The Room*. Through the use of audience interviews and observations within a Northern European context, it sheds a light on how an appreciation towards such films can give rise to a particular viewing culture centred on the live screenings of *The Room*. This thesis will argue for the importance of camp and irony in creating a viewing atmosphere that is marked by freedom for physical expressions. Such freedom is significant because it fosters a shared sense of belonging and the endowment of *camp capital*, which can be defined as a form of capital that is specifically valued within the camp context where an ironic mode of engagement is necessary. Camp capital in this sense, can be utilised as a resource for watching and interacting with cult cinema which enhances one's experience and also provide a sense of place within the general viewing culture of the film.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example <https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/12/2/16720012/the-room-tommy-wiseau-backstory-explained>

## What is *The Room*?

[*The Room*] is a very unique experience you won't get from any other movies. Both because of the quality of the movie and also the interactiveness. [...] It's like the master of all bad movies, the mother of all bad movies.

*Freja (29, F, Media Researcher)*

Over the years, people have flocked to *The Room* screenings and it has evolved into a cultural phenomenon among many moviegoers. Initially released in 2003, evening screenings of the movie are still held in theatres around the world, where both repeat viewers of the film and first-timers congregate mostly to disparage the movie by heckling at the screen and conducting numerous actions throughout the screening.

It all started with a vision from Tommy Wiseau, to be able to make it in Hollywood by writing a movie script. He took it upon himself to self-finance the movie and eventually managed to finish the film. Because nobody wanted the movie in their cinemas, Wiseau rented out a theatre and screened *The Room* only for curious people that passed by. The history of *The Room*'s rise to fame was well documented as a then-college student named Michael Rousselet was credited to have started the whole sensation<sup>3</sup>. He sat alone in an empty theatre and eventually asked some of his friends to come with him again to the next screening. As a result, a number of interactive rituals such as throwing spoons, yelling out lines from particular scenes, and the freedom to shout out commentaries developed as the hallmark characteristics of a screening of *The Room*. Little did Rousselet know back then, this was the birth of a global phenomenon that has a lasting power 15 years later. What started out with a hundred people at one screening evolved into multiple monthly events that spanned multiple cities within the United States and eventually numerous countries worldwide. Since the beginning, *The Room* has been screened in over 600 locations<sup>4</sup> in the US alone and have spread to at least 10 countries worldwide (e.g. UK, Canada, Denmark, France, and Germany among others).

Back in 2003, during the initial first days of *The Room*'s initial theatrical release, both audiences and critics alike were dumbfounded on how to make sense of the film's inherent aesthetic

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<sup>3</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Movies/01/14/the.room/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theroommovie.com/screeningspop.html>

qualities – such as dialogues and shot framing among many other aspects. In a brief review of *The Room* for *Variety* in July 2003<sup>5</sup>, film journalist Scott Foundas recalled that based on the audience’s reaction at the screening he attended, the film ‘may be something of a first: A movie that prompts most of its viewers to ask for their money back –before even 30 minutes have passed’. He partially credits this observation to ‘the extreme unpleasantness’ of ‘a series of soft-core sex scenes’ and the ‘overall ludicrousness’ of the film’s primary goal to convince the audience that ‘the freakish Wiseau is actually a normal, everyday sort of guy’.

From the very beginning, *The Room* has been established as an aesthetically displeasing film. However, if we compare Foundas’ seemingly unenthusiastic early review to another journalist’s review that was conducted much later, we can see that there was a shift in how to appraise *The Room* as a movie. For example, Steve Rose who wrote for *The Guardian* in September 2009<sup>6</sup> noted that it was possible to coin *The Room* as ‘so bad it’s good’ because Tommy Wiseau had ‘vision, drive, luck, and obsessive vanity [...] combined with a total lack of acting talent’, which elevated ‘the whole affair to high-trash status’. By this time, *The Room* is no longer to be considered pure cinematic detritus absent of all value, rather it has earned the predicate of ‘high-trash’. It implies that Wiseau’s film had obtained a sense of distinction if paralleled to other comparable movies by embodying the moniker ‘so bad it’s good’.

### **Researching *The Room***

It was based on the reputation of the *The Room*’s badness and the rowdiness of its screenings that this thesis found its impetus: an interest in unpacking the experience and feelings of individuals who attended the live screenings of *The Room*. Because appraisals and readings of such cult texts like *The Room* is largely dependent on the spectator (Mills, 2010, p.669), this thesis adopts a methodological approach that is rooted in audience research. Here, significance is placed on the cultural and social values of the audience. It embodies an approach that shifts the centre of attention to other aspects aside from the aesthetics and textual qualities of the film, which is the more common approach in analysing cult film texts. Individuals who have recently attended a

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://variety.com/2003/film/reviews/the-room-1117921325>. It’s worth noting that this article is the only easy-to-find review of *The Room* that was written and published online back in 2003.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2009/sep/10/cinema-the-room-cult>. This review was conducted in lieu of *The Room*’s UK premiere at the Prince Charles Cinema in London in August 2009.

screening of *The Room* were interviewed in regards to their experience. They were asked, for example, on how they ascribe meaning to the film itself, how the interactions that occur added value to the experience, and how they perceive themselves having gone through the experience.

This research aims to critically examine how individuals engage and interact an aesthetically ‘bad’ text and how they appropriate knowledge they have gathered in the screening. It would explicate how analysing audiences’ reading protocols provide an understanding on the ‘social dynamics’ (Klinger, 1989, p.4) of the viewing culture that is characterised by an atypical and transgressive live experience where a ‘multilayering of ancillary content’ creates an event-like atmosphere (Dickson, 2018, p.99) that is distinct from a normal cinemagoing experience. The thesis analyses how the culture of *The Room* socialises the audience into an understanding of the ‘meanings and values of the culture’ (Thornton, 1995, p.3).

Built upon these aims, three research questions frame the theoretical and empirical research:

- How are audiences defining and understanding *The Room* as a cult film?
- What role does the camp sensibility and taste play in the way audiences are viewing *The Room*?
- How do audiences shape the live experience of *The Room*?

Immediately following this introduction, the thesis will delve into a review of previous academic discussions that will situate the thesis within four intersecting areas of interests: audience studies, cult cinema, live cinema, and camp. We will look at how media and film studies audience research can elicit rich narratives from individuals in an effort to shed a light on their closely-held modes of perception and values. A discussion on cult cinema follows where we take note of other cult film texts, such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975) and how it’s relevant to the study of *The Room*. Subsequently, an analysis of previous academic works specifically on *The Room* will be laid out as important reference points of this research. It will be followed with an acknowledgement on the significance of live cinema and how it differs from the normal cinemagoing experience. And lastly, intricacies of the camp sensibility as a mode of enjoyment that is ultimately linked with personal taste will be fleshed out. Afterwards, a reflection of methodology and methods will be elaborated, emphasising why qualitative in-depth interviews supplemented with personal observations were chosen as the method most appropriate for this thesis. Points will be made on the design of the research, sampling of respondents,



conducting the interviews, and also the process of analysing the data collected. Reflection on the methods will also be offered as the final part of that section.

The main analysis of this thesis will focus on four key themes: the appreciation of camp, the experience of being in the live screening, a discussion into the notions of freedom and constraint, and the elaboration of camp capital. The acknowledgment of camp gives reasonings as to how audiences ascribe meaning and find enjoyment in experiencing *The Room* that is closely entwined with the aesthetic qualities of the film itself. Because of this reading protocol engaged by audiences, we can then see how the live experience is shaped by creating a sense of bonding among individuals and also identify how *The Room* screenings differ from a normal movie experience. Then we can conceptualise the nature of the screening by applying the notion of the ‘carnavalesque’ where social etiquette is reversed, but only within the confines of the cinema space. Lastly, the analysis will develop the idea of camp capital that is obtained by audience members from the screening experience and can be utilised as a resource within the culture of *The Room*.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### The Audience Perspective

In studying audiences of *The Room*, we must establish that this thesis acknowledges the audience as having power to ‘distil’ meaning from a performance (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.43). It follows in the vein of Austin’s (1981) seminal research on *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. In his study, Austin suggested that the event itself is what ‘attracts and continues to support the popularity of a cult film’ (Ibid., p.53). He also noted that in regards to cult texts, the audiences were the ones that identifies these films as such (Ibid., p.44). Therefore, we can acknowledge that a consideration towards audiences of cult films – how they think, what are their values, and more importantly how they are linked to a greater sociological context, are paramount in an effort to understand their experience of *The Room* screenings.

One example of a research that has shaped this thesis into centralising the audiences as the main focal point was Hermes’ (1995) work on readers of women’s magazines. She demonstrated that even though certain texts might have little to no cultural value, they still possess practical value that may shape an individual’s everyday life (Hermes, 1995, p.143). Her research also illustrated that even though the study of audiences is perpetually linked with the notion of meaning-making, audiences -or in Hermes’ (1995) case readers- may also find texts to be devoid of any meaning. Alongside this, the thesis is acknowledging the role of the audience in regards to the ‘Spectacle/Performance Paradigm’ (SPP), posited by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) where research in this sense is defining the audience as closely intertwined with their identity and ‘intimately bound up with the construction of the person’ (p.37). This harkens back to Goffman’s (1959) idea in that an individual’s mobilisation of his/her activity is the materialisation of that person’s identity in ‘performing’ (p.19-20). Audiences are seen as a component in an event-like setting where certain a degree of ritualistic elements constitute the experience in some ways and ‘the rules of behaviour are circumscribed’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.41). The topic of this research fits perfectly with this notion, in that *The Room* screenings exhibit a setting where repetition and ritualistic behaviour has become the norm, even though ‘the rules of behaviour’ differ on some levels.

For screenings of *The Room*, the notion of performance not only applies to the film being watched by the audience, but also applies to the audience themselves due to the interactive nature of the experience. This draws parallels with wrestling audience where they are engaging in a form of ‘emotional work’ constitutive of their individual performance, allowing them to become active audiences rather than passive (Hill, 2014). In her case, Hill drew upon Barthes’ idea of ‘spectacle of excess’ where she established that fans and anti-fans performed a collaboration of ‘passionate labour’ with both event organisers and wrestlers. As a conclusion, she noted that the aforementioned ‘emotional work’ becomes a determining factor that ‘re-enforces’ and shapes live wrestling events (Ibid.), in which the same could arguably be said in regards to audiences of *The Room* screenings.

With the above in mind, this section of the thesis will further address a number of scholarly work that functions to situate this thesis within the academic landscape and also illustrate its contribution to knowledge. First, it will be elaborated on how we can interpret *The Room* as a quintessential example of cult cinema based on the staying power and audiences the film attracts. *The Room* has followed a similar trajectory with another established cult film text, namely *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, in that both were made for a relatively small budget (around \$1 million), ‘bombed’ during their initial theatrical release, and years later they have both remained a ‘fixture of the Midnight Movie circuit’, consistently drawing large crowds (Weinstock, 2008, p.2). Second, it will be highlighted how *The Room* screenings would be considered to be a live cinematic experience that is ‘event-led’ where live events were created around the screenings (Atkinson and Kennedy, 2016, p.140). This reasoning came to be due to audiences actively interacting with the film in accordance to cues from the text (e.g. throwing spoons, verbally counting the number of footballs throws, etc.). Lastly, a discussion on camp sensibility and taste is unpacked, anchored in the notion that the transgressive nature of *The Room* screenings would have an appeal to a particular set of people whose purpose of attending is to revel in the ironic value of the film as a result of poor filmmaking.

## **Cult Cinema**

One possible entry point into studying *The Room* would be situating oneself within the realm of film studies. Numerous attempts at studying cult film have mostly been focused on the film’s

aesthetics, textual analysis, and 'readings'. However, there seems to be a lack of research that are more aligned with audience studies. Allen (2011) notes that there is a 'normative pedagogic practice' when it comes to studying film that involves viewing, analysing, and discussing select texts, which often aligns these types of studies with literary studies (p.45). Hence why audience research can further fill the void left by a need of research that is not emphasising the textual qualities.

Even if that's the case, we still have address previous academic works in cult films. We have to regard cult film appreciation in today's context not only as something obscure that's spread through word of mouth, but it can also be exposed through a slew of books or specialised shows such as *Mystery Science Theatre* (Taylor, 1999, p.4). Partially because of this, cult cinema and its texts have long been a source of academic inquiry with films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), as examples of classic objects of study. In the discussion surrounding cult cinema, Telotte (1991) remarks that a cult film is typically characterised by a 'highly specified and limited audiences' where 'transgressions' of the film are a source of 'singular pleasure' for the audience (p.7). Yet, the very term 'cult film' in itself is very broad in its definition. Telotte (Ibid., p.9-10) notes that there are two main strands of cult films. One relies on Hollywood icons where the movies can be considered to be commercial successes in the past but then brought back to life in a contemporary setting such as *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), and *Rebel Without A Cause* (Ray, 1955). These types of films are typically situated in a condition 'where temporal and historical distance initiates the audience reaction' (Corrigan, 1991, p.29). For these cult films, nostalgia and the glamorization of a bygone era seems to take precedent in establishing their cult status.

Another strand of cult films is mainly shown at midnight screenings marked by an audience with subculture interests, with movies such as *Eraserhead* (Lynch, 1977), *Liquid Sky* (Tsukerman, 1982), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and evidently, *The Room* as prime examples. Waller (1991) conducted a research based in Lexington, Kentucky from 1980-1985, where he examined theatre venues that were playing 'midnight movies', looked at their booking policies, and surveyed the different types of films that were shown. He noted there is value in distinguishing the midnight movies with other cult films because that distinction makes it possible to consider these as a separate subculture genre (Ibid., p.184). Even if that's the case, there are enough

reasons to perhaps group them generically. Most notably, each of the aforementioned films provide audiences with a sense of ‘loving understanding’ without discounting their individual preferences and taste towards something different (Telotte, 1991, p.11).

In regards to studying cult films, Mathijs and Sexton (2011) identify four contexts that scholars utilise in defining such movies: sociological studies, reception studies, textual interpretations, and aesthetic analysis (p.6). Based on this, this thesis is more aligned within reception studies as it is the context most concerned with how the audience views the subject matter. McCulloch and Crisp (2016) considers cult cinema to be amorphous in that most academic research on the subject has been focused on its ‘contextual as well as its textual dimensions’ (p.194). This thesis is deeply rooted in qualitative methods and allows the voices and opinions of the audiences to shine through processes of reflection and the production of narratives (Couldry, 2010, p.8). This is important because in the case of *The Room*, it is the audience that shapes the experience. Tommy Wiseau didn’t intend to make a film that can be categorised as comedic, but due to the text’s filmic incompetence it is only considered comedic ‘when the audience communally deems it so’ (Popescu, 2013, p.3). Therefore it is necessary to acknowledge the audiences’ voice that functions as a resource that maps out their experience based on their readings and meaning-making of the film. Audience voices gives us ‘fragments of stories’ that allows this research to map out their knowledges that are used to obtain enjoyment. (Hermes, 2005, p.85).

Austin (1981), in the conclusion of his *Rocky Horror* study asked a few unanswered questions, one which is pertinent to this thesis: ‘Why are [components of a cult film] important to the audience?’ (p.53). These questions are still relevant when studying *The Room* considering that there are strikingly similar behaviours and habits of audience members who are in attendance at a screening of both films. People dress up, talk back at the screen, and carry out pre-existing rituals that are triggered by specific on-screen cues -either visually or auditory. Furthermore, the aforementioned questions are not questions that surveys or questionnaires can answer. Hence in this audience-centred study of *The Room*, we will get to pinpoint exactly how cult audiences are formed and shaped. Furthermore, this thesis would also enrich the discussion on cult films by contributing an added case in addition to the oft-utilised aforementioned *Rocky Horror* where in addition to Austin (1981), Weinstock (2007) and Mathijs and Mendik (2008) for example, has also made the film as their focus of study.

It's worth noting previous research on *The Room* has been conducted within the last decade (see McCulloch, 2011; Pavlounis, 2012; Foy, 2012; MacDowell and Zborowski, 2013). Pavlounis' article (2012) *Sincerely Celebrating Failure: Tommy Wiseau's The Room and the Search for Sincerity* suggests that there is a need for audiences to consider Tommy Wiseau as a sincere filmmaker by 'legitimately and genuinely' celebrate 'Wiseau's failure on its own terms' (Pavlounis, 2012, p.28-29). Additionally, Pavlounis is implying that an ironic viewing of *The Room* is required as it would 'not only signal the acknowledgment of failure, but also the acceptance of it' (Ibid., p.29). This sentiment that an enjoyment of *The Room* can only be attained through ironic means is echoed in MacDowell and Zborowski's (2013) work, where in their analysis of the aesthetics of *The Room*, they infer that any pronouncement of the film as a 'masterpiece' can only be 'tongue in cheek' and never threatens the most traditional ways of aesthetic evaluation (p.23). What this means is that from a purely aesthetic point of view, it's never worth one's time to argue whether *The Room* should be considered a good film, because aesthetically the answer is always unquestionably no and thus never challenging the 'traditional standards of aesthetic evaluation' (Ibid.).

This establishes a notion that is important in defining the parameters of this thesis, in that the research eschews an aesthetic reading of *The Room* in order to explicate the subjective dynamics of audiences in how and why they are calling it a 'masterpiece' even though they also acknowledge it's a bad film. The exploration of the audience dynamics as the focus was partially covered in Foy's (2012) article, carried out in a research utilising a performance ethnographic method, in which he attended and participated in a screening at the Art Theater in Champaign, Illinois. He sets out to uncover how the rituals, as a component of the screening, are 'embraced, embellished, and deviated' while at the same time provide a critique on their more glaring problematic aspects (p.1). One such aspect came in the form of the misogynistic audience heckling towards Lisa, in which Foy reflects that 'an empowered audience is not necessarily a critical audience' and reminds all of us that the discourse created by an empowered audience can as easily reify a problem as it can subvert them (Ibid., p.14). Discourses created within *The Room* screenings modifies the act of experiencing it, which implies audience with the film at a live screening is a text in itself, as viewers rewrite the film during their experience of watching (Popescu, 2013, p.3).

McCulloch's (2011) study on *The Room* is an audience-focused research, where he conducted a combination of online surveys and phone interviews of audience members who were present at two screenings at the Prince Charles Cinema in London (Ibid., p.190-191). His main aim of the research was to question 'how' and 'why' participatory behaviours are evident within a screening of *The Room* and also explores how 'individual members view themselves in relation to others inside the cinema' (Ibid., p.191). Specifically, his study linked audience participation with the concept of comedic relief by 'exploring the social functions of comedy as they relate to cultural texts.' (Ibid., p.189). In his conclusion, McCulloch (2011) noted that the audience of *The Room* find pleasure in their attempts of reading the text as something ironic or comedic where these readings 'must subsequently be justified and legitimated by the reaction of others', in which he remarks that the appreciation of the film itself, categorised as 'so bad it's good', is 'only concerned with cultural capital' that may be utilised to enhance a person's social capital (p.212). In addition to providing a different geographic context (Northern European compared to British in McCulloch's case), this thesis would extend the understanding of camp and irony -as only briefly touched upon by McCulloch, how it relates to audiences' perception and how it shapes the live experience. Furthermore, the thesis would also put forward that audience experience is not only concerned with cultural capital, but also another specific type of capital that is valued within the experience of *The Room* with irony as its main tenet.

### **Live Cinema**

Once the audience in a movie screening begins to embody numerous elements of 'liveness', the audience itself becomes an even more intelligible target of inquiry, as compelling as the text they are experiencing themselves. In the case of *The Room* screening, the audience complements the movie and also vice versa. It can be said that the quality of a *Room* screening is established by the audience's embodiments of these live elements. Therefore, live cinema has often been a reoccurring component when it comes to cult films. The concept of live cinema itself was mostly defined through a borrowing of terms that describes 'live performance' such as musical concerts in that 'performers and the audience are both physically and temporally co-present to one another' (Auslander, 2008, p.60). But as Auslander acknowledges afterwards, the definition of 'liveness' has significantly evolved and changed and 'live' has been used to describe situations 'that do not meet those basic conditions' (Ibid.). It is because of this reframing of the definition

of ‘liveness’ that public screenings of *The Room* can be categorized into a live performance, hence a research on said screenings will also contribute to the discourses surrounding live cinema.

Even though some scholarly work on cult cinema (e.g. Austin, 1981; Klinger 1989) has been conducted for decades, academic research on this front is still considered to be an emerging field of study mainly due to the increasing advent of new, different forms of live cinema such as Secret Cinema<sup>7</sup> and Edible Cinema<sup>8</sup>. Secret Cinema for example, have been the subject of few studies (Atkinson and Kennedy 2015, 2016) where they elaborate the complex dynamics between audience participation and the structure of the event itself. McCulloch and Crisp (2016) also conducted a study on the notion of event-led cinema experiences where they targeted the audiences of the Prince Charles Cinema in London as the subject of study through questionnaires. Based on the above, it is still acknowledged that comprehension surrounding live cinema in academic terms are still underdeveloped and ‘remain illegible and are hard to apprehend without [a] common understanding and shared language’ (Atkinson and Kennedy, 2018, p.267). Levitt (2018) states that further research surrounding the moviegoing experience in a ‘post-cinematic era’ is required, especially in regards to ‘how going to the movies can create a meaningful and lasting sense of place for audience members’ (p.32).

As an effort to shed a light on how such ‘liveness’ came to being within the cinema and specifically a screening of *The Room*, it would be appropriate to give a brief historical context on the conducts that is a part of the general cinema-going experience. In order to understand why live elements of certain cult films – which seemingly contradict most of today’s unwritten and written etiquette rules of the typical cinema- generate much curiosity, we must consider the viewing habits of cinema audiences since its advent. Starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, movie theatres – namely in the United States- were very much a neighbourhood affair in which people who lived closely to each other would occasionally gather to enjoy a brief showing of a film. Due to the format of early films, there wasn’t a strong pull towards the narrative that is unfolding on-screen, which allows brief moments of intermissions as materialised by numerous interactive, live, and participative forms of entertainments such as a person playing the piano or sing-alongs amidst audience members who were talking, eating, and

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.secretcinema.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://ediblecinema.co.uk/>



discussing at the same time (Butsch, 2008, p.47). It is because of this, audience members of that time defined movie theatres as a ‘public space for social interaction much like a town square’ (Ibid.).

With the above in mind, Allen (2011) notes that within the context of today’s post-moviegoing age, we have to think back and realise that for a hundred years or so, the most striking feature of the cinematic experience was its social aspects (p.44). This is echoed in the survey conducted on movie audiences by film historian Tom Stempel, in which he remarked that one of the main focuses of the moviegoing experience is the audiences’ need to share emotions with others (2001, p.218). Within his ‘Going to the Show’ project that maps out movie theatres and the cinematic experience in the state of North Carolina, Allen (2011) also reflects that it is not only the social aspect of the experience we need to consider, but also its spatiality (Ibid., p.48). In the case of *The Room*, this is relevant because we want to understand how audience members are making sense of the space that have been provided for the screening. Do they see the space as a typical cinematic venue? Does the physical space in any way shape or transform the audiences’ perspectives, taste, and values? As such, it is these aforementioned relationships, both social and spatial, that will be one of the focuses of this research.

From this, we can infer that today’s cinemagoing etiquette, such as no talking during the movie, didn’t really come into being until sound became an integral part of films, enhancing the immersion factor of being at a movie screening. It became widely enforced that the silence of audience members is presumed to be a requirement in order to have an enjoyable moviegoing experience. It channels the notion of ‘ideal spectatorship’ and how oppositional audience responses ‘are clearly incompatible with dominant formulations of spectatorship that define the spectator’s response as a product of the specific operations of a text’ (Klinger, 1989, p.3). In this case, *The Room* and the boisterous nature of its screenings can be seen as a violation of various ‘protocols’ that are to be observed within a movie theatre. The rowdy and raucous affair in essence ‘express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships’ (Gitelman, 2006, p.7). The ‘digressions’, as Klinger (1989) terms it, does not necessarily ‘reproduce the single intended structure and meaning of a text’ and hence the uniqueness of one’s reading and meaning, experience and knowledge can be commodified and used by individuals as material for promotional discourses that extend into the social realm (p.16-17).

## Camp and Taste

In regards to the audiences themselves, there has been much discussion on taste and live or cult cinema. Sconce (1995) has written extensively on the paracinematic taste culture, in which he defines the culture as the valorising of numerous cinematic ‘trash’ that for the most part has been ‘rejected or simply ignored by legitimate film culture (p.372). He draws upon the concept of ‘excess’ and identifies it as a central operating component of the paracinematic taste where audiences are also focusing their attention beyond the narrative aspects of a certain film. ‘Excess’ in this case, can be described as an existing value that is situated beyond a text’s motivated use (Thompson, 1986, p.130). What this means is that when an audience member starts to consider a text does not provide enough ‘thorough motivation’, excess will then take over and affect the meanings of its narrative (Ibid., p.132). Because audiences are concentrating more on the text’s ‘bizarreness and stylistic eccentricity’ they have emphasised the film’s material identity enabling it to become the primary focus of attention towards the movie where excess would push the audience ‘beyond the formal boundaries of the text’, rendering its diegetic components as something trivial (Sconce, 1995, p.386-387). Sconce would then argue that because excess provides the audience with freedom that enables them to view a film with a ‘fresh and defamiliarized perspective’ (Ibid.), it entitles a question that is political in nature: what does the audience do with this newfound freedom that arises from excess?

Sconce (1995) acknowledges that paracinema is unique because of its aspirations to become ‘counter-cinema’ where it’s characterised by ‘an aesthetic of vocal confrontation’ with a more aggressive approach in challenging the ‘established canon of “quality” cinema’ (Ibid., p.374). The ‘vocal’ nature of paracinema was exemplified by a diatribe from *Zontar*<sup>9</sup>, where readers were encouraged to seek ‘badtruth’ in which their ‘hate is powerful enough to resist the temptations of REFINEMENT, TASTE, and ESCAPISM’ and went on to categorise the American ruling elite as ‘THIRTYSOMETHING COUNTRY-CLUB CHRISTIAN ZOMBIES’ (Ibid.). From this, we can explicitly see the degree of aggression that paracinematic culture holds towards the dominant power structure and blatantly advocating it. Jancovich (2002) in his critique of Sconce’s work however, notes that audiences of cult film – whether it’s paracinema or something else- typically do not share a unified opposition towards legitimate

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<sup>9</sup> A paracinematic magazine dedicated to the opposition of the ‘mainstream’ film culture, ‘dedicated to fighting the Evil Forces of The New Dark Ages’. See <http://www.zontar.net/WHATZONTAR.html>

culture (p.314). Not all audiences of *The Rocky Horror* or *The Room* would hold a contemptuous view on the ‘mainstream’ culture, nor are they dwelling in a realm of exclusivity where ‘my way or the highway’ is the norm. In fact, a number of cult audiences would attempt to ‘raise the value of their own tastes by demonstrating their comparability with it’ (Ibid.). In Jancovich’s case, he illustrated this by drawing upon the example of *Incredibly Strange Films*<sup>10</sup> where the editor drew positive comparisons between the ‘strangeness’ of Ed Wood and Dada (Ibid.).

Sconce (1995) observed on both paracinematic and camp sensibilities that they ‘are highly ironic, infatuated with the artifice and excess of obsolescent cinema’ (p.374). The notion of irony is a key component within the discussion of both paracinema and camp. When it comes to the irony in camp, Pavlounis (2012) notes that some of these discussions on irony are binary in nature, in that they regard a film as either a success or a failure and doesn’t deal with the film ‘on their own terms’ (p.27). Perkins also addresses irony in film by remarking that it should be ‘investigated as a mark of distinction’ and is ‘something that is not reducible to story, style or authorial disposition alone’ (2012, p.13). And hence this is an area where this thesis is geared for, by providing qualitative data on how the film’s audience regards both the cinematic text and also themselves in relation to the text they are experiencing. Based on this, we can explore how the ironic mode of engagement constitutes a form of capital - ‘camp capital’ - that can be utilised to enhance not only one’s experience, but also providing a sense of place within the general culture of the film.

Dyer (2002) latched the notion of ironic enjoyment with that of camp culture, specifically in how it is appropriated in gay culture. He posited that camp and irony has been utilised by individuals who belong in that culture as a form of ‘self-protection and thorns’ (p.50) in the face of a normative society. Dyer drew upon the historical experiences of the gay culture where camp has been used as a tool to keep ‘awfulness’ at bay (Ibid., p.49). Camp in this sense, is not masculine but more on the embodiment of being ‘human, witty, and vital’ not conforming to ‘the rigidity of the hetero male role’ (Ibid.). In terms of film, Dyer noted that the ascription of camp is fluid in nature and it is in essence how individuals are looking at it. He utilised the example of John Wayne films, which at face value is the ‘very antithesis of camp’ (Ibid., p.52). However, if one looks past the masculine qualities of John Wayne and how he’s an embodiment of machismo,

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<sup>10</sup> A book dedicated to American underground films edited by Jim Morton first published in 1985

you will be able to find camp value. The camp sensibility in this research's sense and context could then be seen as a resistance against the normative discourses and practices around film, 'a weapon against the mystique surrounding art' (Ibid.), in which the dominant belief is that in order for a film to be considered as 'good' it needs to be aesthetically good as well. Camp culture could then be defined as a collective of individuals who holds a high appreciation towards camp texts where irony is a key component in finding pleasure. Dyer (2002) then notes that being a part of a camp culture would give us 'a tremendous sense of identification and belonging' as it 'expresses and confirms' a host of values that would otherwise be drowned by the normative society (p.49).

More specifically, camp in itself is a 'love of the exaggerated, the "off", of things-being-what-they-are-not' (Sontag, 1966, p.279). In other words, it is not a sensibility that places great value on objective beauty, rather it elicits enjoyment from the opposite side of the spectrum in which irony can arguably be considered as a central mode of cognitive operation. Sontag (1966) however, remarks that camp cannot be exclusively confined to the gay culture even though this is considered to be the 'vanguards' of camp (p.290). Therefore, we can still consider *The Room* to be a camp experience because camp is first and foremost a mode of enjoyment and appreciation (Ibid., p.291). Its main patrons are instances of the 'off' and circling back to Sconce, 'excess'. Another contemporary example of a film that audiences have ascribed the moniker 'campy' is Nicolas Cage's *The Wicker Man* (LaBute, 2006). A remake of a 1973 thriller, the 2006 version was littered with puzzling predicaments, hilarious one-liners, and featured an over-the-top Nicolas Cage, who capped the film by shrieking 'Not the bees!' as he meets his death. *The Room*, much like 2006's *The Wicker Man* is undeniably aligned with what Sontag calls 'the ultimate camp statement': 'it's good *because* it's awful' (Ibid., p.292). Audiences for both movies were able to find pleasure not because of aesthetic qualities, rather the degree of artifice and stylisation, of 'excess', and of the 'off' (Ibid., p.277).

Even though '[having] a good camp' (Dyer, 2002, p.49) nurtures a sense of identification and belonging, they cannot be obtained uninhibitedly. McCulloch (2011) posits that audiences of *The Room* needs a form of justification and legitimization that would validate their readings of the film (p.213). This is where we need to address the ideas surrounding a form of cultural capital and how it interplays with audiences' meaning-making and taste as one of the cornerstones of

this thesis. Bourdieu (1979) provides us a foundation on thinking about distinction through taste, in which he notes that the individual's cognitive processes allow the acquirement of cultural codes (p.3). He recognizes that 'a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence' (Ibid., p.2). The fact one has to be initiated in the culture itself in order to gain proficiency, in a way creates a reflexive relationship with a previous notion that being a part of something would give us a sense of belonging. Therefore, we must consider the possibility that audiences of *The Room* screening might not feel an immediate sense of identification. What this means is that perhaps audience members who fall into this category might need to be gradually 'initiated' into the culture until they've obtained enough capital to confidently self-proclaim they're a part of the culture.

There is some reason in Bourdieu's remarks in that the 'uninitiated may experience as inadequate and unworthy of a satisfaction' that arises from their incapability to distinguish the meanings that are transcendent to the text itself (Ibid., p.43). As a contemporary example, this notion was evident in a study conducted by Vivar (2018) at the San Sebastian Horror and Fantasy Film Festival (SSHFFF) where it was acknowledged that there were hierarchical dynamics at play during an event as veterans of the movie screening were more revered than those who are first-timers. In fact, when it comes to Vivar's study, it was observed that there were elements of aggressiveness in putting people down if so-called veterans of the SSHFFF deemed an unseasoned person's heckling below their self-established witty standards.

As such, taste is defined by Bourdieu (1979) as the 'practical affirmation of an inevitable difference' (p.56). It can either unite or separate and when taste needs to be justified, it is characterised by the rejection of other tastes. Going back to Vivar's (2018) study at the SSHFFF for instance, the message contained within a heckle from a person can be considered to be a manifestation of one's taste. However, when one of the veterans of the festival audibly disapproves of such messages, the veteran is publicly refusing to legitimise the heckler's comments and hence his/her taste at that moment failed to be justified. Because of this, Bourdieu (1979) maintains that cultural competence – as an important element if one were to fit in – is clearly defined by its 'conditions of acquisition' where such conditions in regards to their relationship with the culture, engender a manner of applying said competence whose meaning and value are determined by both the perceivers and the producer (p.65-66).

In one of his concluding thoughts, Bourdieu postulates that taste functions ‘to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction’ and also provide a social orientation or a ‘sense of one’s place’ that guides individuals towards the practices (or in other cases goods) that are most appropriate to their position (1979, p.466). Though that may be the case, this thesis does not wish to construct a system of taste that’s present in a screening, rather the research explicates – as Sontag (1966) puts it – the ‘logic of taste’, which is the underlying sensibilities that produces a certain taste (p. 276). In other words, this thesis is less concerned with ascribing audiences with ‘good’ or ‘bad’ taste in which there is a clear semblance of structure, rather it is more concerned with the rationale of audiences on how they appreciate and respond to a cultural text. The idea of a camp sensibility can shed light on its appropriation by audiences within the context of *The Room* screenings.

With all of the above in mind, we can see how audience research serves as the ideal entry point in conceptualising the experience of individuals who attend the live screenings of *The Room*. Through the lens of the Spectacle/Performance paradigm, the ‘performativity’ in the connections between media and audiences become the focal point of interest (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.163). By defining the screenings as a performative space where there is a ‘sense of specialness’ separate from the mundanity of everyday life (Ibid., p.40), we can examine how the identity of individuals are manifested in relations to the live experience. For the case of this thesis, these notions are appropriate because the screenings themselves features a number of ritualistic behaviours (e.g. spoon throwing or reciting the movie lines) and also expressions of emotions and personal opinions as audiences participate in the performative space. Therefore, by emphasising the study on the experiences of individuals within a specific context, it embodies Fiske’s (2003) view on popular culture in which he noted that its study should focus on ‘the ways that people use them’ (p.114).

This thesis bridged the realm of cult cinema and audience research because audiences are mainly absent from research in live and cult cinema. Therefore, unlike studies done under the Incorporation/Resistance paradigm (IRP) where text is the main focus, this thesis represents a shift away from the IRP mainly because it cannot illustrate the complexity of audience interactions (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.160). However, Hermes (1995) reminds us that the text in which audiences are interacting with can never be discounted in any audience

research because it serves as a valuable contextual resource. Because of this, this thesis acknowledges the role of past research in cult films. For example, Austin's (1981) study on *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* allowed us to think beyond surveys and questionnaires by contemplating the needs of a cult film audience.

By recognising the importance of cult film, we can identify that a number of such films carry with them midnight movie screenings that possess event-like atmospheres that possess similar 'ontological characteristics as live performances' (Auslander, 2008, p.184). It is within this context that expressions of individual identity and opinions can flourish. Here, the spatial aspect of the cinemagoing experience is pushed to the forefront. As Allen (2011) remarked, going to the movies has always been a social experience, echoing Butsch (2008) that cinemas were an arena for social interaction in the nascent days of moviegoing. Therefore, even though *The Room* screenings are atypical in nature where audiences are engaging with both the movie and each other, it is by no means a recent phenomenon.

Because *The Room* is a cult text in which its screenings embody numerous elements of liveness, we can conceptualise the audience through the employment of the camp sensibility, which is ultimately a matter of taste. Irony has been identified as a hallmark of both paracinematic and camp cinema (Sconce, 1995). Here, the ironic mode of enjoyment is a key process that allows audiences to find comedic value by channelling the moniker of 'so bad it's good' (McCulloch, 2011). Through Dyer (2002), we can understand how a shared ironic viewing can construct a sense of belonging among camp audiences, utilising it as a way of resistance against the dominant cultural practices. This culminates into what can be considered to be taste in bad films, or even camp taste. In other words, how these sensibilities create a sum of all its parts and shapes an individual's affinity towards a particular cultural text or event. Here, Bourdieu (1979) has noted that a person's taste functions as a personal identifier within society in general, or if transplanted into the context of *The Room* culture, among other individuals who have also experienced the screening. Therefore, an exploration on how audiences are adhering and ascribing meaning to these sensibilities and how it shapes their experience is one of the key talking points of this thesis.

## Chapter 3

### Qualitatively Researching Audiences of *The Room*

#### Methodological Approach

Holistically this thesis is rooted in social constructivism, in that it is examining the ‘taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world’ (Burr, 1995, p.3). It is more about how individuals are ascribing meaning to a cultural text, how they act on it, and the nature of enjoyment itself. It has been established that the research is interested in the personal experiences, opinions, and values. Because of this, qualitative methods take precedent in order to produce a robust empirical material and extract rich narratives from the subjects of study. The research looks at the individuals as persons ‘who *construct* the meaning and significance of their realities’ (Jones, 2004, p.257). It acknowledges that ‘cultural artefacts’ can bestow individuals with a ‘sense of identity’ which enables them to orient themselves in a social setting (Jensen, 2002, p.236). By adopting the qualitative perspective, this thesis is channelling what Hermes (2012) considers to be the purpose of audience studies which is ‘to give voice to groups of audience members’ (p.198). Furthermore, qualitative audience studies is even more important for this thesis because studies in film have long held a normative and dominant pedagogic practice that emphasises the text itself as the object that is to be analysed, viewed, and discussed (Allen, 2011, p.45). Therefore, in-depth qualitative interviews became the main method of data collection as it allows respondents to create ‘thick descriptions’ in the form of ‘elaborated and detailed answers’ (Rapley, 2004, p.15).

The methodological approach of this thesis contrasts the idea that audiences’ experience of *The Room* is representative of the everyday life. The thesis is aware that it is not a study on the everyday life, rather it is the study of individuals situated within an extraordinary context. This is to avoid what Hermes (1995) calls a ‘fallacy of meaningfulness’ where researchers are prone to present ‘knowledgeable’ individuals as ‘average’, homogenising their characteristics with the everyday individual and ignoring the importance of the text the individuals are interacting with (p.148). This is why, as reflected in the interview questions of this research and later on in the analysis, *The Room* as a film plays an indispensable role in understanding how and why



audiences of that film extract meaning from the text. It is also a reason as to why in addition to qualitative in-depth interviews, personal observations were carried out at screenings of *The Room* in order to inject a sense of ‘critical subjectivity’ (Ladkin, 2006, p.480). It would allow the researcher to obtain a more encompassing sense of the ways audiences are engaging with the text, responding to the text, and interacting with both the text and other individuals.

## Location of Research

The empirical material for this study was sourced from two locations: Huset-KBH in Copenhagen, Denmark and also Biograf Spegeln in Malmö, Sweden. Huset-KBH is a self-proclaimed ‘culture house’<sup>11</sup> in Copenhagen, Denmark. Founded in 1970, Huset-KBH is comprised of a number of cultural venues such as a board game café, a music venue, and a movie cinema. The cinema’s monthly events offers audiences a slew of alternative programming that features numerous cult hits (e.g. *The Room*; *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*; *Flash Gordon* Hodges, 1981; and a movie drink-along of *The Big Lebowski*, Coen and Coen, 1998) and rescreening of classic movies (e.g. *Red Shoes*, Powell and Pressburger, 1948 and *Sound of Music*, Wise, 1965) among many others, all screened on vintage 35mm film. *The Room* itself is usually screened on the first Friday of every month, with two showtimes: 19.00 and 21.30. It’s worth noting that Huset-KBH has been screening *The Room* for at least eight years now.

Initially, interviewees were only intended to be recruited at Huset-KBH, but during the nascent phase of this thesis, it was announced that Biograf Spegeln<sup>12</sup> would also be holding a one-time screening of *The Room* on 19 February 2018 with Greg Sestero (the actor who plays Mark in *The Room*) in attendance. And therefore, that screening at Biograf Spegeln also became a recruitment venue for respondents of this thesis. Spegeln is a recently renovated art-house movie theatre in central Malmö. It specialises in screening independent movies from all over the world, with additional programming that screens classic movies (e.g. *Dirty Dancing*, Ardolino, 1987 and *Mad Max*, Miller, 1979), sing-along events (e.g. *The Sound of Music* and *Mamma Mia!*, Lloyd, 2008), and cult screenings (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *The Room*). Unlike Huset-KBH,

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<sup>11</sup> <https://huset-kbh.dk/about/?lang=en>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.biografspiegel.se/#/home>

Spejeln does not screen *The Room* monthly. They usually have *The Room* screenings in October and in the case of 2018, an additional screening in February.

### **Design, Sampling, and Conducting the Research**

Prior to the actual research, an interview guide<sup>13</sup> was formulated paying particular attention to questions that were fit for purpose towards what this thesis aimed to achieve. Preliminary talks with individuals who have been to *The Room* screenings before also shaped the interview guide as they provided valuable insights on how they've perceived the screenings. As such, the nature of the questions were ones that would produce reflections on the individual's interpretations of the media's content based on their personal experiences (Hill, 2015, p.20). At the conception, the interview guide categorised questions based on the temporal flow of the audience's experience they go to a screening of *The Room*: 'Pre-screening', 'during the screening', and 'post-screening'. Questions were geared to uncover the audiences' innermost opinions and feelings that would explain their behaviour and actions during a screening, bringing it to the forefront in an effort to document 'the reasons why they behave as they do' (Hammersley, 2013, p.52). A pilot interview was conducted around two weeks prior to the main interviews. After piloting concluded, it was found that the temporal flow of the interview guide needed some revisions. The 'pre-screening' and 'during the screening' categories were kept, in addition to two new categories: 'The individual and collective' and 'taste', which proved significant.

Sampling was then carried out at a total of five screenings: one at Biograf Spejeln in Malmö<sup>14</sup> and four screenings at Huset-KBH in Copenhagen<sup>15</sup>. It was conducted in the spirit of convenience mainly due to limitations of the screenings' physical accessibility (Jensen, 2002, p.239), in which there are only two screenings of *The Room* each month at Huset-KBH and only one screening within the thesis' timeframe at Biograf Spejeln in Malmö. At each screening that I attended, I would converse with a number of individuals or groups of people and ask them if they wanted to be a part of this research. A form resembling this thesis' consent form was given to those who were willing to be interviewed, where they would fill out their personal and contact details. It's worth noting that the actual interviews themselves weren't conducted on the spot at the theatres, rather they were conducted at a range of two to three weeks after the initial contact

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 3

<sup>14</sup> Screening on 19 February 2018

<sup>15</sup> Screenings on 2 February 2018 at 19:00, 2 March 2018 at 21:30, 16 March 2018 at 19:00 and 21:30

in locations that were decided by the respondents. This decision came to be because the theatre setting right after a movie screening is not a quiet space for interviews and deemed difficult to conduct in-depth interviews that may take up quite a bit of time<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, based on the consideration of the respondents' convenience and a consideration towards the quality of the data itself if it were collected post-screening, I contacted the respondents shortly<sup>17</sup> via email<sup>18</sup> after their screenings and set up a face-to-face interview at a later date. This yielded a total of 11 interviews that includes a re-interview with the pilot from a total of 18 respondents who signed up, in which some were physically unable to meet up in person during my data collection period. Of the 11 interviewees, four were from the Malmö screening and seven were from the Copenhagen screenings. Six of the interviewees were male and five of them were female. Four of the interviewees have been to screenings of *The Room* before and the other seven were first-timers to the live experience. Having a mix of first-timers and repeat viewers was important because it allowed the research to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of *The Room* experience as more nuances were able to emerge based on the differing experiences. Furthermore, this thesis was formulated as a study on audiences in general and not specifically on fans; in which if that was the case this thesis would emphasise sampling repeat viewers even more.

Data collection started with personal observations of the experience during screenings in which recruitment was ongoing. This yielded field notes<sup>19</sup> that would later prove useful in supplementing the thoughts and opinions of interviewees with my own personal dispositions. In this case, observations channelled a methodological necessity when dealing with irony, which is a central component of *The Room* experience, as it enhances our ability to understand the 'implications of what people do or say' (Jensen, 2002, p.242). It allowed the researcher to pick up the small nuances of the screenings such as audiences' intonation of voice and their level of interactivity that would otherwise be lost if only interviews were relied upon. Furthermore, it also allowed the researcher to conduct a shared reading of the text along with others that are respondents in the research and hence amplifies the comprehension of their interview answers

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<sup>16</sup> Especially that *The Room* screenings were held at night and there was a high chance that audiences already had other plans after the screening or the chance of audiences already feeling tired and worn out

<sup>17</sup> Typically, one or two days after a screening of *The Room*

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 4

later on. In this sense, observations highlighted the importance of context as a key element of the interpretive process (Brennen, 2013, p.22). Angrosino (2005) would also agree that any form of individual action should always be ‘interpreted in situational context’ (p.736), which validates the use of observation as a complementary method of research.

Having settled on a time and date for the interviews, I made journeys to Copenhagen and Malmö to meet face-to-face with the interviewees. The interviews were conducted through the manner of a ‘neutralistic’ behaviour, steering clear of being overly neutral as that may negatively affect the dynamics of the interview (Rapley, 2004, p.21). An effort was made in each of the interviews to notice the subtle nuances in how interviewees were responding in order to become ‘attuned’ to their subject positions and hence ‘respond accordingly’ (Byrne, 2012, p.210). The interviews lasted in a range between 28 minutes as the shortest to 57 minutes being the longest. They usually began with a question regarding their previous experiences and knowledges about *The Room* screenings and typically ended with a reflection on the entire experience as a whole. An example of an interview can be found in the appendix<sup>20</sup> of this thesis.

### **Analysing the Data**

All recorded interviews were first transcribed, in which the transcriptions became the foundational empirical data for the thesis. During the transcription process, particular attention was paid to the respondents’ vocal intonations while simultaneously recalling their facial expressions and other body languages during the interviews themselves. I would refer back to my field notes based on my observations to see if there were any connections between what the respondents were saying to what actually transpired in a screening of *The Room*. For example, a respondent recalled that during her screening in Copenhagen, the most noticeable person who yelled the line ‘because you’re a woman!’ was a lady who was sitting somewhere in the back, which directly corresponds to my field notes in which I remarked: ‘A woman to my right is emphatically yelling “because you’re a woman!” Very interesting that of all people yelling, she’s the loudest’. This would later allow a more comprehensive reading of their statements and also builds ‘intimate knowledge’ of my data (Bazely, 2013, p.73).

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 5

Afterwards, transcriptions were transplanted into a heuristic coding scheme<sup>21</sup> where the role of the coding was to provide resources in identifying sequences of data that are ‘related thematically’ (Jensen, 2002, p.246). Hence, a host of theoretical categories were formulated that correlated with the audiences’ perception on the film itself, the experience of being in the live screening, and their perception on taste. Ultimately, the categories and themes functioned to uncover the ‘potential motives’ for the respondents’ actions (Brennen, 2013, p.22) in relations to the context of *The Room* screenings. In extracting the conceptual findings from the data, the analysis was conducted in a manner that followed Bazely’s (2013) guidance of ‘read, reflect, and connect’, which allowed the construction of a ‘holistic understanding’ of the individuals and subject matter that is being investigated (p.101). Finished transcriptions were read and re-read thoroughly in order to absorb all the available information. At the same time, I also had another document open where I would jot down my stray thoughts relating to the respondents’ statements. And finally, I was able to concretely structure my thoughts along with the data from the transcriptions into a coherent body of writing.

### **Reflection on Methods**

One of the first things worthy of discussing is the sampling process of this thesis; research was never aimed to produce results that were generalisable within society in general. Rather it sets out to highlight the ‘social significance’ of a cultural event instead of striving for ‘statistical significance’ (Gobo, 2004, p. 414). In this way, the focus of the research is on the experience, opinions, and values of individuals who attend *The Room* screenings. It does not attempt to lay out a developed demographic breakdown of the audience and hence rendering social markers (e.g. occupation, age, or nationality) to be secondary features of the data. Even though a larger scale research could be produced on the basis of these markers in relations to *The Room* screenings (e.g. a study on differences in the viewing cultures of Danish and Swedish audiences of *The Room*). Additionally, there is a point to be made on why there wasn’t a heavy emphasis in sampling to achieve parity between the number of people who have been to *The Room* screenings before with those who have seen it only for the first time. In particular, this thesis does not wish to juxtapose those who have experienced a screening before with those who have

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 6

never seen it. Rather the research is more concerned with conceptualising the screenings as a whole and to contribute ‘a process of understanding’ (Fiske, 1998, p.370) on the meaning-making capabilities of audiences. This is not to say that previous experience is irrelevant, because they are -as shown in the analysis later on. But to go in that direction would require a different set of frameworks in which this thesis is not geared for.

In terms of ethics, a consent form<sup>22</sup> was given to the respondents before any form of interviewing started, in which it gives a brief outline of the research, states that their identity shall remain anonymous, and lastly it asks for their permission in recording the interview. The consent form here symbolises ‘informed consent’, which is an important part in qualitative research ethics that signifies the interviewees’ voluntary nature of participating without coercion (Christians, 2005, p.144). The fact that the consent form also ensures each respondent’s anonymity also embodies an ethical consideration in qualitative research, namely the notion of ‘privacy and confidentiality’ as a ‘safeguard against unwanted exposure’ (Ibid.). Even though the nature of the research is not overly political, it does however touch upon a few instances of sensitive topics. For example, perception on gender roles were implied at numerous points throughout the interviews as a result of the audiences’ perception on the blatant gender stereotyping of *The Room*. In fact, one of the key findings of this research is because of the screening’s ‘free for all’ nature, it becomes an arena where finding comedic value in sensitive topics is acceptable.

As a last point of reflection, the matter of personal bias should be addressed. It’s worth noting that as the researcher, I have personally attended no less than 15 live screenings of *The Room*, in three different countries over the last 12 years or so. When this thesis was initially conceived and shared with others, one of the concerns put forward by one of my colleagues was how I would be able to put proper distance between my personal dispositions and that of the research. It was a concern based on the notion that researchers should ‘overcome’ their individual assumptions (Hammersley, 2013, p.53). To alleviate this, the research process – especially during interviews- was conducted with a keen cognizance on avoiding ‘being critical’ of the respondents but instead ‘ask critical questions’ (Hill, 2015, p.20). Furthermore, Corner’s (2011) mantra of ‘assume less and investigate more’ (p.87) has always been a guiding light in conducting qualitative research as it highlights the nature of subjectivity and how it can affect our perception of a certain text.

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 2

Hence, I consistently used the fieldnotes and cross checked my findings throughout the research process in order to embody a ‘*neutralistic*’ manner towards the empirical data.

## Chapter 4

### Audiences' Perception on *The Room* as a Live Experience

Based on the data collected, four key talking points emerged: First, respondents of this research acknowledged that *The Room* was able to evolve into a worldwide phenomenon mainly due to its poor aesthetic quality as an extension of its auteur, Tommy Wiseau. Because of the extremity of the film's awfulness, audiences perceived it as a cultural text that belongs in the 'so bad it's good' category. This category is closely linked with camp sensibility where an ironic mode of engagement was found to be a prerequisite for enjoyment. Second, the analysis will focus on the physicality of the live screenings themselves and how respondents felt a sense of bonding and belonging with others that were present in the screening. It will also entail an elaboration on how audiences are making sense of the interactions as part of *The Room*'s live experience. As the third key talking point, we will then unpack the nature of the screenings, specifically the tension between the audiences' perceived freedom with that of constraint. Lastly, this thesis will argue that attending the live experience of *The Room* provided an opportunity for audiences to gain *camp capital* as part of their repertoire in knowledge of cult films. It will be elaborated that camp capital takes on the form of knowledge which is valued specifically within a camp context and may be utilised not only as discursive resources, but also to define an individual's place in the general culture of *The Room*.

#### Camp Appreciation

It feels like a movie being made by an alien trying to imitate humanity and trying to make a film like a human being would. [...] In other words it's incredible, you can't really believe that this has been through an entire process of pre-production, production, post-production and that it has come out the other end as a complete product.

*Victor (27, M, Student)*

As a prelude into a discussion on how audiences ascribe meaning and find enjoyment in experiencing *The Room*, we must first acknowledge the importance of the text itself and how audiences are appraising its textual qualities. This is pointed out by Michelle (25, F, Content Manager), who has seen *The Room* seven times (twice in private and five times in a theatre),



states that the audience needs a ‘touchstone’, in that ‘you need something to build this culture around’ and doesn’t think you can ‘substitute it with any movie...with the same kind of intensity that people revere *The Room*’.

What exactly makes *The Room* bad? Ella (29, F, Social Media Manager) recalled an example of the film’s badness where characters in the movie were ‘throwing a football while standing two feet away from each other and wearing tuxedos’ in which she remarked as ‘just so absurd.’ Ella elaborated further:

It’s not bad because it’s boring or the dialogue is boring. It’s because it’s so absurd, like the dialogue doesn’t make any sense. [It] doesn’t make any sense at all and combined with horrible acting, it’s just entertaining.

*Ella (29, F, Social Media Manager)*

Ella was definitely not alone in finding the aesthetics of *The Room* as bad or horrible. Other interviewees who also translated the film’s badness into something that’s entertaining:

I mean it’s not an Oscar worthy film, but it’s a great film in that it’s so bad. [...] I mean the dialogue is just nuts. If you kind of put that aside and if you just see it for the trainwreck it is, then it’s good.

*Sofia (24, F, Student)*

Attention was also directed at Tommy Wiseau’s acting, which for some people defines the badness of *The Room*. Freja (29, F, Media Researcher), who has been to live screenings twice, thought that Wiseau doesn’t seem like he’s ‘in contact with the words he’s saying’. Additionally, Ella said:

I think he’s so over the top and so dramatic that my favourite parts are the ones where he [Wiseau] was on screen. His way of like, pronouncing things [...] he could like read a grocery list and I would think that it’s funny probably.

*Ella (29, F, Social Media Manager)*

An instance of Wiseau's weird delivery on acting that has become one of the cornerstones of a *Room* experience is the bizarre 'Hi doggie!' sequence. In this scene, Tommy Wiseau's character Johnny walks into a random flower shop where he immediately demands 'a dozen red roses' from the shopkeeper. After which, the shopkeeper quips that she 'didn't know it was you' [referring to Johnny]. As she hands the bouquet of flowers to him, Johnny says 'Oh hi doggie!' to an apparently overweight pug sitting on the shop counter for no apparent reason. In all instances of *The Room* screenings that I attended, many of the audience members would end up repeating 'Oh hi doggie!' just as soon as Johnny finishes his line and would occasionally clap and cheer.

For Lucas (21, M, Sales Assistant), who has seen *The Room* at least nine times (five times in the theatre, four times at home), this flower shop sequence was his favourite part of the movie. He's memorised the lines of the scene and thought that 'the whole pace is way too fast, the sound is off [...] that very very...very very short scene is just brilliant'. We can see that Lucas puts a high emphasis on how short the actual scene<sup>23</sup> is, because it illustrates the randomness and bizarreness of this particular scene, and how it is seemingly dropped in the middle of the movie without any context. From a narrative perspective, this whole scene could have been cut from the movie entirely and the story wouldn't have suffered. Instead, its presence became one of many signature '*The Room* moments' in which audiences have grown fond of. In fact, Lucas' fascination with the flower shop sequence has even bled into his everyday life and admits that whenever he's with his colleagues and a dog passes by, 'almost every time someone would say "oh hi doggie!"'. From this, we can see that these inherent qualities of the text actually shape the whole experience and even beyond into the everyday life. Weirdly delivered lines of dialogue, each instance of overacting by Tommy (e.g. the 'you are tearing me apart, Lisa!' scene), and the non-sensical plot lines (e.g. Claudette's<sup>24</sup> breast cancer predicament), all become a form of resource for the audience that creates interactions, discussions, and are key components that shape *The Room* experience.

The reading protocols conducted by audiences based in *The Room*'s failings invokes the camp sensibility where the key element of enjoyment is found in a 'seriousness that fails' but only in instances where there is a 'proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and

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<sup>23</sup> It lasts approximately 20 seconds

<sup>24</sup> Claudette is Lisa's mother

the naïve' (Sontag, 1966, p.283). It is evident that *The Room*'s claim to fame – as is the case with numerous camp texts- is partially based on its 'remarkable lack of artistry or their bald, contradictory or even hypocritical, ideological position' (Jancovich, 2002, p.317). In essence, camp is a love of 'the unnatural', of 'artifice and exaggeration', and the 'off' (Sontag, 1966, p.275), where audiences of *The Room* have recognised these qualities within the film. The recognition would then lead to an understanding of *The Room* as bizarre and weird as exemplified in previous discussions on why *The Room* embodies something that is 'so bad it's good'. Susan (21, F, Student), who has been to a live screening once likens *The Room* to Rebecca Black's song "Friday"<sup>25</sup>, which at the time became an Internet sensation due to its sub-par lyrics, odd music video, and its catchy tune. She noted that there's 'fun in ironically joining in' and considers *The Room* as something 'so bizarre that it's sort of its own thing'. Oscar (37, M, Student), who has seen *The Room* only once conceded that the movie itself is a failure and that Tommy Wiseau is trying to do something 'but fails again and again.'

I think that's the point with [The Room], it tries to be technically great, it has its green screens, it has these sets. [...] Tries to have this emotional tie with everything and then just fails on every part. It tries to be sexy and just fails.

Oscar (37, M, Student)

Based on this, irony plays a key role in how audiences of *The Room* find pleasure that derives from the film's shortcomings. It is in line with one of camp's tenets, which is a sensibility that's 'an aesthetic of ironic colonization and cohabitation' (Sconce, 1995, p.374). Oliver (43, M, Senior Media Researcher), who has seen *The Room* twice almost ten years apart, explained that people who don't enjoy can't put distance between themselves and the movie. 'Irony wasn't part of their experience, so they saw it one to one [...] and when you look at it [that way], it's terrible,' he said. In this sense, irony is anchored in the viewer's belief and perception if *The Room* was supposed to be a comedy or as something else. Therefore, Tommy Wiseau's intentions are a central component in understanding how audiences find enjoyment in something that is unequivocally bad.

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<sup>25</sup> Released in 2011

It has been well-documented<sup>26</sup> that Wiseau in producing *The Room* had always wanted to create a movie that was positively adored by both film critics and movie audiences. But ever since *The Room* gained notoriety across the cinema world, Wiseau has been adamant that his initial vision for the movie precisely mirrors the end product, which is a dark comedy<sup>27</sup>. However, those who have seen *The Room* are not buying it plainly because there are never hints or clues in the movie that demonstrates it is ‘self-aware’ of its own ‘de-based status’ (Kleinhans, 1994, p.183). Sofia (24, F, Student) who has seen the movie only once, remarked that ‘there’s just this mismatch or dichotomy between [Wiseau’s] vision or maybe how he views the final product and what it really is’. Oscar (37, M, Student) had this to say in regards to Wiseau’s vision:

His self-perception is probably where everything’s wrong. [...] I think in some scenes he sees them in his head and I think if I’m going to be honest, when he sees the movie he still sees those scenes as he sees them in his head. But it doesn’t come out that way.

*Oscar (37, M, Student)*

This reinforces the idea that in order for audiences to find entertainment, they must first accept that Wiseau was sincere in creating the movie. Channelling the camp sensibility, audiences are encouraged to find ‘success in [the] passionate failures’ of the text (Sontag, 1966, p.291). In this sense, they manage to ‘extract new, and arguably more satisfying, pleasures from the film’ (Pavlounis, 2012, p.25) that is rooted in the dichotomy between Wiseau’s original vision with what *The Room* actually is, as perceived by the audience. Lucas (21, M, Sales Assistant) said he finds it hard to believe that *The Room* ‘has ever been thought about being a serious movie’, yet at the same time he also does not take up the opposing view that Wiseau had always intended the movie to be a comedy. For audiences, the matter of Tommy Wiseau’s initial intentions have now become a case of ‘my word against yours’ and in certain ways, have become mystified. This discrepancy in perception is necessary because ‘the humour emerges from the text’s failings, not that it is built into the text’ (Pavlounis, 2012, p.25).

An ‘imagined depth’ -as Carl (27, M, Student) said, is arguably *The Room*’s biggest asset as a cultural text. As mentioned earlier, the textual qualities of the film become a resource for the

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<sup>26</sup> See *The Disaster Artist* (Sestero and Bissell, 2013)

<sup>27</sup> See for example <http://ew.com/article/2008/12/12/crazy-cult-room>, where Wiseau insists that *The Room* was intended to be “partly comedic”.

audience. The whole culture of *The Room*, revolves around how audiences are appropriating these assets dependent on their reading protocols. McCulloch (2011) posits that the culture surrounding Tommy Wiseau's film works specifically 'towards the production of a shared reading' (p.205) as exemplified by how audiences are nurtured to call out each mistake or idiosyncrasies that transpire on-screen. It is here that the true value of the culture around *The Room* is based on. It is not entirely on the quality of the text, rather more on 'what audiences *do* with it' (Hermes, 2005, p.13). Dyer (2002) would also agree that the culture surrounding *The Room* is determined more on how people respond to the text 'rather than qualities actually inherent in [the text]' (p.52).

Carl (27, M, Student) explained this by saying that *The Room* is 'poor but it's poor in a way that makes you [...] wonder' and that it's unlike any other poor films where 'there is no thought to it'. This illustrates how audiences of *The Room* are actually exerting effort in trying to understand the nature of the film itself. Because the film is an aesthetic failure on all levels, audiences like Carl are forced into a secondary reading protocol that doesn't take the film at face value, hence giving rise to an 'imagined depth' in trying to make sense of why and how Wiseau has made such an inept piece of cinema. *The Room* as both a camp text and experience 'sponsors playfulness' (Sontag, 1966, p.290) in that audiences are encouraged -required even- to be creative in their readings of the film.

The ironic mode of appreciation would struggle to flourish if the individual does not allow it to exist in the first place. Because of this, the question of the types of people that can enjoy *The Room* is a matter of difference in personalities and ultimately taste. Susan (21, F, Student) admitted that if she were to take her parents to a screening of *The Room*, they would get annoyed with the fact that they're watching a horrible movie and not 'get the whole experience'. Oliver (43, M, Senior Media Researcher) explained that individuals need to acknowledge that the 'badness' is the 'whole foundation of the experience' and if you take it too 'one to one' you probably wouldn't enjoy it. Michelle had similar sentiments that in order to be able to enjoy *The Room* you have to accept a degree of weirdness:

If you're not willing to accept things that are a little bit out there [...] then you're not going to be able to embrace the different aspects of [The Room]. So you just need to be able to accept that it's going to be weird as fuck.

*Michelle (25, F, Content Manager)*

The difference in taste immediately creates a sense of distinction among those who ‘get’ *The Room*, which -by channelling Bourdieu (1979)- is the ‘practical affirmation of an inevitable difference’ that are marked ‘by the refusal of other tastes’ (p.56). Bourdieu would further explain that taste has the power to unite and separate based on each person’s conditioning that will later on distinguish themselves from others who are not of the same conditioning. For example, Lucas (21, M, Sales Assistant) shared his experience of going to a screening with his girlfriend who was a first-timer to see *The Room* and remarked that she ‘liked it but she was in shock in some way’ which stemmed from her different ‘sense of humour’ in which she’s not accustomed to ‘dark humour’. We can see from his statement that Lucas will probably not take her girlfriend to another screening of *The Room* because of her difference in comedic taste. Even though he later said that his girlfriend enjoyed the experience, there was still a hint of hesitation in his voice. This was further compounded by my personal observation as I was recruiting them to be interviewed for this research, Lucas’ girlfriend was seemingly more reluctant in talking to me about the whole experience<sup>28</sup>. His statement illustrates how similarities of taste in comedy determines if an individual may be ‘excluded from appreciation’ (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, p.184). Therefore, the entirety of *The Room* experience very much depends on each person’s ability to appropriate the right comedic knowledge, in the right context which will ultimately constitute ‘the whole of the consumption and gratification’ (Bourdieu, 1979, p.100).

In relations to other individuals, audiences made projections on who they think would be able to enjoy *The Room* based on their own experiences and their perceived similarities by gauging if they are indeed aligned before deeming them – in a way- worthy of seeing *The Room*. The reason is because some interviewees felt a sense of responsibility towards a first-time viewer who they brought to a screening. For example, Michelle (25, F, Content Manager) came to a screening of *The Room* in Malmö with her boyfriend who has never watched it nor been to a screening. She admitted that one of the reasons of bringing her boyfriend was to ‘indoctrinate him in the ways of *The Room*’. Michelle remarked that she ‘felt responsible for his experience’ and if he ended up not liking it, that would ‘make me sad’. Evidently, Michelle utilised such strong words where she took up the burden of another person’s enjoyment and happiness upon herself. She even tied it with her own personal emotional state in that she would feel a negative emotion if things didn’t

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<sup>28</sup> I contacted her to be interviewed but she never replied with a formal answer.

go to plan. In a way, bringing a first-timer to a *Room* screening becomes a calculated risk based on the individual's appraisal of other people's taste. For Freja, it was a risk worth taking:

I knew somewhat of what I was getting into, but to watch people be so astonished by this movie and expressing 'what!?!' sooo many times, is a lot of fun and made my experience even better. And I feel like I could give something, give an experience to whom I brought.

*Freja (29, F, Media Researcher)*

Bringing her colleagues from work who were mostly first-timers, enhanced Freja's experience. We can see that she utilised similar wordings to what Michelle had also utilised before, signifying a sense of 'responsibility'. Their enjoyment is very much intertwined with the quality of the experience of others they brought with them. Freja in particular considers the experience of the screening to be a form of positive bestowment by stating that she wanted to 'give an experience' to those who have not been to a screening. Both Freja and Michelle's statements demonstrate the degree of value they have placed on *The Room* screenings.

### **Being in the Live Experience**

Before delving into a discussion on the nature of *The Room* screenings, it would be appropriate to first elaborate the characteristics of the screenings that I observed. In the Copenhagen screenings<sup>29</sup>, the audience was generally comprised with Danish-speaking individuals although there were also people present that originated from outside Denmark (e.g. American, Italian, Argentinian). In the first screening I went to, it was noticeable that there were more male individuals in the audience compared to females. In the next two screenings however, the make-up of the crowd was observed to be more or less equal in terms of gender split. For the Malmö screening<sup>30</sup>, it was evident that there were more Swedish-speaking individuals present although there were again a number of individuals who didn't speak Swedish. In both Copenhagen and Malmö screenings, alcohol -particularly beer- was consumed by many, which exudes an atmosphere that was almost similar to a night out at a bar where people were socialising with each other with alcoholic drinks as a complement. More importantly, it can be seen at the

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<sup>29</sup> 2 February, 2 March, and 16 March

<sup>30</sup> 19 February

screenings I attended that just about everybody came with someone they knew. The social aspect of *The Room* plays an important role in how audiences enjoy the experience, as Victor said:

It's a movie that hasn't at all got the same appeal if you watch it alone. [...] I would never put myself through it without anyone around me because it's [...] the movie to watch with other people. It's a common experience...it's a group experience.

*Victor (27, M, Student)*

Victor's statement is just one of many examples where audiences of *The Room* are adamant that the live screening experience is meant to be enjoyed with other people. Sofia (24, F, Student) noted the importance of a communal setting by saying that 'you have to share the madness with everyone else'. Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) remarked that he needs other people around in order to be able to share his 'amazement, [...] frustrations, [and] disbeliefs'. This establishes the nature of the screenings to be social:

I know that I watched like these bad movies [,,] and I would be like 'oh god I need to watch this with someone!' [...] It's not something I can experience on my own. I need to experience it with someone else, I need to share it kind of.

*Oscar (37, M, Student)*

There is a continuous acknowledgement that in order to endure the badness of *The Room*, one has to share it with others because it would allow them to alleviate any – or at least most- discomforts that can arise from watching an aesthetically bad film. Much like most of the other respondents, Oscar -as shown above- utilised phrases that were dealt in absolutes, leaving no room for any other interpretations. Meaning you either go watch *The Room* in a crowd of people or you don't watch it at all. Furthermore, it's not just about seeing it with people that you personally know, there is also the importance of seeing with complete strangers. Michelle (25, F, Content Manager) remembered that she didn't understand the 'full appeal of it' until she watched it in a movie theatre:



I think you should go watch it in a group, like with friends. But you should also go watch in a setting where your group is surrounded by people you don't know. Because I think it just works better that way, the dynamics.

*Michelle (25, F, Content Manager)*

The 'dynamics' that Michelle mentioned is alluding to the general atmosphere inside the theatre space, the level of enjoyment gained from hearing other people's witty comments, and also the creation of an ephemeral bond with strangers. This sentiment also resonated with Lucas (21, M, Sales Assistant) who noted that experiencing the screening with thirty strangers is 'a special feeling'. This is important because they are both acknowledging that this is not something that happens often in our everyday life. We don't automatically create a sense of camaraderie if we were watching a movie in a normal theatre setting watching for example, *The Last Jedi*. And most of the time there really isn't an explicit necessity to watch these types of movies with other people because you will likely be able to enjoy it on your own.

When you're in a screening of *The Room* however, the ephemeral creation of bonds with strangers plays an important role in determining the quality of the experience and was evident based on my personal observations which validated this idea. In each screening I went to, there was always something new that I learned, whether they were new lines to shout out (e.g. 'Sex scene water!' during one of the film's sex scenes) or even ritualistic chanting (e.g. when at the birthday party Lisa asks everyone if they want to go out for fresh air, we would then break out chanting 'Fresh air! Fresh air! Fresh air!'). Especially during the chanting of 'fresh air!', a sense of bonding was consummated and you immediately feel a sense of closeness with complete strangers due to our sharing of an interaction that only lasted until the lights in the theatre came up. By this account, the audience of *The Room* screenings can be considered to be 'temporary communities' with motivations of 'sharing their film textual knowledge in a social context' (Vivar, 2018, p.125).

We can then argue that the live screening gave audiences a 'sense of identification and belonging' that arises from a shared 'distinctive way of behaving' (Dyer, 2002, p.49). In Dyer's mind, camp gives way to a sense of belonging because it projects a form of self-defence against the 'awfulness' that the gay culture has endured in the past by injecting 'fun and wit' by not taking things too seriously (Ibid.). In the context of *The Room*, it can also be said that ironic

component of camp has become the preferred mode of enjoyment simply because it has been established that *The Room* is objectively awful. Therefore, the shared sense of belonging in *The Room* emerges from the interactions conducted by audiences aimed at the film's deficiencies, akin to how gay culture utilised 'fun and wit' to distance the 'mystique' of masculinity (Ibid., p.52). For example, Sofia (24, F, Student) admitted that because she finally threw a spoon during the screening, she feels like she's now 'part of the thing'. Such interactions can be argued to be a rite of passage that initiates the individual -especially first-timers, into the culture of *The Room*. Victor had this to say in regards to going to the live screening:

I guess now I'm in on the joke. Now I can finally talk about the good stuff and the funny stuff of the film as a person who has joined the club.

*Victor (27, M, Student)*

Victor wasn't the only one who seemed to imply that the culture of *The Room* is exclusive much like a 'club'. Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) also utilised the word 'club' while describing *The Room*'s 'following' as a unique group of people. Additionally, Carl (27, M, Student) perceived himself to be a part of a group that appreciates a certain type of humour, harkening back to the notion that you have to be able to appropriate the right comedic knowledge in order to enjoy *The Room*. Therefore, individuals would only gain the aforementioned 'sense of identification and belonging' only if they adhere to the set of applicable norms inside a screening of *The Room*; which will be elaborated in the next section. As Freja (29, F, Media Researcher) stated, once you 'know the rules' you become integrated and get a sense of being 'a part of something bigger'.

Building up on the above, we can see that unlike a typical cinemagoing experience, *The Room* screenings are distinct not only because of their inherent social nature, but also due to the level of interactivity that occurs within a screening. Freja had this to say:

You engage more in the experience because it's fun and it's something that you usually don't get to do [in a theatre]. So if you've ever been to the cinema and seen a horrible movie, you kind of feel like shouting out stuff once in a while, and you can't do that because it's a theatre.

*Freja (29, F, Media Researcher)*

Freja's statement encapsulates the experience of being in a live screening of *The Room*, including the little nuances of what's possible within that context: freedom, catharsis, and a rebellious sense. Compared to a typical moviegoing experience such as for example, watching Marvel's *Black Panther* in your local theatre, going to a screening of *The Room* is dramatically different in that 'it turns everything that you're familiar with [in] moviegoing culture on its head' (Michelle, 25, F, Content Manager). Screenings of *The Room* are mainly characterised by people throwing spoons at the screen<sup>31</sup>, people yelling obscenities and verbal abuses towards movie characters, and the reciting of infamous lines that has established *The Room* as a cultural phenomenon<sup>32</sup>. It goes without saying that these types of actions would not be tolerated if conducted within the setting of a normal cinema. Carl (27, M, Student) admitted that if people were to do the things they do in a normal cinema context, him and other people would probably get annoyed and 'they'll get thrown out because they would be like disturbing the order of the cinema'. Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) reflected on the differences in conduct if you're watching something at home with when you're at the cinema:

[At home] you're allowed, to talk and to throw things and to behave in different kind of ways. I still feel different when it's in the cinema, because you know you're used to not being allowed to behave that way in a cinema.

*Noah (30, M, Research Assistant)*

For Noah, the matter of being able to do a number of interactions in a screening of *The Room*, is a matter of divergence from conventional habits which arises from societal rules and norms. The nature of *The Room* screenings exemplifies a pattern of responses that are 'digressive' in nature that are 'incompatible with dominant formulations of spectatorship' where audience members don't 'fall into perfect correspondence' with the specific 'narrative and visual operations' (Klinger, 1989, p.3). In a normal cinema setting, we are used to be governed by cautionary placards shown on-screen prior to a screening of a movie, advocating that we should never talk, or use our cellular phones, or anything else that may disturb others. In this way, it can be argued that a form of 'feeling rule' (Hochschild, 1983) is imposed in a way that we are actually encouraged to suppress our feelings and minimise its expression. What this means is that we are

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<sup>31</sup> When photos of spoons in a picture frame make an appearance on-screen

<sup>32</sup> For example: "You are tearing me apart, Lisa!", "Oh hi doggie!", or "I did not hit her, I did naaaht!"

typically not able to vent out frustrations if plot points don't make sense, or laugh at an inappropriate scene, or even cry uproariously. However, when taken into the context of *The Room* screening, audiences are given license to 'offend against [the] feeling rule' (Ibid., p.64) of the cinema. What this brings are feelings of catharsis and exhilaration as experienced by Freja:

I almost felt...a relief. I feel lighter because you have been able to shout things a screen, you have been able to laugh, you've been able to express your awe about this movie out loud, instead of holding in like you usually have to in a theatre.

*Freja (29, F, Media Researcher)*

For Victor (27, M, Student), the notion of letting go was embodied by throwing spoons and likened it to when he was a teenager when he would occasionally throw popcorn in the cinema, noting that it's 'nice to combine [a] still activity with something that is more [...] based on movement', exuding a sense of catharsis 'to be able to throw stuff around'. Susan also shared similar accounts of how it felt:

It's sort of...exciting and a little bit rebellious almost. [...] It's sort of the same feeling you get when going on a rollercoaster you know. It's like 'whooh...' you're throwing a spoon! But I don't think I can describe it with a feeling. It's more like a thrill I guess.

*Susan (21, F, Student)*

However, not all respondents were in agreement that the spoon throwing for example, added value to the screening itself. Oscar (37, M, Student) said that he 'didn't really get that' and admitted he 'could've done without it' in regards to the spoons ritual. Oliver (43, M, Senior Media Researcher) echoed Oscar's sentiments and thought 'it was an okay gimmick' that 'didn't really do much' for him, partially because he never actually saw the spoons in the picture frames. Sofia (24, F, Student) who found the throwing of spoons to be 'tolerable' albeit 'a bit annoying', did take issue with the amount of people who were talking back at the screen and yelling out lines because she 'found it a bit annoying' and 'unfunny'. From this we can see that even though the interactions are a cornerstone of *The Room* experience, it is by no means universally revered. As illustrated above, they can either add great value to the whole experience by evoking a sense of catharsis or a thrill, but they can also be considered to be a mere novelty gesture that adds

little if anything at all to the individual's enjoyment. This illustrates what Jancovich (2002) posits in regards to cult audiences that they do not share a single or uniform attitude towards a specific culture or its components (p.314).

### **A Realm of Freedom and Constraint**

A movie theatre is often like you sit silently and don't speak [and] all these things you have to follow, [a] social etiquette kind of. And it's nice to just be able to scream at the screen, like it's very liberating kind of.

*Oscar (37, M, Student)*

As briefly explained in the previous section and as illustrated by Oscar above, audiences at *The Room* screenings are allowed a degree of freedom that embodies certain aspects of the Rabelaisian notion of 'carnavalesque' as elaborated by Bakhtin (1965), where speech and gestures are characterised by frankness and freedom, liberated 'from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times' (p.10). The screenings form an arena for individuals to evade and resist the 'structures of dominance' much like the surfers who were used as examples in Fiske's (1989, p.2) writings. In his reading of the surf culture, 'surfies' are seemingly escaping the individualistic and capitalistic nature of society by becoming closer with nature or 'escape into the surf' in Fiske's term (Ibid., p.66). Like surfers, audiences of *The Room* are in a way evading the realm of everyday life where strict rules are enforced and willingly supplant themselves into another realm where many of these rules are invalidated.

In essence, what goes on inside a screening of *The Room* can be considered to be the polar opposite to the everyday life. Due to the film's textual qualities (i.e. campiness, bizarreness, and excess), it has provided audiences with a 'freedom from constraint' and a chance to approach *The Room* from a 'slightly defamiliarized perspective' (Sconce, 1995, p.391). An example of this is Carl's (27, M, Student) perception towards *The Room* as a film and the screenings in which he believed that the experience becomes like a 'canvas where people can apply pretty much anything they want'. The significance of this shared freedom according to Bakhtin (1965), is to 'create a special collectivity' where a distinct group of individuals is 'initiated in familiar intercourse' (p.188). Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) noted that the sense of freedom was what made the whole experience great as he remarked that you're given free rein to express your

emotions by being ‘allowed to shout [and] allowed to say “what the fuck?”’. Susan (21, F, Student) said that because there are ‘sort of no boundaries’, people can become ‘creative’ by yelling out ideas, where occasionally someone will ‘yell something appropriate and then it would be hilarious.’ Michelle (25, F, Content Manager) admitted that everyone will most likely have a running commentary going through their heads while watching *The Room* and said:

You have free rein to yell out that commentary in a scenario like this. So yeah, I let myself off the hook for a little while and I was yelling a lot. I’m not sorry [laughs]. It was fun.

*Michelle (25, F, Content Manager)*

Another example that embodies this notion of freedom and liberation – although it can be problematised- that occurs within *The Room* screenings is the ability for audiences to yell out ‘because you’re a woman!’ whenever Claudette (Lisa’s mother) says something demeaning towards Lisa or whenever the audience sees fit. The most prominent scene in the whole movie that typically elicits this kind of audience reaction is when Claudette is trying to convince Lisa that cheating on Johnny is not a good idea:

**Lisa:** I'm fixing the apartment for Johnny's birthday, but I'm really not into it.

**Claudette:** Oh? Why not?

**Lisa:** 'Cause I'm in love with Mark, not Johnny. And here I am planning his party.

**Claudette:** It's not right, Lisa. I still think you should marry Johnny! Now, you can't live on love. You need financial security.

**Lisa:** But I'm not happy! And he still thinks I'm going to marry him next month. He's a fool.

Right after Claudette finishes her statement on ‘financial security’ audiences will typically yell out ‘because you’re a woman!’ aimed at the character of Lisa. Taken at face value, that line people yell is without a doubt sexist and misogynistic. However, it has been a long-standing tradition in many<sup>33</sup> screenings around the world where audiences appropriate humour into this sensitive topic. It is worth noting that in the Copenhagen screenings I went to, both male and

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<sup>33</sup> The yell-back ‘because you’re a woman!’ is considered to be a ritualistic mainstay as exemplified by its inclusion in numerous ‘Guides’ of watching *The Room* in theatres (e.g., <https://www.avclub.com/a-viewers-guide-to-the-room-1798215944> or <http://www.methodsunsound.com/the-room-newbies-guide-to-audience-participation>)

female audience members were yelling this line. In fact, in the third Copenhagen screening<sup>34</sup> I attended, one of the most vocal shouter was a woman who was sitting to the right of where I was. In the Malmö screening however, the audience was more apprehensive towards the line than compared to the Copenhagen audience where they would belt it out without hesitation. There was at least one or two persons in the Malmö crowd that tried to start the yelling, but the others weren't just having it and eventually nobody yelled 'because you're a woman!' again until the film ended.

Respondents in the research acknowledged that this particular line that people shout out arises from the blatant gender stereotyping inherent in the film's script. Ella (29, F, Social Media Manager) remarked that the portrayals in the movie are 'over-caricatured', 'so over the top', and 'right in your face' and admits that because of its extremity, 'it's hard not to find humour in it'. Michelle (25, F, Content manager) noted that the gender stereotypes are 'so blatantly outrageous' that it 'makes it easy to laugh at'. In this regard, Oliver (43, M, Senior Media Researcher) believed it is important to be able to 'make fun of even the most serious things' but only if it's within 'the right context'. Susan (21, F, Student) stated that people who experience the 'because you're a woman!' yell should understand that it's rooted in irony and that it's meant to be a joke and 'that it should stay there [in the theatre]'. She further elaborated:

Once you leave, that's not you anymore...that was your experience in there. Whatever [laughs] happens in *The Room* stays in *The Room*. [...] I don't think you should bring a sexist attitude outside and continue yelling 'because she's a woman!' [...] cause it's not fine.

*Susan (21, F, Student)*

In this sense, *The Room* screenings can be seen as an 'emotional public sphere that parallels the rational public sphere' by way of encouraging, managing, and reflecting upon emotional conflict as an alternative to the rationalisation of critical discussion, which is a hallmark of the Habermasian public sphere (Lunt and Stenner, 2005, p.63). Much like *The Jerry Springer Show* that was the focal point of Lunt and Stenner's study, *The Room* screenings have manifested into 'an ironic engagement' where the affective takes precedent (Ibid., p.64). What this means is that

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<sup>34</sup> 16 March screening

the intense interactivity nature of *The Room* screening and the freedom to do so acts as a vehicle ‘for the expression of everyday experiences’ that may not be possible in other contexts of the everyday life (Ibid., p.63); as a way to include certain conducts (e.g. swearing, throwing objects, or verbally abusing fictional characters) that are otherwise excluded from the dominant culture (Ibid., p.70). The notion of ‘ironic engagement’ resurfaces again and harkens back to the camp mode of enjoyment in that audiences of *The Room* cannot appraise the movie at face value or otherwise face a depletion in pleasure. Anchored on this mode of enjoyment, the emotional public sphere allows the audience to address and acknowledge what is normally considered to be controversial and politically incorrect if taken outside the controlled setting of the live experience. In the spirit of the emotional public sphere evident in *Jerry Springer* where useful knowledge can be produced and opinions are made heard, encountering these sensitive topics in a screening of *The Room* can actually be beneficial for an audience member. Carl (27, M, Student) acknowledged that humour is one way of disarming blatant stereotypes and ‘perhaps ridiculing them’. Michelle (25, F, Content Manager) also admitted that finding humour in the ‘because you’re a woman!’ line is a good way of ‘recognising the things that can happen in society and how things go wrong’. She then added:

Society lives by rules [...] and in this case you’re kind of flipping those rules and saying, ‘you know what, some things are acceptable, but just for this movie’. And I think it’s good for people to let that out a bit, in a controlled setting of course, and then we can move on with our lives.

*Michelle (25, F, Content Manager)*

Based on Michelle’s quote, we can see that audiences have freedom where they can make fun of sensitive topics, but we can also see that even she perceives the nature of the screening to be ‘controlled’. It illustrates how public screenings of *The Room* is in reality a realm that is marked by a struggle between freedom and constraint. Even though *The Room* screenings are characterised with ‘freedom and familiarity’ where impropriety has a place to flourish (Bakhtin, 1965, p.247), it still doesn’t escape the enforcement of certain rules, boundaries, and constraints. The terms ‘wild’, ‘rowdy’, and ‘anything goes’ has been utilised by the respondents of this research to describe the nature of these screenings. However, the rowdiness and the wildness to the live experience can only be extended to a certain point before other individuals would start



exhibiting displeasure. It can be argued that one of the primary rules of a *Room* screening is that you are expected to not be offended over the particularities that occurs in that screening. For audiences, a pleasurable experience of *The Room* depends on their ability to discern what other individuals do inside the screening is ‘deliberately transgressive’ in nature, or a ‘knowledge to recognise’ (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, p.184). As Oliver said:

Like when you throw spoons, there are rules in this room [laughs]. So if you go there and get offended by this, you don’t understand the rules and I actually don’t think you should be there.

*Oliver (43, M, Senior Media Researcher)*

The interactivities of the audience have become a rule on its own as well. People are expected to follow along and respond accordingly based on the visual cues transpiring on-screen. Oscar (37, M, Student) admitted that he felt pressured to do something and ‘chime in’. Michelle acknowledged that ‘the basic rule of *The Room*’ is that you have to throw spoons otherwise ‘there isn’t really a point of going’. Lucas (21, M, Sales Assistant) reflected on this by saying that if other individuals ‘play’ along as expected, then it would only enhance the whole experience. But afterwards he admitted that during the screening he attended there was one really drunk person who acted out the ‘police guy’ persona and consistently corrected other audience members who were not responding accordingly (e.g. throwing spoons at the wrong time). Lucas said that these types of people were unnecessary and it ‘sort of killed the vibe’.

Here, another unwritten rule of *The Room* screenings surfaces: you still have to be considerate of other people. You cannot plainly walk into a screening and be completely obnoxious in which Michelle (25, F, Content Manager) also said that you can ‘interact with the movie’ but only if it’s ‘relevant’ and you cannot be yelling ‘just to be a loud asshole’ because ‘there are still some rules.’ Evidently, audiences of *The Room* are engaging in a form of what Hochschild (1979) calls ‘emotion work’ in that they have to shape and evoke certain feelings within themselves (p.561) that may otherwise be absent if they were situated in a different context. It becomes a delicate balancing act within the spectrum of rowdiness and politeness. Audiences need to adhere to both the rowdiness status of the live experience by explicitly expressing emotions and also maintain a degree of civility. You have the freedom to throw spoons, shout out opinions, and reverse the

typical cinemagoing etiquette of being in the theatre as long as it is within the right context and more importantly the right amount. Unlike the Rabelaisian carnival where it's completely 'independent of Church and State' (Bakhtin, 1965, p.220), *The Room* screenings are still very much a part of society in general and is merely 'tolerated'. Therefore audiences needed to always remember that even if inside *The Room* screening is purportedly embodying the carnivalesque where it's free for all, the physical space itself is still a component of the greater society and still has to abide by its rules.

### **Attaining Camp Capital**

We have seen before through the course of this thesis, that an ephemeral bonding between individuals do occur in *The Room* live experience and also the screenings themselves have become a temporary space in which the affective can flourish through its reversal of common social etiquette as elaborated in the previous section. Due to the free flow of expressions and opinions, it enables audiences to attain a certain form of knowledge based on the interaction of others in what can be termed as *camp capital*.

Much like the obtainment of cultural capital, a person's camp capital functions as a form of 'social orientation, "a sense of one's place"' that guides the individual towards their appropriate position in the appropriate context (Bourdieu, 1979, p.466). Here, context is paramount in the application of camp capital because it does not necessarily denote an individual's position within society in general. Where if cultural capital according to Bourdieu's elaboration is garnered and nurtured based on an individual's upbringing and education, camp capital can only be obtained within the camp environment that appreciates the value of such knowledge. In other words, camp capital exists only within the realm of camp culture as a means for individuals to achieve distinction based on their knowledge on camp texts. As such, camp capital is a form of situated knowledge as a result of situated affective practices arising from audiences' ability to 'recognise, endorse, and pass on the affective practice' (Wetherell, 2012, p.79).

It also draws parallels with subcultural capital in that they both can be considered means by which individuals 'negotiate and accumulate status within their own social worlds' (Thornton, 1995, p.249). For example, it's more about how many midnight screenings of *The Room* you've been to, the number of lines you can recite, or the amount of different commentaries you can

produce during a screening of *The Room*. Unlike subcultural capital however, the ironic mode of enjoyment as the central component of the camp sensibility plays a key role in the obtainment of camp capital. As illustrated in a previous section, a specific taste in comedic appreciation is required to gain pleasure from *The Room*. There needs to be a secondary reading protocol that does not ‘reproduce’ the intended ‘meaning of a text’ (Klinger, 1989 p.16) in order for camp capital to exist.

For audiences of *The Room* obtaining knowledge from the interaction of others is one of the main modes that an individual can garner camp capital that may be utilised in future engagements and also ‘enhance one’s social capital’ (McCulloch, 2011, p.212) through discursive practices that occur after the screening. Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) admitted in the following days after he went to a screening he asked a lot of people if they have seen *The Room* because he was ‘hungry’ for answers on *The Room* and wanted to talk about the movie with as many people as possible. Oscar (27, M, Student) remarked that being ‘able to talk about it and understand it’ is an important outcome from the whole screening experience. Ella (29, F, Social Media Manager) admitted that after her screening, she felt different from if it were a normal movie because she continued on talking about different scenes from *The Room* with her colleagues and wanted to ‘quote the movie all night long’. We can see that the knowledge individuals gained from the screening experience becomes a resource for social functions such as conversing with others as well as a personal identifier, signifying that they’ve experienced a ‘specific cultural experience’ (Noah, 30, M, Research Assistant) and eventually perceiving themselves as someone who has ‘joined in on the joke’ (Victor, 27, M, Student).

In obtaining camp capital itself, respondents of this research noted the importance of ‘instigators’ who were present during a screening in regards to their role in shaping the experience and bestowing knowledge. For example, Ella (29, F, Social Media Manager) noted the importance of going to the screening with others who have experienced it before because ‘they were supportive and telling us what to do’. Victor (27, M, Student) noticed in his screening that there was one girl who ‘catalysed’ certain yells, in which he started noticing her voice and eventually others in the audience would join in. Susan (21, F, Student), who went with a friend, remarked how others who have seen the movie acted like a guide and others who weren’t as well-versed could pick up stuff just by listening to them:

So at first I got right in, I started yelling along with everyone. She [referring to her friend] was sort of sitting there like ‘umm...so what am I expected to do?’ But then half way through the movie she started yelling along with everyone else. She got it straight away.

*Susan (21, F, Student)*

The ‘instigators’ and the actions they carry out in their physical or verbal manifestation acts as an educational tool of sorts that may be utilised by first-time attendees. Due to the repetitive nature of a lot of these rituals, first-timers were able to pick up and practice the acts themselves. Freja (29, F, Media Researcher) noted that many in her group of friends who hadn’t seen it before started to pick up on ‘some of the screams we hadn’t talked about before because they could hear other people screaming’ after which they started doing so themselves. In this sense, *The Room* screenings becomes an embodiment of a ‘viewing protocol [that] holds a pedagogical purpose’ because the audience ‘performs its own structure by individuals patenting witticism’ (Vivar, 2018, p.128). Carl contemplated on the meaning of the actions that people do and thought they can be considered to be an auditory cue to something important within the film:

It’s like they’re shouting this thing at this moment it must mean this moment in the movie is significant in some way. [...] So in one way it’s like educating the people who come there for the first time.

*Carl (27, M, Student)*

Not only do audiences learn interactions from others, but they also had to overcome their own personal dispositions by learning that it is acceptable in these screenings to throw spoons or yell out obscenities. Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) admitted that it took him a little while because he still felt strange doing these interactions in a movie theatre and felt that he needed to ‘win myself in that sense’. For Oscar (37, M, Student), he finally chimed in and yelled out something original towards the very end of the movie by shouting out ‘great job taking responsibility!’ at the character of Mark as he stood over Johnny’s dead body. He explained that he finally ‘felt experienced enough’ by the end of the movie and found joy as he perceived that there were other people laughing at his comment. Oscar then pointed out that if he were to go to another screening in the future, he would probably be ‘a little bit more active’.

Oscar's experience illustrates how the obtainment of camp capital could possibly shape their future engagements differently, especially if their initial attempt at exhibiting said capital was reinforced with laughter. Susan (21, F, Student) reflected that in future screenings, she would do a few things differently, specifically during the sex scenes in which she felt there were 'missed opportunities within the gaps' and would like to 'make a joke or do something interactive'. Victor (27, M Student) admitted that 'when you're there for the first time, you don't know the traditions' and believed that he would allow himself 'to be more active in yelling at the screen' in later engagements. Noah (30, M, Research Assistant) said that he considered himself to be an 'outsider' the first time he saw it and that he didn't know what to shout:

[...] If you watch it again and again you can let go of [...] those boundaries [...] try to participate some more. Not that I didn't participate, but again, relax more in the participation but because you know more.

*Noah (30, M, Research Assistant)*

The individual's knowledge of the visual cues, the flow of the film, the important plot points, and also the witty lines to yell out are then compounded that would establish her or himself within an unwritten hierarchy of *The Room* fandom; a classic case of distinction where individuals are guided towards their social orientation. Lucas (21, M, Sales Assistant) for example, has seen *The Room* at least nine times and five of those was in the theatre. However, he does not consider himself to be a veteran but that he's 'getting there' and wouldn't consider himself as 'hardcore' even though he's won numerous free tickets<sup>35</sup> based on his knowledge of *The Room*. Oliver on the other hand (43, M, Senior Media Researcher) said he was mostly going with the flow of the audience and would probably do so again in another screening because it would only be his second screening and would still feel like a 'novice'. He does note the importance of gaining enough camp capital by saying that if you can come up with a lot of original commentaries or interactivities, 'that way you kind of become the creator yourself'. Susan had similar aspirations in future screenings:

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<sup>35</sup> At the beginning of each screening of *The Room* at Huset-KBH, a person from the theatre would ask the audience a number of *Room*-related questions, in which if an audience member answers correctly, they would win a pair of movie tickets valid at Huset-KBH. Examples of the questions are: What is the real-life occupation of the actor who played Chris R in *The Room*? Or How long have Johnny and Lisa been together?

Maybe...try to be the person to lead the crowd. Because it was the first time I went to a screening, right? So I wasn't really sure when to yell, but now I do! So I might add a bit here and there.

*Susan (21, F, Student)*

In this sense, a possible end-goal for anyone who has gone through the live experience of *The Room* screening is becoming one of the 'instigators' that potentially shapes the experience of others present in the audience. The 'instigators' ultimately acts as a facilitator -more so for first-timers- that imparts knowledge to produce a 'shared reading' of the movie (McCulloch, 2011, p.205). This is important because harkening back to previous discussions, enjoyment of *The Room* is very much entwined with a specific reading protocol involving an ironic mode of enjoyment. One has to acquire enough camp capital through experience in order to be able to embody the persona of the 'instigator'. It can be argued then, that such individuals who have accumulated competence would sit in the upper echelons of *The Room*'s hierarchy of fandom because they become 'a source of inculcation' (Bourdieu, 1979, p.65) that convey information in the form of interactions where others in the audience will ascertain its value (i.e. others will laugh, repeat the comments, or perhaps dismiss it).

With all of the above in mind, we have seen that audiences were able to ascribe the 'so bad it's good' moniker to *The Room* due to the film's poor aesthetic quality. It was then elaborated that an ironic mode of engagement was a requirement, anchored in the notion that Wiseau was sincere in producing *The Room*. Because of this shared reading and the interactivities in the live screening, it was found that audiences felt a sense of belonging which also resulted in the creation of a 'carnavalesque' atmosphere. As the culmination of the overall experience, audiences were able to attain camp capital as the manifestation of their knowledge in cult films, which may be used as resources and guides an individual to their place within the hierarchy of *The Room* culture.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Within the context of the live screenings of Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*, this thesis has examined the audiences' values and opinions based on their viewing experiences. Through audience interviews and observations, the research has extracted rich narratives that would otherwise be undiscovered if a different approach was adopted. This thesis has shown that the general nature of *The Room*'s live screening can only be made possible due to the qualities inherent in the text, in which audiences were engaged in a secondary reading protocol that does not take the film at face value. This was elucidated through the channelling of the camp sensibility by respondents where irony plays a central role in their mode of enjoyment. The tenets of camp became a requirement mainly due to the fact that *The Room* was considered by audiences to be a sincere failure on the part of Wiseau as the producer and director. Because audiences were not reading the film at face value, its live experience is transformed into an event-like screening in which audiences have a certain degree of freedom to conduct themselves in a manner that breaks the rules of the normal cinemagoing experience. As these screenings are characterised by a free flow of opinions and expressions, it allows audiences to engage in a form of learning process – which they can obtain knowledge related specifically to *The Room* and its culture. Such knowledges are then manifested in the form of camp capital, that functions as a resource for discursive practices, a personal identifier, and means of distinction for individuals within the hierarchy of *The Room*'s culture. What's written above demonstrates what has been observed and uncovered throughout the course of this research. As the concluding chapter of the thesis a detailed reflection on the aforementioned findings in relations to the key research questions is pertinent:

#### **How are audiences defining and understanding *The Room* as a cult film?**

Respondents of this thesis have consistently noted the importance of *The Room*'s poor textual qualities. It was established that in relation to the overall live screening experience, *The Room* is in a way irreplaceable and that other similar bad films would not be able to recreate what *The Room* has achieved since the beginning of its release. This demonstrates what Hermes (1995)

had posited in that audience studies of cultural artefacts, the text plays a crucial role in conceptualising the topic of interest. As a point of reflection, it is because of this, that the research makes reference to the text and how it plays a role in the way audiences are ascribing meaning.

For audiences of *The Room*, they noted the degree of the film's poorness and bizarreness have crossed an imaginary line that situates the film a notch beyond just plain bad, but into the realm of 'so bad it's good'. Particular attention was paid to the film's non-sensical plotlines, absurd scenes, bizarre dialogue, and most prominently, Tommy Wiseau's acting. The notion of 'so bad it's good' in the case of this research, was rooted in the audiences' disbelief that someone has actually produced a film as poor as *The Room*. In this way, as Carl (27, M, Student) stated, *The Room* was perceived to have an 'imagined depth' as a reactionary mechanism in trying to rationalise why and how Wiseau constructed each individual scene. What this means is that because the textual qualities of the film have surpassed the point of 'normal weird', audiences begin to extract their own narratives from the unbelievable components of the film's more outlandish scenes. The 'hi doggie!' scene in the flower shop exemplifies this well, due to the scene's hasty pace and abrupt ending, audiences were left to wonder for example, why that dog was up on the counter, who that dog belongs to, and even the reason as to why Johnny would greet the dog in the first place. In other words, individuals are creating their own narratives in their heads, shifting their focus away from the diegetic components of the film (Sconce, 1995, p.387) and instead into something else that is not explicitly portrayed.

It can be argued then, the aforementioned 'imagined depth' creates a distance between audiences and the film itself. Instead of feeling invested and empathising with *The Room*'s characters and their predicaments, audiences are instead ridiculing them due to their 'unintentionally heightened awareness' (MacDowell and Zborowski, 2013) of the film's bizarreness and excess. Here, the notion of distance can be further unpacked. Pavlounis (2012) posits that the audiences' ability to find enjoyment from *The Room* is less 'predicated on distancing' but is in reality a 'genuine enjoyment' (p.27). However, this thesis would argue that the audiences' main source of enjoyment is based on the film's unbelievability. Even if audiences are genuinely enjoying the film, they would not be able to do so without that sense of unrelatability. It is the aforementioned



distance that instills an additional value into an otherwise inadequate piece of cinema and pushes *The Room* into the territory of ‘so bad it’s good’.

### **What role does the camp sensibility and taste play in the way audiences are viewing *The Room*?**

After identifying exactly how audiences are perceiving *The Room* as a film, this thesis has identified the camp sensibility in which irony is key, as the main mode of enjoyment for audiences. Camp in the case of this research, was anchored on the notion that Wiseau was sincere in his efforts at producing *The Room*. Audiences *need* to accept this idea because it would allow audiences to ‘disavow the broader implications of failure itself’ (Pavlounis, 2012, p.28). In spirit, it is similar to how Dyer (2002) views camp in that it creates enough distance from something that is objectively awful (p.49). Thus, camp functions as a tool for audiences to find pleasure from something that is aesthetically poor. Instead of cringing or feel embarrassed of what transpires on-screen, they are instead ascribing a different meaning from what can be interpreted at face value. In this sense, a dichotomy of vision emerged from the differing perspectives of audiences and also Wiseau’s perceived true intentions. It is as Sontag (1966) posits, that if a subject is embodying ‘camp’, then a duplicity is constructed in which exists both the ‘straight’ reading and also the ‘zany experience’ of said subject (p.281). The duplicitous nature of *The Room* as a film becomes even more muddled with the fact that Wiseau consistently claims he had always intended *The Room* to be a dark comedy, a claim that audiences of this research had been keen to point out as implausible. It’s understandable why they refuse to validate Wiseau’s claim, because if they do, the puzzlement and confusion exhibited by audiences would then disappear. It would demystify *The Room* itself as both a film and as an experience. And if that’s the case, there is no longer a need for camp as the main mode of enjoyment because then *The Room* would already be a comedy at face value.

Based on the above, camp is established as the preferred sensibility in viewing *The Room*. However, this research had also shown that camp itself would not be able to develop if the individual in question does not ‘get’ what it’s all about. Hence, the matter of taste surfaces and acts as a means of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) that provides a guideline on who would appreciate camp. Respondents indicated that they are reluctant to bring others who they deem would not ‘fit’ with what *The Room* and its experience are. In this way, they are projecting their

own tastes onto others and gauge whether other people would also be able to enjoy *The Room*. We could argue that audiences in a way, created boundaries (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, p.184) rooted in their perception of another person being able to discern that *The Room* is indeed camp and that a specific mode of enjoyment is necessary. Determining the taste of others was important because as this thesis illustrated, audiences who wanted to bring their friends or partners placed a great sense of responsibility upon themselves in that their own enjoyment of the experience was very much linked with the enjoyment of the individuals they brought to the screening. If the friend or partner had a great time, then it would arguably enhance their relationship. If not, the opposite may also happen and there is one less thing they can share. It exemplifies what Bourdieu (1979) posits about the nature of taste, in that it can both unite and separate individuals. By that same logic, taste in camp would also establish that the experience of *The Room* screenings is social in nature. Audiences of this thesis have remarked that they simply cannot attend a screening without being a group of friends or colleagues. In this sense, other individuals function as a support in enduring the badness of the film itself. For returning viewers, respondents noted that seeing *The Room* with first-timers actually enhanced their experience because they were able to witness how others would react for the first time.

### **How do audiences shape the live experience of *The Room*?**

*The Room* invites audiences into a secondary reading protocol where the irony of camp is paramount, and audiences in turn shape the live screenings of *The Room* to embody an atmosphere of the ‘carnavalesque’ (Bakhtin, 1965). Considering that audiences don’t take the film itself at face value, it is no wonder that the screenings themselves are dissimilar from anything in ‘normal’ society. Respondents have noted how carrying out actions in the form of throwing objects or yelling out their thoughts and opinions exuded a sense of liberty, freedom, and catharsis. These senses arose from the camp viewing of audiences in which they were ‘diverted’ from the objective meaning of the film (Klinger, 1989, p.5). Audiences have remarked that the transgressive nature of *The Room* screenings are evidently incompatible with the typical cinemagoing etiquette. Even if that were so, this thesis would argue that by no means are *The Room* screenings to be in direct opposition towards society in general, simply because audiences of this research were not exhibiting a sense of hostility towards the normal cinemagoing experience and weren’t actively promoting ‘an alternative vision’ (Sconce, 1995, p.374) of going

to the cinemas. Instead, it can be argued that *The Room* screenings can be considered to be a form of escapism. A respite from the typically silent and orderly experience of going to a movie theatre. Audiences placed a high importance on being able to throw spoons because this is their chance on breaking the normal ‘feeling rule’ (Hochschild, 1983) of being in a cinema. Based on this, the interactions themselves become an added value in the whole experience, in addition to the qualities of the cult film itself.

The sense of freedom offered by the live experience of *The Room* would then allow audiences to be able to express their thoughts and opinions uninhibitedly, constituting a form of ‘emotional public sphere’ where there is more of a focus on emotional expressions instead of rational discussions (Lunt and Stenner, 2005). It functions as a vehicle for ‘thought and feeling [and] for imagination’ (McGuigan, 2005, p.435). Such freedoms have even given audiences of *The Room* some leeway into addressing and acknowledging sensitive topics, particularly that around gender stereotypes. *The Room* screenings become a conduit of free expression for audiences that would otherwise be considered offensive if taken outside the context. Here, the importance of camp and irony resurfaces in that it gives individuals the license to be playful (Sontag, 1966) towards politically incorrect statements. This was illustrated by audience responses in that they believe humour is a way of disarming such sensitive topics and that it’s acceptable having fun with them.

Even though audiences have free rein to yell out commentaries and conduct physical actions, they still have to be considerate of their surroundings and in particular other individuals. Susan (21, F, Student) encapsulated this best when she said that ‘whatever happens in *The Room*, stays in the room’. Some respondents in this research recalled a moment in their screenings when another audience member became overly obnoxious and almost ruined their enjoyment of the experience. Additionally, audiences have also remarked that there are certain unwritten rules in *The Room* screenings and you are encouraged to adhere to these rules. For example, as explained by some of the respondents, you are expected to participate in one way or another throughout the course of the film, and that you have to yell certain lines at specific moments. Based on what’s written above, we can argue that in *The Room* screenings, both freedom and constraint almost equally characterise the nature of the screenings themselves. On one hand, the ‘carnavalesque’ is upheld where all hierarchical elements are suspended (Bakhtin, 1965, p.10), but on the other, rules of the greater society still apply in that we are encouraged not to offend or hurt other

people. Furthermore, the unwritten rules of *The Room* where we are expected to follow the auditory and visual cues on-screen further contradicts the notion of freedom as offered by the ‘carnavalesque’ atmosphere. By this logic, *The Room* screenings can be defined as a public space where the affective climate allows emotional excess to flourish, while at the same time it is still considered to be ‘a managed space’ (Lunt and Stenner, 2005, p.77) in that said excess is regulated by audiences and the timeframe of the live event itself.

As one of the last talking points of the thesis, it could be argued that because of the shared reading of the text that creates a ‘carnavalesque’ atmosphere, it would bring about a sense of belonging. Respondents of the research -especially first-time attendees- have remarked that after attending the screening, they now feel they ‘get it’ or being ‘in’ on the whole culture. Because of the rowdy nature of the screenings where the camp sensibilities flourish, Dyer (2002) characterises this as having a ‘good camp together’ which provides audiences with a ‘sense of identification and belonging’ (p.49). This was illustrated in this thesis through both my personal observations of creating bonds with strangers and also respondents’ statements where they said that *The Room* screening makes you feel like you belong to something bigger. Some had also noted that they felt like being in a ‘club’, in which there are undertones of exclusivity. This harkens back to the matter of taste and how it functions as a form of identifier if a person likes *The Room* or not. The perceived similarities among audiences of *The Room* ‘breeds emotional closeness and trust’ (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, p.187).

The aforementioned sense of identification and belonging could also be sourced from the obtainment of camp capital. Here, this thesis argues that camp capital is a value within *The Room* experience where an ironic mode of engagement is necessary. It emerges from the screenings’ affective climate where situated affective practices are conducted. Audiences first exemplified camp capital through their recollection of utilising the camp knowledge as discursive resources in talking with other individuals. It can either be utilised as a talking point with those who have seen *The Room* before, or a means to persuading others who have never seen the film. Camp capital also channels the function of being a personal identifier in that it signifies that a person has experienced a ‘specific cultural experience’ (Noah, 30, M, Research Assistant). In this way, camp capital certainly has the ability to constitute what is ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Friedman and Kuipers, 2013, p.193) and as mentioned before, marking a boundary between those who are ‘in

on it' and those who are less so. However, this thesis does not suggest that those who are 'in' are superior or those who aren't are inferior. Rather, in relation to *The Room* and its screening, there is no superior/inferior binary but instead simply acknowledging that said boundaries are only a reflection of 'a difference in taste' (Gracyk, 1990, p.128).

McCulloch (2011) argues that any form of capital obtained in a screening of *The Room* can only be utilised as far as enhancing a person's social capital (p.212). In that vein, camp capital also functions to enhance one's standing within the hierarchy of *The Room* culture. One such role that embodies the upper echelon of the hierarchy is that of the 'instigator', in which audiences have noted their importance during the live screenings. Here, 'instigators' can be defined as an individual who has accumulated enough camp capital and hence are comfortable in making their interactions known. As perceived by the respondents, 'instigators' lead the crowd by spearheading actions or yells based on specific scenes of the movie. They would impart valuable knowledge on others who were in attendance that would materialise into camp capital. Their actions would signify to other audience members that the scenes in question are an important part of the screening experience. Because of this, *The Room* screenings represent an environment where the processes of learning can be observed. In a way, it exudes a sense of liminality in which individuals who were previously less initiated (or not initiated at all) come out after the screening being more well-versed in the dynamics of *The Room* screenings. This was elaborated by audiences in that they began to take notice of certain details in the movie because of other people's commentaries or actions. Respondents had noted that they would most likely conduct themselves differently in future screenings of *The Room* because of learning new things based on the 'instigators'. Furthermore, some respondents made it known that for subsequent live experiences, they wanted to accumulate enough camp capital in order to embody the 'instigator' persona themselves. Therefore, we can infer that camp capital produced by the interactive nature of the screenings, shapes the audiences' personalities and identities within the context of *The Room*'s culture and affirmed by their ability to appropriate their readings of the film into interactions (Bourdieu, 1979, p.281). Camp capital would then also shape the live experience itself through these audiences who are exhibiting their camp knowledge throughout the screening.

## Going Forward

In conclusion, this thesis has critically examined the nuances of *The Room* screenings from the perspective of its audience. We can see how *The Room* is worthy of being called ‘the mother of all bad movies’. Not only did its poor aesthetics transcend its normative detritus status, but they have also constructed a distinct culture that revolves around the film. Going forward, this thesis may serve as a stepping stone into research that is broader in scope. For example, a possible extension would be to study how camp capital is applied to other cult films and live experiences such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or *The Big Lebowski*. The notion of camp capital could also be examined in relations to other genres other than cult film such as reality TV (e.g. *Rupaul’s Drag Race*) in which a number of programmes are patrons of the camp sensibility where excess is often exhibited. Going even bigger, a study could also be conducted on the different viewing cultures of *The Room* in a slew of countries that hold monthly screenings (e.g. the United States, United Kingdom, and Denmark). A bigger sample would also allow us to investigate how audiences are able to attain the ability to appreciate camp in the first place in relation to their upbringing. In other words, how audiences are able to fundamentally discern that *The Room* is ironic based on their previous knowledge of culture and film in general. Here, demographic markers such as social class, education, ethnicity, and nationality may play a role. Therefore, a potential outcome of the future research could be the elaboration of how an individual’s economic and cultural capital instils a camp sensibility and its ironic mode of engagement.

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## **Interviews**

- ‘Carl’, 27, M, Swedish, Student. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 5/3/18
- ‘Oscar’, 37, M, Swedish, Student. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 5/3/18
- ‘Sofia’, 24, F, Danish, Student. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 6/3/18
- ‘Susan’, 21, F, American, Student. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 7/3/18
- ‘Noah’, 30, M, Danish, Research Assistant. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 7/3/18
- ‘Lucas’, 21, M, Danish, Sales Assistant. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 7/3/18
- ‘Freja’, 29, F, Danish, Media Researcher. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 8/3/18
- ‘Oliver’, 43, M, Danish, Senior Media Researcher. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 8/3/18
- ‘Victor’, 27, M, Danish, Student. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 8/3/18
- ‘Ella’, 29, F, Danish, Social Media Manager. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 8/3/18
- ‘Michelle’, 25, F, American, Content Manager. Interviewed with H. S. Priambodho 13/3/18

## Appendix

### Appendix 1 – Recruitment Message Example

Dear [Respondent's name],

My name is Hario Priambodho from Lund University and you may (hopefully) remember me from a screening of *The Room* at Huset-KBH on 2 March where I've had the pleasure of talking with you, albeit briefly, about my master's thesis work that I am conducting on the audiences of *The Room*.

First of all, I want to apologize if I didn't reach out to you sooner as I needed the time since that screening to finalize a bunch of stuff in order for me to confidently conduct interviews, which is why I am contacting you right now. Based on that, I have set the week of 5-11 March as my window for conducting interviews in Copenhagen.

With that mind, please do let me know if you are still willing to be interviewed and if you have around 1 hour to spare in any of those days (from 5 March - 11 March). You are free to choose the time you want to meet up and of course where we meet is also your choice. I will gladly find my way to where you are.

If you have any questions, concerns, or even if you know of someone else that might be interested in being interviewed for my research, please don't hesitate to let me know. You can also contact me on my phone: +46 73 xxx xxxx.

And finally, I just want to say a big thank you for your kind assistance and understanding!

Best regards,

Hario Priambodho

P.S. If you're completely unavailable for the week of 5-11 March, maybe we can work something out on days outside that time frame.

## Appendix 2 – Consent Form

### *The Room* Audience Research Lund University

**Researcher:** Hario Priambodho

**Programme:** Master's in media and communications

I am currently conducting a study centered around audiences that are present in a screening of *The Room* as a part of my master's thesis work. This research seeks to explore the thoughts, opinions, and values of individuals in regards to *The Room* and the culture surrounding it. Therefore, I would like to interview you as a part of my ongoing research. The data I collect will only be used within the confinement of my final thesis, which I expect to be finished in May 2018. I may also contact you again at a later date to explore the possibility of a more in-depth, face-to-face interview.

**Your identity shall remain anonymous** and I will ensure that this will always be the case. Nowhere in my final report will your real name be stated under any circumstances.

I would like to record the interview and use the dialogue to elaborate my findings. I will only record the interview if you give your written consent. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview any time you want.

If you agree to join this study, please sign your name below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Full name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age and Gender

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone number (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix 3 – Interview Guide

### Pre-Screening - Expectations

- What was the reason you came to the screening?
- How many times have you seen The Room?
- (If seen more than once)
  - o Where did you first see it?
  - o How did you come to that first screening?
  - o How was that first screening like?
  - o Favourite screening?
  - o What were your expectations before this screening?
  - o How is this screening different from previous screenings?
  - o Who did you come with to the screening?
    - How did you convince others in your group to see The Room? (If they brought first timers)
- (If this is first time)
  - o Who brought you here?
  - o Before coming to this screening, what did you know about The Room?
    - Read up on anything?
  - o What were your expectations before the screening?
    - How did you feel before the screening?

### The Screening

- How would you describe The Room as a movie?
  - o Aesthetics? Colour? Dialogue? Shot framing? Music?
- What are your thoughts on the venue itself?
- In your own words, how would you describe the experience of the screening?
  - o What's important to you?
  - o What part of the experience was your favourite?
  - o Does the film matter?
    - Is it the film or the live experience?

### The Individual and Collective

- How did you feel during the screening?
  - o Emotions? Laughter?
  - o Specific moments?
- Did you do any actions during the screening?
  - o Shout? Throw spoons? Sing?
  - o What were your reasons in doing so?
    - If not, why?
    - Would you do things differently in future screenings?
  - o How did it feel? (in doing such actions)
  - o What makes it important?



- What does it mean to you?
- How do you see yourself as someone who has watched The Room?
- How do you describe the audience for the film?
  - Your thoughts on other people who shouted? Threw spoons?
- What are your thoughts on watching it with other people instead of watching alone?
  - Watching it live instead of at home?
- How would you describe the culture around The Room?
- Have you ever been to other live cinema events?
  - What was that like?
- What do you think it means to watch live cinema?

## **Taste**

- The Room has been called “The Citizen Kane of bad movies”, what’s your take on that?
  - How would you explain “so bad it’s good”?
  - How do you enjoy something that’s bad?
  - What is the right mindset to see The Room?
- What’s your take on Tommy’s acting?
  - Your take on the gender aspects of the film?
    - Finding humour in non-PC scenes
  - Your take on filmmaking in general?
- Since the screening, have you talked about The Room with anyone else?
  - What did you talk about?
  - What were your reasons in doing so?
  - Did you pick up anything after the screening?
- Reflecting on the whole experience, what are your thoughts?

## Appendix 4 – Field Notes Example

### Field Notes – [16 March 2018, 19:00] *The Room* screening, Huset-KBH, Copenhagen, Denmark

For this screening, I went with my wife, a friend, and one of his friends who I previously was not acquainted with. We arrived at the venue around 30 minutes prior to the start of the screening, in line with our normal arrival time because I wanted to ensure that we'll get good seats in the theatre (it's first come first serve). As we wait in line, I notice that a lot of people had already started drinking. Again, because the venue has a small bar right outside the auditorium door, it's no wonder that a lot of people would drink alcohol first before watching the movie. The time is now almost 19:00, Jack makes his way to the auditorium door and readies himself to let people in. There's a slight delay because 'the spoon man' isn't there yet and Jack calls to one of the people behind the bar to bring the spoons. Just like any other *Room* screenings in Huset-KBH, we are given plastic spoons to be thrown later on. I grab a handful of spoons thinking that it would mean I have more spoons to throw considering that I brought at least a hundred spoons of my own from home. It's a mad dash to our preferred seats, somewhere towards the back of the auditorium so I can observe audiences more completely. We manage to get our preferred seats. People begin filtering in and take seats. I immediately take notice on the gender split of the audience. So far, it's been pretty even I would say. Nobody stood out immediately. After 10 minutes or so, I notice that there are still some empty seats. I think some people are still outside and have not come in yet. After another 5 minutes, almost all seats are filled up now. I notice that in the last row (3 rows behind me) there are three empty seats. So it's not a full house then.

Just like all screenings at Huset-KBH, Jack comes up to the front of the auditorium and gives his typical introduction. Let's see which questions he asks this time around. First question is on Johnny's and Lisa's relationship. I know the answer but refused to answer, just let other people do it. One guy in the front answers, it's correct. Jack gives two free tickets to him. The next question is on Chris R and his real-life occupation. I also know the answer but didn't answer as well. Turns out, the same guys answers and he gets more free tickets. Last question is on the significance of a person's name during the beginning credits. He/she's been dead. Wow, the same guy answers again and got more tickets. Now Jack is readying himself to throw the pillows like usual. Don't think I'll get pillows this time because we're quite at the back.

Now Jack's left and the film is starting. Opening credits scene, always a good way to gauge the audience from the beginning. It seems like they're a bit slow getting into things. When Tommy's name popped up only a few cheered. Maybe there are a lot of first-timers like my friend and his friend. Everybody popped when we see him on the tram. First scene, nothing significant to note. Everybody's playing by the rules now. A lot of laughs at Denny as expected. First sex scene now. Moaning and groaning can be heard all around. I try to sing along to the song and see if anyone picks up on it. Nope. I yell out 'still coming' after the sex is over. Everything's proceeding like normal now. A few errant yells here and there. Because you're a woman!! Everybody's in on it unashamedly. Flower shop scene now. Everybody's quieting down in preparation. A number of people clap and recite 'hi doggie!'. First spoon throwing of the night. I ration my spoons wisely. It seems like everybody's in on it. Creeper Denny is back again.

Someone yells out 'creep!' loudly. Scotchka time! I yell out scotchka, and it seems some other people have only become aware that it's scotchka. They react in laughter and disgust. Second sex scene. Even more groaning. One person stands up and leaves the auditorium. Probably going to the toilet or getting a drink. Oh my, that was brilliant. When Claudette asked Denny if he had nothing better to do, a guy in front yells 'don't you have breast cancer?!?'. Never heard that before. Meanwhile in San Francisco!!

Chris R, here we go. The guy up front tries to psyche people up. Where's my money Denny?!? Everybody's just laughing out loud. The lady next to me yells out 'still coming' when Johnny looks up while holding Denny. A few laughs abound. The Lisa and Michelle scene now. I wonder if anyone's gonna react to Lisa's bulging neck. After a few times it bulged, no one's seem to pick up on it. 'You are tearing me apart Lisa!' Everybody bursts into laughter and applause. Golden Gate Bridge pan, I start yelling 'Go! Go! Go!' along with a few others. More people pick up on it as the scene progresses. Next highlight, Johnny trying to act sneaky and stuff. Immediately as he walks down the stairs, audiences were humming along to the Mission Impossible theme song. I think by this time, this is normal for Copenhagen audiences. There's a fucking chair Denny, don't sit on the floor! Meanwhile in San Francisco. It seems more and more people are latching onto it by now. Café scene. I yell out cheesecake a few times! I think a few people have only realised that the café only has cheesecake. Anyways, how's your sex life? Laughter all around. Mark and Lisa's second sex scene. 'What's going on here?' that line always kills me. More football throwing. People count the number of times they throw it around.

Party time! I start to yell 'who the fuck are you?' aimed at faux Peter. Well that was new. When Lisa asks everybody to go out for some 'fresh air', the guys behind me start chanting 'fresh air! Fresh air! Fresh air!'. Naturally I join in because I think that's a cool thing to do. Never heard of it done before either. The last few moments of the party is just hilarious. I can tell that people around me are audibly laughing. I think there's a lot of newcomers here because I also sense a lot of disbelief. Meanwhile in San Francisco, at night! Johnny retrieves the tape recorder, some people also starts humming the Mission Impossible theme. Fuck that dress, fuck that dress! Everybody starts chanting. Johnny fucks the red dress, people laugh. Johnny kills himself. I hear an audible 'what the fuck?' Someone yells out 'still coming'. I laugh and others too. Final shot of the film, I do my usual 'go to town Denny! Suck his dick!'. Other audiences laugh at that. End film, everybody claps and cheers.

We wait for about 2 minutes before the DVD commentary comes on. Everybody's still coming off on a high from the movie and cheers and laughs at everything Tommy does in the commentary. Now everything's ended. People can be seen talking with each other and discussing. Some are staying in their seats. I notice at least one person who picks up stray spoons on the floor. I do that too sometimes, to replenish my ammunition for future screenings. As we filter out, unlike some previous screenings I didn't talk with strangers about this screening in the theatre. I head out and went straight to the bathroom. A line is already forming up for the next screening. It seems like there are bigger groups of friends or colleagues in the next screening. I approach one of the groups and start talking with them.

## Appendix 5 – Sample Interview

### Interview 9, ‘Victor’ (Male, 27 years old, Danish, Student)

Q: So, talking about the screening at Huset, what was the reason you came to the screening of The Room?

A: Well it was a social event with some of the people from work. And umm...I mean it's always been this kind of cult thing if you're into film and or media and a student in Copenhagen. You always have a lot of friends going to that thing. So it's always been on the back of mind to go there but I just never...I had never gotten to it. So yeah, it was motivated by someone from work and we all went and had a night out in town.

Q: How many times have you seen The Room?

A: Umm...just once! Just the once.

Q: And who brought you there?

A: Well I think it was one your other interviewees, [another interviewee's name], I guess. I think she inspired it, she arranged it all. It was a colleague.

Q: How did you eventually come to the screening? How did she ask you?

A: She just umm...we're just a couple of people socialising and I guess she was a big...either she had seen it before or one of the other guys have seen it a lot of times before. So and they were a big fan, you know as I said before it's kind of natural in these circles to talk about The Room as like this important thing. So I guess it was like a realisation of something inevitable. Yeah, so I guess you know...some people got together and I joined in. It was like an email that went around, so yeah.

Q: Before coming to that screening, what did you know about The Room?

A: Well all the basics I guess. I knew it was the world's worst film and I knew a bit about Tommy Wiseau or Wiseau [different pronunciation] or however you want to pronounce it. And that you know...I've seen clips so I knew the different phrases and weirdest scenes and I knew about the phenomenon of people when seeing it, like in Huset a small cinema, throwing stuff and that there were these small points of focus within the film. So yeah, I guess I knew the basics.

Q: Before going to the screening, did you read up on anything else?

A: None at all, none at all! I felt I knew enough and just wanted the experience.

Q: So what were your expectations before?

A: Well...actually my expectations were that...I guess I expected it to be underwhelming because I already knew so much about it. I felt that it was kind of spoiled for me, because I've heard so much about it. But I mean still, I expected it to be a fun time and I couldn't wait to experience the physicality of it, of The Room.

Q: How did you feel before the screening?

A: Well just excited. It was a good time, we had just gone out to eat and got a few beers so that kind of fitted in quite well with the atmosphere. It was like this loose fun gang going to watch weird movies. I've never been to that you know...the small screening room in Huset. So I was just excited to see that as well.

Q: How would you describe The Room as a movie?

A: Umm...how would I describe The Room? [laughs] It's entertaining and it's of course weird and surreal and otherworldly. It's like nothing I have ever seen before and it's a movie...especially in these times it's been talked so much about now. So you can't really say much that hasn't been said about it. But I guess the most accurate thing I heard a lot of times now, is that it feels like a movie being made by an alien trying to

imitate humanity and trying to make a film like a human being would. And it's...in other words it's incredible, you can't really believe that this has been through an entire process of pre-production, production, post-production and that it has come out the other end as a complete product. It's this weird phenomenon I would say.

Q: What are your thoughts on Huset as a venue?

A: Intimate. I really loved it. I guess it fulfilled all my expectations because it has this...in general I've been to Huset quite a few times but never up there in the cinema. And I really liked it because it seems like they're just good at nailing intimacy and umm...well it seems like it's run by people who know what they're doing and love what they're doing. And you know, a concept such as screening *The Room* constantly over and over, years on end, that's...you need to have a really dedicated people and you need to kind of cultivate this air of I don't know...of cult and nerdiness. And that's what I like about it. It feels like you're a part of this little club, both in terms of the atmosphere and the interior and the decorations, and also what you're there to just do, which is go see a weird movie.

Q: How do you think the experience would be different if it were screened in any other theatre?

A: Like in a normal big theatre? Yeah I don't think it would have been the same because you would lose that intimacy and crookedness. You know Huset is really...in one of these buildings from the Middle Ages, it's one of the oldest buildings in Copenhagen, so umm...everything is just crooked and small and that really comes great together with the entire tradition of throwing stuff and yelling stuff. You really feel like you're a part of this sweaty mass of people...of a cult.

Q: In your own words, how would you describe the experience of the screening?

A: Crazy, you know. It felt like you were a part of this club. Even though I was a newcomer, I quickly felt like I had become a part of a tradition, like an exclusive little society that yells at the screen every time something weird happens or throw spoons every time there's a spoon in the picture. It was a really good experience, it was a lot of fun. I could use another beer to keep me company, that would have been awesome, but in general it felt like a unique experience. Because you take something like...you take a crazy crazy, weird, bad movie, and combine it with the experience of you know...drinking beer and actually going to the movies and yelling with people, it felt like this...like a combination of all kinds of weird things.

Q: What part of the experience was your favourite?

A: Oooh...I guess the community. The uhh...how you could...I mean everyone was so responsive, reactive you know...it felt like everyone was there to enjoy it and like they wanted to take part of this tradition. And that was really nice. Because if you go to a random movie, that has no traditions around it because it's a normal movie and it's a big theatre, then you lose that sense of community. This was really the opposite, this was...you felt like you're on the same page with everyone. That was pretty unique I would say.

Q: In your opinion people go to see *The Room* in a screening because of the film or the live experience?

A: The experience, the combined experience I'm sure! Because I actually...you know I'm sure I know a lot of people who watched it on their computer at home, but as far as I know...and I don't know much...it seems that Tommy Wiseau has done a great job at kind of narrowing the means of distribution, it's hard to get a hold of the movie. And I mean everyone has that experience of...everyone talks about the experience of having seen it as a part of this tradition and weird things...I forget the questions, what was it again?

Q: Yeah do people go because of the film or the experience?

A: Yeah totally the full experience.

Q: And if you were to go back, is it because of the film or the experience?

A: That would be the experience because then I will get to you know, to be allowed more active in yelling at the screen because...when you're there the first time you don't know the traditions. Well I knew about the spoons, I knew about the pillows but the people yelling "because you're a woman!" and stuff like that, I would love to know that from the start because then I can participate. It would definitely be with a couple of friends doing the traditions...and you know.

Q: During the screening, what sort of emotions did you feel?

A: Well I mean, the emotions... of course I was amused and entertained. I was uhh...I felt kind of transported into another dimension when I really just focused on the movie. And of course as I've said, this sense of belonging, a tight knit group. Yeah...and it was also...also actually for me a feeling of fulfilment because I've heard about this movie for so many years. And it felt like this finally...I finally get to see this, this is awesome.

Q: Did you do any actions during the screening?

A: Yeah yeah yeah! I participated in you know...throwing the spoons and the pillows. I was in the back row so not many things get...land there. So after a couple of rounds, we all lost all of our stuff to the people in the front. But I'm not sure I did any of the yelling though. But the throwing I definitely did, and of course a lot of laughing.

Q: And how did it make you feel throwing things?

A: Awesome! That's cool, I mean...it's a great feeling to be able to...I guess it's a bit childish and it's really satisfying that you get to throw things in the room. And I guess that's why it's a good idea to have plastic spoons and of course soft pillows. It was actually really great because you're kind of just waiting for the next moment to be able to throw spoons. And the fact that no one complained, everyone was in on the joke, made it a lot better.

Q: So what's your thought on being able to do that inside a cinema?

A: That was nice, it was really nice. Because well as...as a guy...you know we went to the cinema as a dumb teenager sometimes it would be a lot of fun throwing popcorn around. I guess it's nice to combine this sitting activity and actually...this really still activity with something that is more umm...based on movement. I don't know...I guess it felt like catharsis, to be able to throw stuff around.

Q: How did you feel after the screening?

A: Actually I think I was a bit light-headed. Because I don't know if you know the feeling when you laugh like too much, it gets to your head. And I don't know what happens, but I was like woah, I'm thirsty, I'm hot, I need some air. It was really like a compact, intense experience. Huset, the room, the theatre, that's really you know...a small place and a small space. And everyone was constantly laughing and having a good time, it was jus really intense. So when I got out it was great to have gotten this experience and to be able to stand around and joke with my colleagues. As I guess we all do...we quoted the film, talked about the funniest moments and stuff like that. I guess...but I guess it was a crazy experience and I just had to calm down you know.

Q: Having been to a screening and seen The Room, how do you see yourself as someone who has been to a screening?

A: How do I see myself? Hmm... I don't know...I guess now I'm in on the joke. Now I can finally talk about the good stuff and the funny stuff of the film as a person who has joined the club. I still haven't seen The Disaster Artist and I would like to see that because it was a part of the...what motivated some of the other guys to suggest that we go see it. Umm...but I definitely feel...as you always do when you go see something important, this is kind of a Casablanca of bad movies. It has the status of something that you have to see. So I guess that kind of satisfactory, fulfilment.

Q: It's interesting you mentioned it like Casablanca, because a lot of people calls it the Citizen Kane of bad movies, what's your take on that?

A: I could have just easily said Citizen Kane, it's just the first thing that popped into my mind. But yeah, it just really is...I guess it's because of the status, you can't really...Citizen Kane is an amazing movie and to be able to make a movie at that age and do all the things that Orson Welles did, that's just crazy, that's other-worldly. You can't really compare that to making a bad movie unless you suggest that he went for making such a bad movie as this. And that would be quite amazing, to be able to do this on purpose. But it's just something, I guess it's the legacy, the importance of seeing Citizen Kane can compare with the importance of going and experiencing The Room, especially as a film student.

Q: How do you describe the audience of The Room?

A: Well you know, interactive and I would say you could definitely feel that...it was geeks of society, right? In a good way it was the people knowing about the umm...the not so mainstream culture, it felt like that. It felt like people had gone to see a lot of times. And that we were the newbies so to speak. And as I said before, it was so intimate you quickly felt like these are your friends, all of them, because you had this common experience where you all expressed a lot of things in a short amount of time. And everyone...no one sat around quiet and without participating and everyone was in on it. Everyone was a part of this and that was nice to kind of...to have that kind of equal-mindedness in every person in the audience.

Q: What are your thoughts on other people who shouted or threw spoons?

A: Other people...well awesome...I don't know. It was good that everyone was in on it and participated. Yeah.

Q: Was there anyone who shouted out a particularly funny joke you remembered?

A: Well there was this couple behind us...we were on the back row of the...the bleachers or what you call it. Umm...behind us to the right there were these little couches and I just remembered there was this one girl who kind of...she catalysed or started that whole "because you're a woman!" thing. She kept shouting it, so I noticed her voice. And then eventually a lot of people joined in on it but I think she was the first one. That was cool. And I don't know if she had like...had been to other screenings somewhere else and knew something that most of these people did not. I had never heard of that tradition even though I've heard of the other ones, so yeah. That was something I noticed.

Q: What are your thoughts on watching *The Room* with other people?

A: Absolutely mandatory! Especially because of the things you do as an audience, it's a movie that hasn't at all got the same appeal if you watch it alone. I would never [laughs]...okay perhaps to you know, to investigate or to do a...write an exam paper or something, I would never put myself through it without anyone around me because it's...it definitely...I feel like alongside *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, it's the movie to watch with other people. It's a common experience...it's a group experience.

Q: How about your thoughts on watching it at the cinema instead of at home?

A: Also yeah equally important. As we spoke about it before, it seems like Huset has made a good job at cultivating this atmosphere of intimacy and crookedness and...so going to that space feels important and sort of feels central to the experience. And also the people there would motivate you further to join in on stuff. So I wouldn't be the same and it wouldn't be the same if you watched it with your boring-ass family, or your stiff friends, or you know...it was great to have these kind of weird creative souls around you all the time.

Q: Now that you've seen *The Room*, how would you describe the culture around it?

A: Well it is...it's that cult, right? It is that feeling of being a...something special. I don't know of the culture...as with you know, cult things, it makes you feel like you're part of this club. I don't know...I guess it's not easily...it's more of a special experience than if you share another moviegoing experience with someone. It sticks with you and I don't know...it's just more special and inclusive and weird. Spectacular.

Q: You mentioned like *Rocky Horror*, have you been to other live cinema events?

A: No! Not like *The Room* at all. The only...I've been to the cinema a lot of times, I've been to a lot of different things and events. But the only thing I've ever experienced where there was other entertainment you know...umm...accompanying the movie being shown, was a movie called...what was it called...I couldn't even remember the name now. It was a young British director had made a movie as this exam project about...he had taken all the coming of age high school American movies and cut out stuff from it. And made like this one and a half hour like movie, but it was kind of this documentary where you had a narrator taking through the important things of you know...young adulthood and combining with all these tropes from movies. And then at the screening I was going to the band that did the soundtrack was playing alongside it. I guess that's the only you know combined experience I had.

Q: What do you think it means to go to a live cinema event like that?

A: Well, it makes it...naturally it just makes it another experience. Because it feels like it's not only in your head you know. It's not just for you to interpret, it feels like there's this common interpretation and umm...yeah I don't know. This kind of togetherness is a lot more apparent than just being at the cinema where everyone is quiet. And you remember stuff a lot more as well.

Q: How do you think people find enjoyment in something that's bad?

A: Oooh...that's...it depends on you know...there are many kinds of bad you know. This definitely takes the cake because everything is bad in...the technical stuff is bad, the acting is bad, the script is just totally weird. Umm...I guess it's that appeal of the absurd. It's always...a lot of humour is based on breaking or negating people's expectations. To have your expectations totally ruined. So it's...you know of course because it has this reputation, you know about it, you know what's weird about it. But umm...well of course people are drawn to it because of its absurdity because of its...it's almost fascinating that a human being or several human beings have created something that is not just technically bad but it's just another interpretation of reality. So I guess that's appealing. And also in recent years, it's become this bigger experience with the audience and the action and stuff like that. I don't really know what draws people to bad movies, I'm not really...I don't really cultivate that whole bad movie thing. I always try to avoid it for some reason. But it is...I think it's more of a joint experience, it's more of a group experience, because you need to...yeah I think it's more of a group experience than doing it by yourself.

Q: What do you think is the right mindset in going to a screening of *The Room*?

A: Oh just being open to whatever is going to happen I guess. And going in with a good attitude and being ready for whatever is thrown at you. So just going with flow I guess. Because if you enter *The Room* with an experience or expectation of this being your own experience and wanting to be there just sitting in silence watching a movie, you're going to have a bad time I think. Because you need to take part of the things that the audience do to fully enjoy it.

Q: What's your take on Tommy's acting?

A: [laughs] I mean...are there any different takes on it? It's totally surreal. I mean is he acting, is he just being himself? I don't know. There are so many smoke screens. There are so many layers of absurdity that I don't know what is true and what is not. HE could be a great actor and still give a creative performance because the direction was crap or the script was bad. Either he's an acting genius or just as we all suspect a very untalented man with a very special mind. But it was... I guess his acting is definitely...combined with the script, his lines are definitely one of the funnier things in the movie.

Q: What's your take on the gender aspects of the film?

A: Well yeah...it's definitely written...I mean it was...did it air in 2002 was it?

Q: 2004 I think.

A: 2004...so first of all, gender roles and movie are a lot different back then, or you know it was a lot more...male dominated but you can definitely see this is a run of the mill, standard, very flat portrayal of genders. The women characters are mainly there to either fulfil the male characters or to instigate unhappiness and drama. I mean it doesn't really get much more misogynistic but it's definitely...it definitely a bit chauvinistic. You know I guess that's why one of the audience interaction things is umm...yelling "because she's a woman!", every time a woman says something in that she's bad at or not happy with. I assume that was like a commentary on the gender roles in the movie, because that's kind of like saying yeah we know why you're a faulty person, that's because you're a woman, in the eyes of the director...and writer, Tommy Wiseau.

Q: In your mind how do you think about people being able to find humour in these topics?

A: Well...I think everyone is so distanced from it, it feels like everyone understands that this is not at all a portrayal of reality. So the absurdity and the distance combines into this comprehension of it as just being a joke. Umm...the fact that the female characters are that simple, I mean all the characters are simple but the fact that...I mean they're portrayed as stupid and that evil I mean, that has to be assumed as a joke, right? So I like the fact that you can make a commentary on it, because that's what *The Room* has become all about. Like finding jokes in each aspect of it and that's a pretty apparent aspect.



Q: Since the screening, have you talked about *The Room* with anyone else?

A: Yeah definitely! The colleagues I went to see it with, we've talked a lot about it. You just go around quoting it in everyday life. Umm...so yeah. But trouble is...it was already a part of the conversation, I just never watched it. And I watched this and now I can participate a bit more.

Q: Did you talk about it with anyone who hasn't seen it before?

A: Umm...yeah perhaps my girlfriend. I don't think she's seen it. As couples do, I share my experience with her. So yeah.

Q: Reflecting on the whole screening experience, what are your thoughts?

A: Well, I'm happy that I finally got to see it. And umm...I'm happy that this is...yeah it's become a phenomenon. In society and in film in general. I like the fact that there are still experiences that require you being there, present, instead of being home in your living room or watching something on a second screen. I think it's...I know it's something I'll never forget, a really unique experience and I'm happy to have shared it with some people at work. It might as well have been some of my nerdier friends or something. But it's definitely something that feels like more than shared experience, extremely shared experience. And that's a good thing to have and I like the fact that I joined in on the joke, finally.

Q: That's actually all the questions I have, do you have anything to add?

A: No...I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean it's interesting about this whole phenomenon that it's now...because of *The Disaster Artist*, it's going to be a lot more mainstream. So I'm sure as it is with all things that starts as cult becomes mainstream, it starts you know...something must happen now about the culture, the cult status of it. Because it can't really be called that much anymore. And I expect if you now, they can get the rights to it, this would be a thing in a few more venues around big cities. I think that's interesting.

Q: What's your take on that, *The Room* possibly becoming more mainstream?

A: Well...I mean all things must go right? That's cool. I know some people would like cult things and special things and exclusive things, to stay exclusive. But...I like the fact that this movie has you know...been granted such an interesting life, an interesting career thus far. And the fact that it's still evolving, the culture around it is still changing...I mean it must have been a few years at least from when it premiered to when it became this thing and started generating cult status. And so it's already been through a few steps and it's not that old! So, now that it's probably becoming more mainstream, it's also interesting to follow that and to follow Tommy Wiseau, will he have a career? What will he do? Will he make a lot of money now, more money? Will we finally find out what his heritage is? That's going to be interesting, because he's become a figure...a figure in society now especially in film societies to follow.

Q: Anything else?

A: I don't think so, no. I mean I hope you can use what I've said.

## Appendix 6 – Coding Scheme

### 6.1 NVivo Screenshot

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface. On the left, a tree view shows the 'Nodes' hierarchy, with 'Enjoyment of The Room' selected. The main window displays a table of nodes and their associated sources and references. The node 'The right mindset' is highlighted, and its associated text is displayed on the right side of the interface.

Name	Sources	References
Appreciation towards bizarre humour	2	3
Better to read up a bit before going	1	2
Better with others who are like you	2	2
Going with others who have been to a screenin	1	1
If you take it at face value it's bland and poor	2	3
Need to participate	1	1
Need to see it with other people	9	16
People put thoughts and meaning into the film	2	2
Require an imagination	1	1
Requiring a form of intellect to enjoy The Roo	1	1
Requiring certain kind of humour	2	4
The need to have an analytical mindset	1	1
The right mindset	10	19
The Room is not for everybody	4	4
Watching alone would be boring	4	4

Text associated with 'The right mindset':

<Internals\Interview 10 - Ella, 29, F, Danish, Social Media Manager> - 5 1 reference coded [2.49% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.49% Coverage

I think little expectations, probably. Even though I was very entertained and I thought it was really funny, I don't know how I would've reacted if I expected to be entertained. Like I wasn't expecting it to be entertaining at all. I think that's part of the reason why I enjoyed it so much. So I kind of ruin it for a lot of my friends now. Like, OMG, it's so funny and stuff like that. So maybe now they won't find it as funny as I did. Because I really thought it was going to be like a horrible, horrible experience [laughs].

<Internals\Interview 11 - Michelle, 25, F, American, Content Manager> - 5 2 references coded [2.79% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.74% Coverage

Expect the unexpected...no...that might be a little too dramatic for this. I think the right mindset is to just accept that things are going to be weird. Don't go in there with like...try to get as much as possible rid of your preconceptions of what a movie should be. And what a moviegoing experience should be like. Because like I said before, if you're not willing to accept things that are a little bit out there, both from the movie and the audience, then you're not going to be able to embrace the different aspects of this. So you just need to be able to accept that it's going to be weird as fuck.

Reference 2 - 1.05% Coverage

### 6.2 Categorisation

#### Enjoyment of The Room

Name	Sources	Reference
Appreciation towards bizarre humour	2	3
Better to read up a bit before going	1	2
Better with others who are like you	2	2
Going with others who have been to a screen	1	1
If you take it at face value it's bland and poor	2	3
Need to participate	1	1
Need to see it with other people	9	16
People put thoughts and meaning into the fil	2	2
Require an imagination	1	1
Requiring a form of intellect to enjoy The Ro	1	1
Requiring certain kind of humour	2	4
The need to have an analytical mindset	1	1
The right mindset	10	19
The Room is not for everybody	4	4
Watching alone would be boring	4	4

## 6.3 Examples of Coded Transcripts

### Name: Nodes\\Taste\\Enjoyment of The Room\\The right mindset

<Internals\\Interview 10 - Ella, 29, F, Danish, Social Media Manager> - § 1 reference coded [2.49% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.49% Coverage

I think little expectations, probably. Even though I was very entertained and I thought it was really funny, I don't know how I would've reacted if I expected to be entertained. Like I wasn't expecting it to be entertaining at all. I think that's part of the reason why I enjoyed it so much. So I kind of ruin it for a lot of my friends now. Like, OMG, it's so funny and stuff like that. So maybe now they won't find it as funny as I did. Because I really thought it was going to be like a horrible, horrible experience [laughs].

<Internals\\Interview 11 - Michelle, 25, F, American, Content Manager> - § 2 references coded [2.79% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.74% Coverage

Expect the unexpected...no...that might be a little too dramatic for this. I think the right mindset is to just accept that things are going to be weird. Don't go in there with like...try to get as much as possible rid of your preconceptions of what a movie should be. And what a moviegoing experience should be like. Because like I said before, if you're not willing to accept things that are a little bit out there, both from the movie and the audience, then you're not going to be able to embrace the different aspects of this. So you just need to be able to accept that it's going to be weird as fuck.

<Internals\\Interview 2 - Oscar, 37, M, Swedish, Student> - § 2 references coded [2.42% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.26% Coverage

I think it's just...not thinking too much about it. I think it's just going there and doing and being kind of...because I was drawn into it, when I went there I was sitting there and I was like "okay this is going to be drawn out and going to be long". Umm...it's going to be a nice experience, I was there with good friends, so it was going to be a nice experience...it was a Monday, I was a bit tired...so I think the mindset comes after you get into the movie.

<Internals\\Interview 3 - Sofia, 24, F, Danish, Student> - § 1 reference coded [0.86% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.86% Coverage

If you...to get the most out of it, I would say do yourself a favour and see it for what it is and not for what it should have been or

could be or umm...so you just have to kind of acknowledge that it's gonna be weird and then just go enjoy.

<Internals\\Interview 4 - Susan, 21, F, American, Student> - § 2 references coded [0.67% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.16% Coverage

To have an open mind and not be weirded out about people yelling.

<Internals\\Interview 6 - Lucas, 21, M, Danish, Sales Assistant> - § 3 references coded [3.58% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.53% Coverage

Weird [laughs]. And first time, very shocking. I think you have to know what you're in for before watching The Room for the first time. And it's funny, it's personally why I watch it a lot. I think it's funny and you can feel the entire audience think it's funny and the way you sit with like twenty, thirty people and you just say the lines...I mean all the way through almost.

<Internals\\Interview 7 - Freja, 29, F, Danish, Media Researcher> - § 2 references coded [2.78% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.19% Coverage

It's interesting because I think if I had to recommend someone to go see The Room, I would tell them expect a really really horrible movie. It's so bad that you won't even believe how bad it is. Because then you won't expect it to be as entertaining as it actually is and you would get a positive surprise.

<Internals\\Interview 9 - Victor, 27, M, Danish, Student> - § 1 reference coded [1.92% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.92% Coverage

Oh just being open to whatever is going to happen I guess. And going in with a good attitude and being ready for whatever is thrown at you. So just going with flow I guess. Because if you enter The Room with an experience or expectation of this being your own experience and wanting to be there just sitting in silence watching a movie, you're going to have a bad time I think. Because you need to take part of the things that the audience do to fully enjoy it.